

CENTRAL ASIA

REGIONAL PROGRAMMES

CHF 6,759,000

Programme no 01.45/99

Introduction

1998 was another catastrophic year for Central Asia. Peoples' lives were devastated by unprecedented floods, landslides, and other natural and man-made disasters, while destitute states were unable to come to their aid.

By far the most disastrous effects stemmed from the introduction of a free market economy to replace centrally directed systems. The result for the majority of the population was ever-increasing poverty as the old systems and structures collapsed and nothing took their place.

The race to develop new sources of energy for the main consumer nations brought considerable investment in the region but few benefits: hydrocarbon production requires only a few highly skilled employees and diverts investment from areas such as agriculture which provide employment and support for the majority of the population.

Drought, a collapsing infrastructure and sheer neglect reduced the harvest in the northern oblasts of Kazakhstan, the grain bowl of Central Asia, by as much as 60%. The grain price and thus the cost of flour were poised for a dramatic winter increase. Food shortages were already apparent in northern cities in September 1998 and queues formed daily for scarce food commodities.

In Turkmenistan observers fear the 1998/99 winter will see the bottoming out of the economy. The level of unemployment has doubled since the beginning of 1998 and the country's inability to export any of its vast reserves of natural gas since March 1997 has reportedly brought the country to the verge of catastrophe. Amid growing unrest, various Turkmen clans began a struggle for power, some enlisting support from neighbouring countries.

Tensions continued in Uzbekistan, with the Islamic Fundamentalist Movement gaining an ever-increasing grip, particularly in the Ferghana valley. Uzbekistan has the most centrally-controlled economy in Central Asia and remains dependent on cotton. The ecological disaster of the Aral Sea, although the subject of intensive research, generates little practical aid. Meanwhile, the conditions have changed the region's climate, producing harsher winters and windstorms laden with salt and residual pesticides.

Political and social unrest in Tajikistan continues as the peace process limps along but makes little real progress.

Foreign investment remains moribund and crime is increasing in the main cities. The attempts of the most vulnerable to make their lives a little easier by growing vegetables on any available piece of land have been devastated this year by the white mosquito pest. As a result they have been able to set aside very little in the way of reserves for the harsh winter.

In Kyrgyzstan, the privatisation process and economic reforms are being carried out to the detriment of the non-profit social institutions. Kyrgyzstan has been heralded as a model of democratisation, but because it is 97% mountainous and has few natural resources, poverty is increasing and access to social structures such as education and health is becoming more difficult, as even the most basic government services disappear.

Within the short, medium and even the long term, it is unlikely that governments will be able to provide even a rudimentary safety net for a population in great need. For the first six years (1992-98) of the new era, the five National Societies have concentrated on providing assistance to the most vulnerable. In doing so, they have made a significant contribution to the development of the humanitarian sector of civil society.

The five Societies, with the support of the International Federation, have been promoting volunteerism and youth mobilisation at national, oblast and rayon level. More and more Red Crescent branches are taking the lead in providing community solutions for community problems throughout Central Asia in the form of health, social welfare, disaster preparedness and support for refugees and internally displaced. The foundations for well-functioning National Red Crescent Societies are firmly in place. This emergency appeal focuses on carefully targeted training programmes to develop the technical and management skills of National Society staff at all levels, and regional programmes that build capacities to provide urgent assistance to the ever increasing number of vulnerable.

Objectives

- Review of Federation and Regional Delegation support to National Societies and the establishment of a new five-year plan.
- Relief: To enable the National Societies of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan to support the most vulnerable in the ecologically devastated regions of Aral Sea and the Amu Darya delta.
- Health: To assist the National Societies maintain preventive health programmes and provide support to Red Crescent centres.
- Social Welfare: To assist the National Society of Turkmenistan in providing equipment and training to refugee families to enable them to become self-sufficient.
- Disaster Preparedness and Response / Population Movements: To further improve the capacities of National Societies to respond to emergencies throughout the region, promote the

formalising of the National Societies' role in disasters with their respective country authorities and integrate population movement activities into disaster preparedness.

- Youth: To assist the National Societies in developing volunteer recruitment strategies targeting the young generation.
- Assistance to National Societies: To strengthen the capacity of the National Societies in the region in terms of modern management of human and financial resources and assist them in diversifying their fund-raising base.

Programmes

- Relief

Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan - Food Assistance to Pregnant Women (Aral Sea)
 Infant mortality is high and rising in the Aral Sea Region, due to a combination of ecological, nutritional and other problems in the area. The Federation proposes to help reduce the alarming death rate by providing 6,000 women with nutritious supplementary food during the last six months of pregnancy and the first three months after birth. The food will include 2 kg wheat flour, 2 kg sugar, 2 kg rice, 2 kg fish conserves, 1 kg dried apricots and 1 kg nuts per month. It will be purchased locally, where possible.

Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan - Food Assistance to Children (Aral Sea)
 The programme will provide nutritious food to 10,000 children in various types of institutions - orphanages, institutions for handicapped children and isolated schools and kindergartens - in the Aral Sea region and Amu Darya river basin. They will receive a monthly ration of 2 kg rice, 2 kg beans, 2 kg wheat flour, 1 kg sugar, 1 lt vegetable oil and 2 kg corned beef. All food will be cooked and consumed in the institutions. The programme will be directly operated by the National Societies of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

- Health

Regional - Red Crescent Centres/Medical Social Rooms Improvements

This programme seeks to build on the Visiting Nurse and Medical Social Rooms programme that has been the traditional backbone of the National Societies in Central Asia by developing the Medical Social Rooms as centres for training and other activities. These centres could train up to 1,500 people each year in a wide range of activities including first aid, preventive health, and disaster preparedness.

Regional - First Aid

The reappearance of illnesses kept in check during the Soviet period requires a new community-based approach to the prevention and treatment of diseases. A first aid programme has already started in Tajikistan and it is proposed that this work also be carried out elsewhere in the region. This programme contains elements of Disaster Preparedness, Unstable Populations and Typhoid Prevention programmes and will be closely linked to the new Red Crescent Centres.

- Social Welfare

Turkmenistan - Seeds and Tools (self sufficiency project)

280 refugee families (about 2,000 persons) will be provided with seeds and tools to enable them to produce food for their own consumption and for sale. The project will improve these families' standard of living and enable them to integrate more easily in their new country.

- Disaster Preparedness and Response / Population Movement

Regional - Disaster Preparedness and Response

This is a continuation of the programme that has been running for the past two years. 1999 will be a year of consolidation, with follow-up training using the materials produced in 1998. Special attention will be given to formalising the National Societies' role in disasters with their respective country authorities and integrating the population movement into disaster preparedness.

Regional - Population Movement

This programme started in 1998 but will now concentrate on training the appointed National Society

co-ordinators, encourage synergy between the five societies and build on the relationships already developed with UNHCR, IOM and other international organisations concerned with moving and unstable populations.

- Youth

Regional - Youth Recruitment and Training of Volunteers

The aim of the programme is to identify new sources of volunteers and to develop youth programmes in each of the five National Societies of the region.

Regional - Kids to Kids (collection of clothes for Tajikistan)

Devised by youth volunteers at the Lake Issyk Kul youth conference held in 1998, this programme will encourage children in the region to collect second hand clothes and shoes for their less fortunate peers in Tajikistan.

Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan - Youth Camps for Aral Sea Children

This programme will give 300 children with health problems a holiday break, away from the ecological disaster of the Aral sea. The programme will be run, in the main, by Red Crescent youth volunteers of the three countries affected by the disaster.

- Assistance to National Societies

Regional - Priorities for the Five-Year Plan

Review of priorities and focus of Federation/Regional Delegation assistance to National Societies. As a first priority in early 1999, an evaluation and review of the Federation's assistance to the National Societies in this region will be carried out. National Societies will participate and provide priorities for the coming five-year plan.

Regional - Information, Media, Fund Raising

This programme, started in 1996, will continue in 1999 to assist the five National Societies of Central Asia in maintaining a well-functioning information department and in particular developing the key task of fund-raising.

Regional - Oblast Level Middle Management

Designed to strengthen the capacity of the five National Societies in modern management techniques and accountabilities, this programme will focus in 1999 on improvements at the oblast level.

Regional - Governance and Management Training

The five National Societies of Central Asia will be assisted in separating and improving their governance and management functions, in order to more easily develop the attributes of a well-governed and

well-functioning Society.

Uzbekistan, Regional - Resource Development

In 1997, as part of the Institutional Development programme, the first Resource Development Adviser (RDA) was assigned to the Red Crescent Society of Uzbekistan to help in maximising its fund-raising campaigns. In 1999, the Federation plans to continue this critical initiative by assigning an RDA to the four other National Societies of Central Asia.

Turkmenistan - Institutional Development

In 1998 an institutional development delegate was appointed to Turkmenistan to help the National Society's transformation into a fully functional self-sustaining organisation able to service a severely disadvantaged population. This function will continue.

- Delegation Capacity

The Regional Delegation provides support to the five National Societies in the region, as well as to the delegations and offices of the Federation. In 1999 it will also be responsible for follow-up of eleven regional programmes.