

AFRICAN RED CROSS RED CRESCENT HEALTH INITIATIVE

CHF 1,011,000

Programme No. 01.01/2000

Programme Context

Africa is ill-prepared to cope with the effects of man made and natural disasters. This situation is compounded by poverty, illiteracy and the high prevalence of some of the worst diseases (AIDS, malaria, and cholera) which seriously affect the lives of Africans, particularly the most vulnerable. The effect is perhaps most strikingly reflected in the high mortality rates in the underfive age group, who often die from such preventable and treatable conditions as acute respiratory infections, diarrhoeal diseases, pregnancy related conditions, measles and malaria. The maternal mortality ratio is high in most of the countries, and average life expectancy is well below the world's average and is steadily decreasing as a result of the AIDS pandemic in many countries.

Governments are often overwhelmed by the multitude of public health problems currently faced. As a result, external assistance is welcome (and often essential), including from the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Any assistance provided however must fit into the overall Ministry of Health plans, maximising the combined health efforts of the various partners.

So far, the Federation and National Societies have invested considerable human, material and financial resources in the field of health in Africa, focusing mainly on response activities ranging from first aid to full scale emergency relief interventions in response to disasters, including epidemics and population movements. Since far less efforts went into more structural basic health activities, the impact on general public health problems has not met expectations. The potential impact of existing Red Cross programmes is furthermore limited due to lack of focus of these programmes and a tendency of most Participating National Societies (PNSs) to work alone, rarely sufficiently forming more effective partnerships with other actors in the field.

Programme Assistance Strategy

To respond to the existing needs and improve access to health of the most vulnerable in Africa, the Federation, in collaboration with National Societies, has collectively started the African Red Cross Red Crescent Health Initiative (ARCHI 2010), a longterm programme intended to be implemented over the next 10 years. Based on the results to date, ARCHI has become a genuine flagbearer programme both for the respective African Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies as well as for the Federation's Africa Department. A strong commitment to improve the impact on health by better focusing programmes on real priorities as defined by Ministries of Health and beneficiaries, using approaches that build on the Red Cross/Red Crescent strengths while supporting policies and best practices that have been identified by major health actors has turned out to be a successful approach. Active participation from Participating National Societies, Ministries of Health, WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, Center for Disease Control (CDC) and other health actors and the sheer enthusiasm of all African Societies in the process are encouraging signals for the sustainability of this initiative.

A capacity building project will now be started, to be referred to as “ARCHI 2”. ARCHI 2 implements a series of pilot programmes aimed at identifying and training coaches who will be responsible for supporting the RC/RC workers involved in the multiplication of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies’ health efforts at community level and coherently linking them with national headquarters and national programmes.

Programme Objectives

Based on the results of a series of workshops which took place during 1999, the Federation’s ARCHI 2010 team is preparing a new series of 4 subregional workshops to take place during 2000 to discuss, prepare, and finetune the basic instruments and tools that will facilitate the implementation of the defined and agreed-upon strategy and key interventions. A first series of these toolkits will be demonstrated to the assembly of African Societies during the Vth Pan African conference scheduled to take place in September, 2000. These key interventions are intended to allow the Red Cross and Red Crescent to impact positively on major health priorities that have been identified in consultation with Ministries of Health and delegates from WHO, UNICEF, and UNAIDS.

In addition, it is planned that the ARCHI Committee of Experts will meet on three different occasions to monitor the development of toolkits and to propose a menu based system of key health interventions for endorsement by the Vth Pan African conference.

In the interim, ongoing discussions will take place in Geneva as well as in the region with offices of the missions accredited to the OAU and with major institutional donors to facilitate support for the implementation of the conclusions, to promote advocacy, and to discuss possible partnerships related to issues of mutual concern.

Finally, as planned, an ARCHI 2010 website is now available, intended to present National Societies and delegations in Africa with a wealth of health related information and links to major actors in the field of health. This will facilitate future planning of health interventions and the preparation of appeals related to health emergencies.