

# **SOUTHERN CONE OF SOUTH AMERICA**

## **REGIONAL PROGRAMMES**

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### Introduction

From a humanitarian point of view 1998 was a difficult year for South America. The meteorological phenomenon "El Niño" tested the response capacity and the endurance of an already vulnerable population

– the increasing number of Latin Americans who live in poverty and on the edge of society.

Floods in Peru, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Argentina destroyed or paralysed important sectors of the national economies, the infrastructure and the ability of families to fend for themselves. Droughts in Bolivia and

north-eastern Brazil had similar effects, especially on agricultural production. Earthquakes in Bolivia levelled entire villages. The economic consequences of all these events have yet to be fully assessed, but the suffering and loss incurred by the most vulnerable populations are already painfully obvious.

The increasing globalization of economies was reflected in the spill-over effects on Latin America of the crisis in south-east Asia. Governments had to reduce social investments on a continent with a steadily growing gap between rich and poor.

The National Societies covered by the Regional Delegation – Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay – have had to mobilise all their resources in order to tackle these challenges. The disasters have emphasised the importance of strengthening the Regional Delegation's institutional development work aimed at helping National Societies to respond with greater speed and efficiency to sudden emergencies. Equally important, the crises have served as a reminder of the need to seek new solutions that will lead in the long term to decreased vulnerability – a powerful justification for community based programmes focusing on disaster preparedness and prevention as well as socio-economic development.

The same effects are being felt by the Regional Delegation in its efforts to assist the seven National Societies in the Southern Cone in general. Since the delegation was established in 1994, calls for support in all areas of Red Cross work have steadily increased. The Regional Delegation will continue to work along the strategic lines already laid down for ongoing activities and planned programmes. This will require the continued presence of delegates

specialised in the areas of disaster, community and institutional development, information and youth.

## Objectives

The objectives for the 1999 regional programmes are:

- To strengthen the capacity of the NSs to prevent, prepare for and respond effectively to the suffering caused by disasters. The full involvement of disaster-prone communities in the process remains a priority;
- to help NSs, and in particular their local branches, reach a greater number of vulnerable groups through cross-border, development-oriented programmes emphasising primary health care and integrated community development activities;
- to assist NSs in the creation of sound institutional and financial structures and clear procedures so that they can put their development plans into practice. This includes both ad-hoc campaigns and long term strategic planning;
- to reinforce the efforts of all seven NSs to develop, consolidate and modernise Youth Departments and Programmes;
- to contribute to an enhanced public awareness of the Red Cross and ensure respect for its principles and its activities in the region through the professionalisation of information services.

## Programmes

### Disaster Preparedness, Prevention and Response

The frequency of disasters in South America poses a regular challenge to the National Societies' emergency response capacity, which varies greatly from one country to another. The Regional Delegation is putting substantial efforts into promoting common standards and assisting the Relief Departments of all NSs in the region, both during sudden emergencies and through the development of long term policies. This work involves the participation of the at-risk communities, as well as co-operation with other NGOs and the authorities.

Consolidation of disaster response capacity. This programme covers all NSs in the region and includes needs assessment, designing systems and monitoring relief operations. It will help each NS establish procedures to be followed in times of disaster, enhance communication between Headquarters and local branches and provide the necessary training of human resources.

Community Education in Disaster Preparedness. The vulnerability of a community to disasters can be influenced by its level of preparedness. The programme encourages communities to adopt appropriate preventive and response measures, and thus minimise human and material losses due to foreseeable disasters. It covers issues ranging from response to common disasters in daily life to management of temporary shelters. The programme is part of a Federation initiative being carried out in more than ten countries of South America. In the Southern Cone, Bolivia, Chile, Peru and Paraguay will participate in the programme in 1999.

#### Cross-Border Community Projects

It makes sense for Red Cross Societies to join forces in border areas where inadequate health structures, recurrent disasters and lack of social development are shared by several countries. The three projects below offer a new approach to joint challenges.

The National Societies work in close co-operation with the local communities, and involve NGOs, the authorities, community leaders and other players essential to the success of the programmes. The communities participate actively during the whole process, from the identification of their needs to finding and realising solutions. The aim is to give beneficiaries a sense of true ownership of the projects as a way of guaranteeing sustainability in areas where external funding is scarce. The programmes also enhance the relationship between the various components of the Movement in the region: local branches / national headquarters / the Federation Delegations and the ICRC.

Camalote/Aguapey, a regional programme for the River Plate Basin, was born out of a need to tackle the recurrent disasters in the region. It focuses on 21 marginal urban communities in flood-prone areas of Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay. Since the root causes of vulnerability are many-faceted, disaster preparedness and prevention will be coupled with initiatives promoting socio-economic development in the local communities.

The Amazon Programme covers parts of Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela. Like Camalote/Aguapey, the Amazon programme focuses on vulnerable communities living in areas with environmental and social problems. In 1999 the programme will be extended from the current five Red Cross branches to the planned total of 15. Each participating community will identify its own needs, and concrete projects will be carried out. While the programme's planning phase is funded, contributions are sought for the implementation of projects.

The Strong People Programme provides vulnerable communities with the means to identify their primary health care needs and improve their access to basic health services. The project covers border areas of north-western Argentina, north-western Chile and southern Bolivia. It is fully funded by the Canadian government through the Canadian Red Cross.

#### Capacity Building

One of the primary tasks of the Federation through its Delegation in Buenos Aires is to support and strengthen the capacity of the seven National Societies in the region. As a tool in this process the "National Development Plans", normally combined with a revision of the NS

statutes, have proved to be of great value. The National Development Plans cover a wide range of capacities including basic management, the identification of key activities, self-sustainability through resource development initiatives, and co-operation between local branches and headquarters. Planned programmes for 1999 are:

**Resource Development:** This has become a key issue as funding for development in Latin America is steadily decreasing. This programme aims at diversifying funding sources, guaranteeing the continuity of activities and – in the long run – building self-reliance. It covers Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay and to some extent Uruguay. The programme provides training and technical support for each NS, and the Regional Delegation helps design and implement strategic plans for financial independence.

**Institutional Development Support:** In 1999 this project will help the NSs of Uruguay and Brazil design and implement National Development Plans and revise their Red Cross statutes. The process has already begun in Uruguay but further funds are sought to ensure that all objectives are met. A training workshop will be organised for governance members of all seven Societies to improve the structural relationship between governance and management and so institute better leadership at both levels.

#### Youth

To help improve the situation of vulnerable youth groups in the Southern Cone, Red Cross Youth of the seven National Societies will receive support through a range of initiatives. These are grouped within the framework of "SUR JOVEN" (Young South) a programme agreed upon in 1998 by Youth representatives from the NSs in the region.

**Enhancing Red Cross Youth capacities:** In order to strengthen the capacity of the Red Cross Youth branches, the Regional Delegation will assist with the organisation of training workshops. Youth activities will promote the development of programmes in the following areas:

- AIDS/STD prevention
- Environmental protection
- Community work among children 4-12 years old.

**Revitalising Red Cross school groups:** This is a separate project which aims to recruit participants in school groups and reorient their activities towards services for particularly vulnerable youth. The programme will be implemented in 105 educational centres located in 21 cities throughout the region.

#### Information and Communications

The ability to communicate – internally as well as externally – is of paramount importance for every National Society. In recent years several National Societies in the region have increased

their efforts to professionalise their public relations, press contacts, publications and internal communication lines.

The Regional Delegation strives to support and strengthen the capacity of all National Societies in this field.

A quarterly magazine, "Latin American News", is produced and distributed to the National Societies in the region. All programmes have information/communication elements built into them, and efforts are made to give support to NS information officers both in emergency situations and with long time strategic planning.

In addition, the following programme has been designed in co-operation with the Regional Delegation Guatemala:

#### Distance Learning Programme for Red Cross Communicators

This pilot programme aims at developing training materials and providing a six month course for Red Cross volunteers in charge of information at the local branch level. Two National Societies with well-functioning information departments, Chile and Colombia, have been selected for the pilot phase. However, it is intended to extend the programme to more National Societies in the Americas in the near future.