

WEST AFRICA

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Regional Context

The Regional Delegation for West Africa covers an area comprised of 16 countries generally characterised by conflict, economic stagnation, and political insecurity which have provoked massive population displacements and refugee movements. The region is also prone to recurring natural disasters and hazards such as drought, floods, famine, epidemics and diseases. The failing and fragile economies - with decreasing government expenditure on health and social services - in many of these countries contribute to increasing poverty levels among the already vulnerable populations. Mortality rates due to epidemics remain high in the region, with frequent outbreaks of cholera exacerbated by poor hygiene and cramped living conditions and with malaria continuing to claim the lives of many thousands each year. Natural disasters, environmental hazards and deforestation encourage migration towards urban centres as rural populations in search of better livelihoods take refuge in squalid slums with no health care and few prospects of employment.



A systematic approach to institutional development was initiated in the region in 1995 and since then actions in terms of institutional reforms are being carried out in most National Societies. All but one National Society have reviewed their statutes in recent years and regularly hold General Assemblies. All National Societies have carried out critical self-assessments and most National Societies have revised their national strategic development plans accordingly.

Regional Assistance Strategy

The Regional Delegation in Abidjan provides the following services:

- Supporting, advising and guiding the National Societies in establishing regional priorities;
- Mobilising resources for regional and country specific disaster response and capacity building activities and ensuring accountability;
- Organising and maintaining expertise focal points within the Regional Delegation to support National Societies in priority areas;
- Planning and implementing regional and country specific support programmes, including support to the regional process, disaster response and preparedness, and strengthening capacity in public health services;
- Encouraging and supporting the co-ordination of bilateral relations between PNSs and ONSs by promoting and organising regional meetings, supporting and participating in in-country donor meetings, and advising and involving cooperation agreements and overseeing their implementation;
- Organising and supporting reviews of programmes and structures, evaluations and audits, and following up on implementing findings and recommendations.

The Federation strategy is intended to make a difference by working with communities to reduce vulnerabilities through health education and services at a primary level, building disaster preparedness capacity and promoting humanitarian values. The African Red Cross and Red Crescent Health Initiative (ARCHI) will continue to target health programmes.

Further areas of common focus are improving institutional development and building stronger domestic income bases, and a water and sanitation programme. The National Societies also recognise the need to strengthen their involvement with youth and to work in a way that is gender sensitive, especially in programme design.

The Federation also provides key support with the following services:

- **Regional Information and Reporting Service:** to improve the visibility of Red Cross/Red Crescent traditional activities and operations in the region, thereby raising the profile of the Federation/National Societies in West Africa, reinforcing credibility and increasing funding.
- **Regional Finance Unit (RFU):** to provide professional support to the Delegations and National Societies in the Region in all areas of financial management.
- **Regional Logistics Centre (RLC):** to provide logistic support to Red Cross and Red Crescent operations and programmes in Western Africa.

Programme Objectives

Disaster Response

To strengthen the regional relief co-ordination and management of operations, to improve regional relief capacities by using regional human resources in operations and to improve needs assessment capacities in the region.

Disaster Preparedness

The purpose of the Regional disaster preparedness programme is to work in an integrated way with other Federation programmes and in co-operation with other Agencies to support National Societies in the West African region to increase their disaster prevention and preparedness (DPP) capacities to respond to natural and man made disasters at the Sub-Regional, National, Branch and community levels.

Health

Continue to improve the health status and the living conditions of the most vulnerable in West Africa by addressing the three major health areas: epidemics, HIV/AIDS and Community-Based First Aid (CBFA).

Humanitarian Values

The purpose of this programme is to carry out through dissemination at all levels and at all times of the ideals and the fundamental principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and International Humanitarian Law.

Capacity Building

The Federation plans to strengthen National Societies' institutional and resource development capacities including financial self-sufficiency in order to create more effective programmes to better assist the most vulnerable communities and be better prepared for disasters.

The specific needs of the National Societies are capacity building and increased financial self-sufficiency. As dependency on external funding remains high, resource development focuses on increasing local fund-raising options including revenue generating projects and training of staff. Human resource strengthening is considered essential to improve the NS capacities and skills.

The basic aim is to assist National Societies in moving closer to achieving the "Characteristics of a well-functioning National Society". A systematic approach to institutional development was initiated in the region in 1995 and since then actions in terms of institutional reforms are being carried out in most National Societies. Several National Societies have reviewed their statutes in recent years and regularly hold their General Assemblies.

A declaration on good governance was adopted by the National Societies during a regional workshop with all 16 National Societies, in Ouagadougou in 1997. National workshops on good governance are being held as a follow-up to the regional workshop.

A more equal representation of women and men in governing bodies but also at programme and activity level is an aspect of a "Well-functioning National Society". The gender aspects related to institutional development are being integrated into the capacity building programme to ensure a proper integration within the National Societies' development plans.

In the field of resource development, the programme has emphasised creation of proper structures for programme implementation in the National Societies; assessments of the actual situation and fund-raising possibilities; training of senior staff at Headquarters and, in some National Societies, at branch level. However, the dependency on external funding still remains high. In 1998 a three year regional strategy to further strengthen the National Societies in the field of resource development was developed together with the regional task force on resource development (with representatives from 6 National Societies).

The institutional and resource development process has led National Societies to determine the National Society mission and objectives and to review their development plans, to analyse their functioning, to review their organisational structure and administrative procedures, to create permanent human resources. Many National Societies still lack permanent, paid employees, in particular at branch level, and need to strengthen their organisational structures as well as human and financial resources.

The following initiatives have been taken to promote sub-regional unity between the various National Societies, to move towards the characteristics of a Well Functioning National Society, and to develop action plans focusing on exchange of experiences and joint workshops in priority areas: the “Praia-group” consisting of the National Societies of Senegal, Cape Verde, the Gambia, Guinea Bissau and Guinea; two additional sub-regional networks have also been formed consisting of the Lomé-group (National Societies of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Nigeria and Liberia) and the Sahel-group (Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso Red Cross Societies).

On a regional basis, the governance programme will also ensure that the West Africa regional strategy is updated and implemented and to continue to strive to work through building the capacity of National Societies and maximising co-operation within the region.