

D.P.R. KOREA

HEALTH, DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE AND CAPACITY BUILDING

CHF 12,372,000

5.8 million beneficiaries

Programme no 01.33/99

The Context

After three years of devastating natural disasters and a decade of collapsed trade with the Eastern bloc, the famine in DPR Korea shows every sign of getting worse rather than better.

The health sector is almost paralysed. It is now largely reliant on herbal medicines and acupuncture, since the pharmaceutical industry, with run-down production facilities and no pharmaceutical raw materials, has almost come to a standstill. Hospitals, though clean, lack even the most basic medical equipment and, not having received any maintenance budget for years, are unable to replace broken windows, even with plastic sheeting, which leads to very cold temperatures in winter. Public distribution coal deliveries stopped in 1995. A sharp increase in admissions of patients with gastro-intestinal ailments, as a result of eating so-called "substitute food", is further straining inadequate facilities.

The public water supply system is in a very bad state; when available, water is heavily contaminated due to the absence of chlorination. As a result, diarrhoeal diseases are widespread.

It is difficult to predict how the situation in the DPRK will develop. To overcome the present situation the Government's mid-term strategy will reportedly concentrate on the rehabilitation of the agricultural sector in order to maximise food security. The goal of the national plan is to end dependence on direct international humanitarian assistance by the year 2000. This means that basic humanitarian assistance will certainly be needed during 1999, but at a gradually decreasing level. The World Food Programme, the chief international food supplier in 1998, is planning to continue to provide important quantities of food in 1999.

The Operation

The Federation/DPRK Red Cross emergency operation, launched after the severe floods in July 1995, has evolved from food aid and shelter rehabilitation in all the disaster-affected areas of the country to a health programme focused on support to 853 health institutions in two northern provinces. In late 1998, it was operational in 25 counties in North Pyongan and

Chagang, with a total population of 2.2 million. The change of emphasis was made in response to the severe lack of drugs and basic supplies in medical facilities at all levels, highlighted in the Federation assessment reports of May and November 1997. A mid-term assessment was made of the current Red Cross project in April 1998.

An increasingly significant factor in the political context is the development of relations between the two Korean states – a process to which the Red Cross is contributing. During the emergency period three agreements have been signed between the DPRK and the RoK Red Cross Societies, resulting in the donation of 150,000 MT of food from the South to the North. The Operation's objectives

The Federation/DPRK Red Cross operation will continue to shift its focus from emergency response to institutional capacity building and disaster preparedness with a longer term perspective. In 1999 objectives will be:

- to continue health system support programmes through drug distributions and assistance to health institutions, including water and sanitation activities and training of their personnel.
- to increase the number of health institutions receiving drug distributions from 853 to some 1,600, in response to a DPRK government request to the International Federation to provide essential drugs to two additional provinces – South Pyongan and Kaesong – in 1999.
- to implement basic disease control projects, health promotion, community based First Aid – all nation-wide projects with a strong involvement of the DPRK Red Cross in close co-operation with the MoPH – in the Red Cross operational area in 1999, with a possibility of expansion during 2000 and onwards.
- to continue the reinforcement of the DPRK Red Cross Disaster Preparedness Project.

Plan of Action

- Health projects

Drug distributions will be continued, supplying drug kits limited to 30-40 essential drugs and designed for Primary Health Care, as will monitoring, and training activities for health personnel. To meet the government request to the Federation to provide essential drugs to two additional provinces during 1999, as from January 1999, drugs will be distributed to 1,608 medical institutions (hospitals and clinics): 853 in North Pyongan and Chagang, which were also covered in 1998, and 755 in the new areas of South Pyongan and Kaesong.

The comfort of inpatients, already addressed in 1998 through the provision of coal for heating, blankets and bed sheets, will be further improved by continuing to provide these same items, carrying out minor repairs of doors and windows, and supplying safe drinking water. Working conditions for doctors will also be improved with a more extensive water supply system, round-the-clock running water and separate latrines. It is expected that the incidence of diarrhoeal diseases will decrease with the introduction of this safe drinking water supply and through health education efforts.

- First aid

The DPRK Red Cross has first aid activities throughout the country, consisting mainly of training and the diffusion of health messages. It has four regional training centres. It plans to upgrade these health activities into a more comprehensive primary health care/Community Based First Aid programme.

The project covers two years. In 1999 it will concentrate on the Red Cross operational areas: North and South Pyongan, Chagang and Kaesong. Later the programme will be expanded to the whole country.

The main activities in 1999 will be: an assessment of needs and capacity, the upgrading of DPRK Red Cross resources, and community-oriented training of First Aid workers and volunteers.

- Disaster Preparedness and Response Capacity

This project will establish a comprehensive Emergency Response capacity within the DPRK Red Cross, co-ordinated with the general national emergency function.

The 1995 floods were the DPRK Red Cross's first experience of a major emergency operation. During the floods that followed in 1996 and the drought and tidal waves in 1997, the Society was increasingly involved in evacuation, rescue, mass feeding, and shelter provision in co-ordination with the authorities. It now considers that its experience of the past three years should be consolidated into a comprehensive Disaster Preparedness development programme and has given this project the highest priority in its long-term capacity building.

The first steps will be the establishment and maintenance of material, human and financial resources.

Capacity

- The Operating National Society

Founded in 1946, the DPRK Red Cross is a large and well-established organisation. Its branches extend to nearly 23,000 villages and factories, and it runs 8,000 first aid posts. Before the 1995 floods, its main activities were medical and social programmes and disaster preparedness. Now, in addition to these, and as one effect of the Federation programmes, it is restructuring its headquarters, including recruiting and training new staff. The current leadership, established in mid 1997, is committed to long term projects and to the further development of the National Society.

- The Federation

At the end of 1998, the DPRK delegation consisted of seven delegates, aided by one Logistics delegate in Beijing. In 1999 the following staff will be needed:

Head of Delegation

1 Logistics/Relief delegate

4 Health delegates

1 Water and Sanitation delegate

1 Disaster Preparedness delegate

1 Finance/Reporting delegate.

Institutional capacity building and assessment missions should be planned for.

Co-operation

The Federation delegation ensures regular information sharing and co-operation with NGOs and UN agencies represented in the DPRK, and in particular with WFP, WHO and UNICEF.