

# NICARAGUA

## CAPACITY BUILDING

**CHF 914,000**

**Programme No. 01.19/98**

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Nicaragua's recent history has led to an accumulation of social, economic, and political problems that have reached crisis proportions. The 1997 UNDP Report on Human Development puts the country in 127th position, the lowest in the American continent except for Haiti.

Out of a total population of four million, an estimated 1,700,000 Nicaraguans live in extreme poverty. There are no reliable statistics on employment, but estimates put unemployment at 60% of the economically active population, most of whom end up in the informal sector. In rural areas health services reach only 60% of the population and potable water is available to only 23%. Infant and maternal mortality figures stand at 68 deaths of children under five for every 1000 live births, and 160 deaths of mothers for every 100,000 live births.

Frequent natural disasters in recent years have contributed to environmental degradation. This factor, plus the conditions of vulnerability of many urban and rural communities, constitute threats to health calling for urgent action. Young people are particularly vulnerable. They have insufficient educational and leisure opportunities and many are driven into begging, vagrancy, prostitution, and the informal economy, especially in Managua. Despite progress, socio-political conflicts still obstruct peace building and are potential detonators of violent confrontations.

### *Objectives in 1998*

- | To strengthen the capacities of vulnerable communities by promoting preventive health, disaster preparedness and community development, and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Principles;
- | to strengthen the National Society's work in favour of the most vulnerable by putting into practice its new National Development Plan.

### *Plan of Action*

The Nicaraguan RC, in the framework of its National Development Plan and with the collaboration of the RD, has proposed a wide range of activities for 1998. The priority projects are listed below, along with an indication of the national programmes in which they are included.

## **Disaster Response and Preparedness**

*Disaster Response System*, focused on the reinforcement of the relief department in the headquarters and in the branches. Improvements in warehouses, training of volunteers and basic equipment will be undertaken, drawing on experience from the drought operation carried out at the end of 1997.

*Community Education in Disaster Preparedness*, as part of the regional programme, will train communities in dealing with disasters and common accidents in daily life.

## **Community Health and Social Welfare**

*Community Health “Gulf of Fonseca” Project*. This will be part of the project covering areas of Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua. Focused on community education, first aid in the community and disaster prevention, it emphasises the training of health promoters and of communities, including preventive measures against dengue fever, malaria, tuberculosis and other common diseases. Basic services will be provided through dispensaries and community pharmacies; microprojects related to clean water and sanitation will be introduced. The project started in 1997 with the involvement of the branches and a feasibility study.

*Community Health in the Mosquitia Region*. The Atlantic Region of Nicaragua is one of the poorest and most isolated areas of the country. It has a population composed of ethnic minorities with a strong cultural identity, living in an area with poor basic health facilities. The project will start in 1998 with a feasibility study in Puerto Cabezas and Bluefields prior to activities the following year. The project could be extended in the future to the Honduran Mosquitia Region, which has similar characteristics.

*Prevention of AIDS/STD in Adolescents*, through peer education, training a core group of one hundred young people and supporting their work with educational materials. The Nicaraguan Red Cross has been working on AIDS/STD prevention for several years. (A similar project will start in Honduras and Panama).

## **Capacity Building**

- | Support to the implementation of the National Development Plan by putting into practice the central programme approved by the NS governance.
- | Elaboration of the statutes and regulations governing development tasks and basic administrative activities.
- | Follow up and monitoring of the NDP together with the National Planning Office, which became operational in the second half of 1997. Support to the training of staff and volunteers.
- | Assistance for the geographical expansion of all national service programmes, through regional co-operation, led by the strongest branches.

## **Youth**

***School Programmes:*** Nicaraguan Red Cross activities for children and young people help to integrate them in the humanitarian action of the Red Cross, encouraging their participation in preventive health campaigns, prevention and response to disasters. Recruiting of volunteers for RC Youth will be an important goal.

***Strengthening of Youth RC and its leaders*** will be based in 1998 on extending Youth RC to all branches and developing the programme. Specific attention will be paid to continuing the training of young leaders.

## ***Capacity***

### **National Society**

The Nicaraguan Red Cross is one of the few organisations represented nationwide. It has 36 branches, one in an Autonomous Region, 14 at the departmental level, and 21 at the municipal level (there are 15 departments and 145 municipalities). Coverage is strongest in the densely populated urban centres, facilitating disaster response co-ordination and providing hubs from which territorial coverage can be expanded and the development of the stronger branches can be promoted.

After overcoming a serious institutional crisis at the beginning of the decade, the National Society has concentrated on reorganising its structures and renewing its programmes, work not yet entirely completed. In 1997, with the participation of most of its branches, the NS finalised a National Development Plan (NDP) which outlines a significant role for it in national community development.

### **Federation**

The Federation does not have a Delegation in Nicaragua, but delegates and consultants from the RD have made frequent working visits, while Relief Delegates have been provided for short operations. Future co-operation will be co-ordinated by the Regional Delegation in Guatemala. For the general follow up of the National Development Plan and assessment in the area of institutional development, the Delegation will, as in previous years, draw on the services of a Development Consultant.