

BELIZE RED CROSS SOCIETY

An expanding and changing National Society

For Belize the 1980s meant the consolidation of the country's political independence, gained in 1981, a search for economic and social development, and affirmation of the nation's cultural identity amid the difficult Central American crisis. Belize was not directly involved in the armed conflicts the region experienced, but it has not been free from the effects of the regional crisis since, in addition to growing socioeconomic problems, it has witnessed a major influx of refugees and migrants from neighboring countries. That influx, though numerically small compared to other countries in the region, has had a large impact because of the country's small population.

The Belizean Red Cross's short history as an independent National Society has been affected by all these phenomena. During the 1980s it consolidated its independence, faced the challenge of institutional development, built its own identity, and effectively confronted the social and health problems of the country and those resulting directly from the crisis with activities and services directed toward refugees. The Belizean Red Cross is a small National Society whose size matches that of the country's small population, but it is very active. In a few years it has established a set of activities, a style of work, and an organizational structure which makes it substantially different from National Societies in near-by countries such as those in Central America and Mexico. The identity and "organizational culture" of the Belizean Red Cross have been founded on two elements. One is its commitment to the problems and needs of its country. The other, its traditions and origin before Belize's independence as an overseas branch of the British Red Cross, also explains the ties it maintains with other National Societies in the English-speaking Caribbean.

Problems have naturally arisen along the way and certain structural limitations of the National Society have become clear. To cite a few examples, the institution's physical infrastructure,

especially its headquarters, urgently requires renovation and extension, and in the financial sphere its fund-raising capacity and possibilities are small, as a result of which it depends heavily on external aid. Given the small size of the National Society's budget, external cooperation has a very heavy impact, and in recent years external financing of the Society's activities grew to a figure close to four times that of the National Society's own fund raising, which has been a cause of concern. In consequence, budgets up to now have largely been based on programs or projects financed with funds from abroad.

The Belizean Red Cross's priority area of activity is health promotion and education. In addition to traditional activities such as training in first aid and primary home medical care, the National Society has introduced a few comprehensive health programs such as "Child Alive" which have components not only of maternal and child health care but also of AIDS prevention and information, and those carried out by the Multiple Health and Nutrition Use Center at Belmopan, which provides services to refugees and displaced persons as well as the local population. In this context, it needs noting that the National Society is gradually modifying its profile of activities from the most traditional ones to those involving it more in emerging social and health problems. The Belizean Red Cross also acts in disaster and emergency situations. The country has not experienced major disasters in recent years, which is why in this field greater emphasis has been placed on disaster preparedness activities.

The Belizean Red Cross maintains good cooperative relations with the Government's authorities, especially in the areas of health and disaster relief. The ministries which conduct activities in these areas appoint representatives to the National Society's central committee.

The National Society underwent major administrative changes at the end of the 1980s. After the resignation of the director general and the later

replacement of the president, a certain number of administrative changes were introduced in an effort to deal with the needs created by the institution's growing number of activities. Compared to neighboring National Societies, a peculiar feature of the Belizean Red Cross is the relatively important role played in the organization by the director general. Other significant differences of the National Society are the absence of auxiliary bodies, since volunteers are unified in a single corps, and the predominance of women at all levels of the National Society, including its management.

The Belizean Red Cross has an annual planning system but so far has not had longer-term plans of action and development. It has been preparing a five-year plan for some time.

Organizationally, the Belizean Red Cross identifies its greatest challenges in coming years as development of revenue-producing activities so as to ensure financing for its activities, improvement and extension of the National Society's headquarters, both nationally and in the districts, improving the training of its volunteers, recruitment of more men, and dealing with competition from other organizations. In the future the National Society intends to develop new activities to help solve the growing problems of school absenteeism, abandoned children, juvenile delinquency, and drug addiction. It would also be desirable that programs specifically aimed at refugees should go beyond current activities, which focus on the health and nutrition areas.

Organization of the Belizean Red Cross

Organizational structure and geographic coverage

According to the statutes in force, the governing bodies of the Belizean Red Cross are the general assembly and the central committee. The body with highest authority is the general assembly, which is composed of the central committee

and representatives of the district committees. This body elects the members of the central committee and approves budgets. The central committee, however, elects the president and treasurer and appoints the director general. It currently has 18 members, including representatives of the public authorities. A representative of the Red Cross Youth was recently included. The assemblies of the district committees elect the members of their district committees and their respective chairpersons.

The statutes list the duties of the director general as the National Society's executive, responsible for carrying out the general policies of the institution and its specific guidelines. This aspect of the organization differs from that of other National Societies in that this official enjoys greater autonomy and has greater executive power than in other National Societies in the area. This makes daily administration of the National Society more flexible and expeditious.

The Red Cross of Belize is divided into six districts corresponding to those of the country, which allows extension of its activities to each of them through their respective district committees. A new branch was recently created at San Pedro, in Ambergris Caye District, and that at Dangriga (Stann Creek), which has a new executive committee and an active youth group, is being reactivated. The National Society believes that having adequate buildings is vitally important to the development of its branches and so providing infrastructure is one of its most important development objectives. This need also affects the central headquarters, in Belize City, an old building which should be renovated and extended or be replaced by another larger, more modern, and functional one.

Administration and planning

The new administration has proposed introducing changes in the statutes with regard to administrative policies and procedures as well as in post descriptions. A new strategy has also been adopted regarding relations between the central

committee and the district committees aimed at replacing the concept of central authority with a two-way relationship between the central headquarters and each of the committees. Workshops and visits to share experiences and ideas and to improve communication with the branches are thus frequent. Such exchanges are also one of the main means of follow-up and evaluation.

Program planning and evaluation are considered especially important in obtaining external support and providing feedback to donors through reports on progress and results. This is why there is an organized system of planning and follow-up.

The Belizean Red Cross has an annual plan of action and budget for national activities and is now drawing up a five-year plan, for which it has requested assistance from the Federation. Planning is very participative since division heads, representatives of the volunteers, paid staff responsible for programs, and heads of specific projects take part. A separate plan and budget are drawn up for each project for which external support is solicited. The Society is aware of the importance of having its own development plan in order to stimulate donors toward greater support of its activities.

Human resources

The Belizean Red Cross differs from many other National Societies in the region in that its volunteers are organized into "branch groups" according to geographic boundaries, and within each according to specific programs and projects. There are no specialized "bodies" such as relief or women's units. Only young people have their own system of organization, which has been strengthened through a specific project. Volunteers take part in varied activities in a flexible manner. The National Society places a high value on its volunteers, allocating a large part of its efforts to developing its human resources through training activities, workshops, and meetings, and believes that they are competent and have great capacity for community promotion work.

In 1989 and 1990 the Belizean Red Cross had 200 volunteers in its activities, together with 105 others in the "Child Alive" program. The Red Cross Youth had 90 "cadets" and 150 liaison members or "links" in schools. Members of the Belizean Red Cross have pointed out that one of the chief problems regarding volunteers is the lack of instructors for the various health programs. The most important training activities have been carried out in the "Child Alive," first-aid, and youth leadership programs. A significant problem noted by members of the Belizean Red Cross is loss of trained volunteers. An example is the "Child Alive" program. Its heads were hired by the National Hospital and cannot devote enough time to the program. The National Society has therefore had to train new staff.

There is widespread awareness of the imperative need to train future leaders for the National Society. Some district committees lost leaders who had long experience and the branches' activity waned. Training needs, as identified by members, include training in leadership, administration, and management.

The Belizean Red Cross is essentially a women's organization. In 1989 and 1990 the acting president, director general, all district leaders, and all members of the executive committee but one were women. The three representatives of the ministries on the central committee were men. This female bias in the National Society is seen as a problem up to a point. It is understood that this is due to the emphasis traditionally placed on health and social service activities, which have traditionally been viewed as women's tasks. For the past two years the National Society has been stressing male volunteer membership in its member training activities. This has resulted in increasing men's membership somewhat, but it is a slow process.

Given the multiethnic and multicultural nature of the country and the Belizean Red Cross itself, many volunteers who work in the districts communicate with the people in their own languages, such as Mayan. Most members are black Creoles and mestizos, while because of their cultural peculiarities few Mayans are members.

The Belizean Red Cross now has seven full-time staff members. Four work at the central headquarters, among them the director general. In addition, three officials head projects in the districts, though one of them—the chief of the project for the disabled—has resigned. There is also a permanent staff of five persons at the Multiple Use Center at Belmopan: a supervisor, an assistant, a cook, a medical care aide, and a guard. As a result of an agreement with UNDP, there is also a parttime nurse. The leaders of the Belizean Red Cross believe that to guarantee efficient administration of the National Society's new activities, it is necessary to increase the number of the institution's permanent staff, while at the same time it is thought that there are problems in competing in the labor market for trained personnel because the lack of financial resources prevents offering competitive wages.

Finance and budgeting

The Belizean Red Cross has a budget in which national income and outgo are separate from the revenues and expenditures of projects financed with external funds. During the fiscal year 1989-1990 the budget of the National Society itself was approximately B\$56,200 (B\$2 = US\$1), 37% of which came from a governmental subsidy provided every three months, 16% from fund-raising activities, 26% from member donations and dues, and 21% from the proceeds of the souvenir and craft shop at the airport. Although not included in the accounts, a significant portion is the tax and customs exemptions which the Government has granted the Red Cross and which result in a major reduction in expenses.

Sixty-seven percent of the expenditures during the same period were for wages and social security, and 33% for office expenses and vehicle and building maintenance. Within these categories the district branches receive financial support from the central headquarters.

As already noted, the income and outgo based on external funds was four times greater than the National Society's budget in 1989-1990. Specific

sources of financing are set out in the section on international cooperation, but it should be noted that they are relatively diverse, though the British and Dutch Red Crosses' contributions have so far been very significant. In 1992 it was planned to complete various cooperation projects, among them the Dutch program for the disabled. As a result, if financing for new projects is not secured, the portion of the budget coming from cooperation could fall precipitously in 1993.

For all these reasons the National Society believes that improving its financial base, diversifying its sources of revenue, and developing its ability to raise funds through new income-producing activities are one of its most important development priorities. It has therefore been proposed that the new headquarters be provided with meeting rooms and facilities which could be rented, as has been done in other National Societies in the Caribbean. The most important restrictions on this so far have been the small size of the country and its population, in which various NGOs compete in fund raising.

The Belizean Red Cross's role and activities in the context of the country

Principal activities

Health services

The main activities of the Belizean Red Cross are its health services, especially in health education and promotion. Traditionally and for many years the National Society has conducted first-aid training activities in schools and companies and has offered courses on primary medical care to housewives. In addition to these activities, it has a clinical service at the Multiuse Center in Belmopan. The Belizean Red Cross is responsible for the first-aid component of the CARE/MAC program as well as for the first-aid component of some of the programs of Doctors Without Borders (DWB). It promotes the work of the Belizean Council for

people with visual disabilities by housing the Council's clinic. It also takes part in vaccination campaigns organized by the Government, and its volunteers collaborate in the activities and services of governmental health centers and hospitals.

In recent years the most significant health activity has been the "Child Alive" program, which has an AIDS education component and is conducted nationally. This program originated as a Federation initiative and initially had an epidemiological approach, but it was quickly changed into an educational program. The objectives of the program are training volunteers in health promotion and improving children's nutrition, preventing and controlling malaria, and preventing AIDS through information efforts aimed at parents of children less than five years old. The AIDS education component was incorporated later on the initiative of the National Society itself. The program is coordinated with the Government's childhood survival program, and governmental authorities also use Red Cross material on AIDS in their own programs.

Since the cholera epidemic began in neighboring Guatemala, the Red Cross of Belize has conducted an extensive effort to prevent and educate about the disease in collaboration with DWB. A cholera module was included in the "Child Alive" program. The areas of Benque Viejo, near the border post with Petén Department in Guatemala, and Punta Gorda have been especially emphasized in this program since they have had a large number of cases. Many publicity spots have been broadcast on local television as part of the prevention activities.

Except for support provided in recruiting blood donors, the Belizean Red Cross does not conduct any blood-related activity. It is believed that such activities are not among its priorities.

Social assistance and welfare activities

Among the National Society's assistance activities are its services to care for the elderly as well as a system of weekly distribution of food and clothing to persons of limited means, includ-

ing refugees and prisoners, and sporadically to victims of household fires. Another program in this area, begun recently, is training instructors of disadvantaged school children, which is conducted in cooperation with the educational authorities. This program, which had its own project officer and was financed by the Dutch Red Cross, has involved a major effort by the National Society.

Among the most recent activities in which the Belizean Red Cross has been involved has been refugee care. The Multiuse Center was built at Belmopan to carry out this work. It provides daily care, acts as a nutrition center and clinic, and also provides care to the local community. This project has been possible thanks to support from the British Red Cross. It is reckoned that around 30,000 refugees, of whom only 5,000 are recognized as such, live in Belize; they are thus one of the most important challenges facing the Belizean Red Cross. The establishment of a similar though smaller center at Punta Gorda with possible support by UNDP and PRODERE is currently being studied.

In the social sphere the National Society's concerns about the future relate to the situation of specific groups in the community, among them the homeless, delinquent children, and adolescents who have dropped out of school.

Relief and emergency services

The National Society has a good team of volunteers trained to act in disaster situations and other kinds of emergencies which is an essential support for the public authorities in this field. There is an active disaster preparedness committee. First-aid services are also provided at public events and meetings. There is no ambulance service such as other Red Cross Societies in the region have since it is understood that this should be a state function, nor is there a specialized relief group.

During the past two years the National Society has increased its training activities for emergency situations. With the participation of a consultant specializing in disaster management from the Muskegon, Michigan, Chapter of the American

Red Cross, two-week workshops on first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation have been held in which paramedics, local airline pilots, tourist guides, and Red Cross volunteers have taken part.

Relations with the Government

The National Society's relations with the Government are considered satisfactory. The Belizean Red Cross maintains cooperative relations basically with the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Social Services. It provides support in particular to governmental primary health care (PHC) and AIDS education programs, and to hospitals and health centers through its volunteers' work. The National Society is a member of the National Disaster Preparedness Committee and the National AIDS Committee as well as many other committees. The Government provides the National Society with a stable annual subsidy to finance its operations. The Ministries of Health, Social Services, and Education appoint representatives to the central committee of the Belizean Red Cross, which facilitates coordination and communication.

Relations with other organizations and agencies

The Belizean Red Cross maintains relations with other organizations at the local level, especially in the health area. The National Society's attitude about establishing cooperative ties and coordination mechanisms is very positive. Such relations are not free from problems, however. At times the National Society views such organizations as a threat in that they compete to recruit the same volunteers and raise funds. Often, in fact, they even recruit already trained and experienced volunteers from the National Society by offering them better conditions and even hire them professionally. The Belizean Red Cross also believes that other organizations with more resources are taking on some of the tasks which the Red Cross is performing or is duplicating its

work. Moreover, there is an impression that some of the organizations with which the Society collaborates are receiving credit and recognition for activities carried out by the Belizean Red Cross.

Despite such problems, it is thought that relations with other organizations are ultimately beneficial to the National Society since they allow the results of its work to be multiplied and result in exchanges of ideas and experience. A decision has therefore been made to maintain an attitude of openness toward the work of other organizations.

The role of international cooperation

International financial support and technical assistance, as noted above, are diverse in nature and continue to be of great importance to the Belizean Red Cross. The British Red Cross has contributed most of the external aid which the National Society has received in the period since independence, though it has also received cooperation from other sources.

The "Child Alive" and AIDS awareness programs operate with funds from the British Red Cross, which also supported the construction and operation of the Multiuse Center at Belmopan. In the sphere of institutional development, that National Society has also supported youth activities by financing the program and supplying a coordinator for activities in this area. The Dutch Red Cross, in turn, has supported programs to train instructors of disabled children. Concrete support has also been received from the Federation to conduct disaster preparedness training workshops and from the Austrian Red Cross, which has provided funds for training equipment.

The cooperation of United Nations agencies such as UNHCR and UNDP has been particularly significant for refugee programs. As noted above, it is possible that PRODERE and UNHCR will help extend refugee work in the Punta Gorda area. The Overseas Committee of Jersey, one of the Channel Islands, has recently become an important donor since for two years it has provided

funds for purchasing a vehicle and drugs for the Belmopan center's clinic.

In the 1991 "Appeal for Development of the Federation," the Belizean Red Cross is included in a Caribbean subregional project to train disaster personnel. In 1992 the only project presented to the development appeal, for a total of SFr60,000, was for repair and extension of the headquarters. As noted, this project would help to improve the National Society's revenues since the premises could be rented. The National Society has additionally asked the Federation for technical assistance in areas such as planning in order to be able to complete preparation of its Five-Year Development Plan and correctly apply the "Principles and Norms for Cooperation in Development," which are considered too complex for a National Society as small as that in Belize.

The National Society's perception of its public image

The National Society believes that it has such a good image in the community at large, in the Government, and in the communications media that it may be said that the Red Cross enjoys a privileged position in the Belizean community. The National Society's volunteers are favorably received in homes when health campaigns are conducted, companies do not refuse requests for aid, and the authorities seek the Red Cross's advice. From the viewpoint of the National Society, these facts are indicators that there is prestige and public recognition. The National Society is first and foremost viewed as a voluntary organization.

An important feature of the Belizean Red Cross's image in the community is that it is perceived as a mainly female organization composed of a group of "self-sacrificing women."

This is a traditional image which links that sex with caring activities and nursing. This situation becomes a problem where the recruitment of men is concerned since men would rather join organizations viewed as "male." At any rate, 70% of subscribing members are men. This does not prevent the service provided by women volunteers from being considered of high quality and, indeed, the National Society's growing participation in social development activities such as refugee programs is helping overcome the traditionalism of its image.

The lack of adequate facilities, meeting places, and warehouses in the districts and the age and deterioration of the headquarters are thought to affect the public image of the Belizean Red Cross negatively. Another problem stems from international cooperation. External support, particularly in the form of vehicles and material goods, projects an image of ready availability of resources which does not correspond with the real situation in the institution. The National Society fears that this will lessen national contributions and bring about greater demands for action, on the part of the Government, for example, than those which in reality can be satisfied.

The Belizean Red Cross has often made extensive use of the mass communications media, and especially television, in conducting awareness-raising and publicity campaigns. Some television spots about emergencies and AIDS have been transmitted regularly on local channels, and recently a video of high professional quality has been disseminated as part of the anti-cholera campaign. It is worth mentioning that this was the only television advertisement of such a nature and that the Red Cross is the only NGO with access to state communications media. It is thought that such spots have created a very favorable effect for the National Society. In addition, a video was produced in 1990 to promote the National Society and its activities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The Belizean Red Cross is a small but very active National Society. In a little more than a decade of development as an independent National Society it has managed to built its own identity and a strong volunteer base, the main strength of the institution. It has also established cooperative relations with the public authorities while maintaining its autonomy and independence, has been heavily involved in the areas of primary health, disaster preparedness, and community action, and has undergone extensive expansion and change.

Amid growing social problems, the National Society has evolved from a profile of traditional activities based on small-scale assistance to a more modern and diversified one, embracing activities on a larger scale in which promotional and development efforts in areas such as health and social action with vulnerable groups in the population, like the refugees who have been settling in the country, predominate. In doing so it has made use of significant international cooperation resources, which have come to be the institution's main source of revenue. Finally, the growing volume of activities has created in the National Society a need to make various changes in its organizational structure and administration.

In doing so, some problems have arisen and various limitations and obstacles which might hinder the forward motion of development have become clear. These may be the principal challenges which the Belizean Red Cross will face in coming years. The National Society still does not have a planning system or development plan enabling it to shape its annual plans of action over the medium or long term since preparation of the five-year development plan has still not been completed. Some programs and approaches still have a traditional profile and must be revised and updated. It is also necessary to continue the focus so far provided on volunteer training and motivation. In addition, the physical infrastructure—especially the central headquarters—needs urgent renovation and extension. Finally, fund-raising capacity is limited and dependence on foreign funds is very great, particularly in the most innovative programs of greatest impact, which could endanger their continuity and development. The challenge of self-sufficiency is therefore also the challenge of consolidating and extending the sphere which the Belizean Red Cross now occupies in the ever more complex and competitive arena of the country's social development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Draw up the Five-Year Development Plan reaffirming the National Society's orientation toward the most vulnerable**
- 2. Broaden the institution's financial base**
- 3. Intensify the strategy of human resources development**
- 4. Improve the physical infrastructure**

- 1. Draw up the Five-Year Development Plan reaffirming the National Society's orientation toward the most vulnerable**
 - 1.1 Finish preparation of the Five-Year Development Plan, requesting technical support from the Federation, in order to begin implementing it as soon as possible.
 - 1.2 As part of the Development Plan, maintain and strengthen the programs which the National Society now considers priorities such as primary health care activities and disaster preparedness and emergency relief, which are the Belizean Red Cross's present strengths.
 - 1.3 As part of the Development Plan, develop new programs for other very vulnerable groups such as women heads of household, the elderly without resources, and marginalized children and young people, or dealing with new or emerging social problems such as AIDS, the situation of illegal immigrants, and violence against women
 - 1.4 Develop the National Society's operational capacity in the sphere of disaster prevention and preparedness, putting greater stress on prevention and community organization. Broaden the conceptual and operational approach to designing disaster prevention measures by including physical factors affecting the population's vulnerability and social, psychological, and especially environmental factors.
 - 1.5 Maintain as the National Society's action priority care of refugees by promoting their self-sufficiency and gradual integration into the country, in coordination with the public authorities and other organizations and agencies. This should be done through programs which, as in those already begun in Belmopan, deal with their situation comprehensively and also involve the local Belizean population.
 - 1.6 Establish development goals for each of the programs noted as to coverage, efficiency, and quality of service, as well as means for their follow-up and evaluation.
 - 1.7 Maintain and extend the use of low-cost action strategies by making intensive use of the National Society's most abundant resource—personnel—with methods based on community organization, awareness raising, and information, and on education and training.
 - 1.8 Draw up a Framework of Development Cooperation based on the development plan.

2. Broaden the institution's financial base

- 2.1 As part of the Development Plan, formulate a plan of action for fund raising which, with advice from professionals in that area and including modern marketing and publicity methods, will identify new kinds of fund raising and overhaul existing ones so as to increase their effectiveness
- 2.2 Increase the proportion of local financing in the National Society's revenue structure by strengthening self-sufficiency and gradually reducing the present imbalance between the Society's own revenues and those from external financing. To that end:
- 2.3 Adopt measures which guarantee the future sustainability of projects undertaken with funds from international cooperation.
- 2.4 Identify new income-generating and/or commercial projects based on profitability criteria and the potential of the tourist sector which do not contradict the institution's Principles and help increase its financial base. Especially consider the opportunities which Belize's vigorous tourist sector offers.
- 2.5 Undertake negotiations and agreements with the public authorities concerning new social development programs.
- 2.6 Develop new agreements and contracts with international agencies working in the country, especially those in the United Nations system, to finance new programs in areas of common operation.
- 2.7 Extend mechanisms of sponsorship by private enterprise.
- 2.8 Establish a permanent unit, with a chief, in the organizational structure which is responsible for fund raising.

3. Intensify the strategy of human resources development

- 3.1 Establish a continuing education program based on participative methods and aimed at volunteers, paid staff, and community collaborators based on the training needs found in practical activities and the needs of the community.
- 3.2 Exhaustively analyze the external and internal reasons for the low participation of men in the institution's membership. Several supplementary promotional activities or those oriented toward a change in the Society's public image may result from such a study.
- 3.3 Conduct a volunteer recruitment campaign, with some emphasis on men, as well as to recruit volunteers with professional and technical qualifications by including them in duties, programs, or projects according to their qualifications. To that end, change the National Society's public image as an organization of women by adopting measures to publicize a more gender-balanced image.
- 3.4 Promote recruitment of young people and creation of conditions favorable to their remaining members and motivation: greater participation and service and recreational activities suitable to their age, etc.
- 3.5 Undertake trainer training activities.

Conclusions and recommendations

4. Improve the physical infrastructure

- 4.1 Promote the reconstruction and extension of the central headquarters through contributions from international cooperation and the Society's own funds.
- 4.2 Promote provision of adequate premises and storehouses for branches which still do not have them.

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