

CUBA

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE, CAPACITY BUILDING

CHF 956,000

Programme no 01.26/99

The Context

Since Cuba entered the so-called "special period" following the dissolution of the Soviet bloc in 1989, it has experienced a 60% decline in its gross domestic product. There is evidence that the embargo is impeding access to essential humanitarian goods; specifically, it has raised the costs of medical supplies and food. In January 1997, the American Public Health Association concluded that "Rationing, universal access to primary health services, a highly educated population, and preferential access to scarce goods for women and children help protect most Cubans from what otherwise might have been a health disaster." According to the American Association for World Health, Cubans' calorie intake dropped by a third between 1989 and 1993.

The Operation

The importance of a strong National Society in Cuba was again emphasised in 1998 when over 8,000 volunteers were mobilised to support evacuation and other measures in response to Hurricane Georges, the second major hurricane to strike the country in less than two years. The year also saw a further enhancing of the image of the institution through a continuing public awareness campaign. In addition, the Cuban Red Cross continued to serve the public through a broad range of services including its lifeguard programme, health services, including HIV/AIDS prevention, and ambulance service.

Objectives of the Operation

- to strengthen the overall disaster preparedness and response capacity of the Cuban Red Cross;
- to develop further the Youth Red Cross network and ensure integration in other key programme areas;
- to provide targeted support to branch development and improve NS capacity at community level;
- to raise public awareness about the distinct and unique identity, and scope of action of the Cuban Red Cross.

Plan of Action

- Community-Based Disaster Preparedness Programme

Integrated in the regional disaster preparedness programme co-ordinated by the Regional Delegation, the Cuban Red Cross Society will implement this programme of three different but complementary components: training, logistics and radio-communications. It includes targeting of specific vulnerable communities at proven risk to disasters; organisation of motivational workshops; training of facilitators to work at community level; and hazard mapping. The response capacity of the NS will be further strengthened through the improvements to the radio-communications network and logistics support. An extremely important element of overall disaster preparedness measures in Cuba is the Red Cross lifeguard programme which saves hundreds of lives each year; this programme is presently seriously under-resourced and needs greater material support.

- Youth Red Cross Development Programme

The Cuban Youth Red Cross has a strong constituency and social base. With one of the largest memberships in the Caribbean, the youth section of the Cuban Red Cross suffers from the lack of equipment and financial resources which would allow it to play a more full role in the life of the NS and in programme participation to meet the needs of the most vulnerable. The aims of this programme are to train youth leaders in project planning and micro-management; to reinforce the youth at provincial and local level and promote their active participation in important areas such as HIV/STD prevention, first aid and disaster preparedness. Communications and Red Cross visibility will be improved through support to this programme.

- Branches Development Programme

The Cuban Red Cross has probably the largest constituency of all the Caribbean NS, thanks to its 169 municipal and 14 provincial committees. Most of them have a basic infrastructure and sufficient membership to develop worthwhile activities in favour of the most vulnerable groups but are hindered by lack of resources and infrastructure; weak disaster response capacity; lack of training and human resources development; and lack of communication with NS HQ - all major factors in blocking the capacity-building of the NS.

This programme seeks to carry out a feasibility study of the current situation of the branches, especially

at provincial level, in a first phase, holding a series of meeting/workshops with committees' staff and management. A two-year branch development plan would then be established including a plan for human resource training. An important element in this programme is continuing the work which has been done on projecting the institutional image of the NS through the media and promotional and dissemination tools such as tee-shirts and posters.

- Public Awareness campaign

Efforts to increase public awareness of Cuban Red Cross services and understanding of the National Society's role will form part of the three programmes described above.

Capacity

- The Cuban Red Cross

The HQ employs 16 professional and five support staff. There are 14 provincial headquarters, each staffed by a secretary general, and 169 municipal branches with around 22,000 members and volunteers, including a very active youth membership. All financial resources for the functioning of the NS are provided through the Government. The Cuban Red Cross has a network of warehouses and other buildings. The Society's development plan is the result of an ongoing needs assessment and evaluation of existing activities. The programmes included in the plan are focused on tracing, water safety training, emergency ambulance service, dissemination, youth, communication systems, and first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) instructor training.

- The Federation

There has been increasing co-operation with the Federation during the 1990s, culminating in the signing of a Co-operation Agreement in late 1997. The Regional Delegation has supported the Cuban Red Cross in a number of major relief actions in recent years. There has been increasing support also to institutional development and image-building as the Cuban Red Cross gives importance to promoting its independent status amongst the general public while still respecting its relationship with the Cuban authorities.

Co-operation

In terms of international co-operation, the Cuban Red Cross continued to maintain strong links with Participating National Societies particularly the Spanish Red Cross and the German Red Cross. Through the German Red Cross, it has been involved in an ECHO-financed distribution of medicaments over the last three years. Closer relations have also been developed with the American Red Cross over the last two years. In February 1998 the Cuban Red Cross hosted a donors' meeting with the Regional Delegation, six PNS, the Dominican Republic Red Cross and the Haitian Red Cross, which drew fresh attention to the needs of the National Society. The Cuban Red Cross works closely with the ICRC in dissemination and promotion of International Humanitarian Law.