

## ARGENTINIAN RED CROSS

### A difficult transition toward a new model of development

For the past half-century, instruction in nursing and life saving has been the predominant activity of the Argentinian Red Cross and a decisive factor in its institutional development. This teaching activity has been conducted in 36 schools whose staff are paid by the state. It is possible that in the future the state may transfer responsibility for the schools to provincial Governments, and there is uncertainty and concern in the National Society about their future financing and continuity.

The institution's activities during all those years were modest in relation to the country's size, varied little, and had a mostly charitable focus.

At the beginning of the 1990s the Argentinian Red Cross finds itself in a period of transition and redefinition of its role, a process that reflects the changes such as the economic crisis and democratization which the country has experienced in recent years.

The strong social impact resulting from the economic crisis and application of liberalization and adjustment policies has shown itself in recent years in the greater vulnerability of large sectors of the population which have been affected by the deterioration in their real income and an increase in poverty and indigence. Poverty is largely urban and is especially concentrated in Greater Buenos Aires, though its proportional burden is greater in the countryside. It is believed that there are a large number of elderly persons who live alone and are poor, particularly in rural provinces

Health indicators show increases in infant mortality in 18 or the 24 provinces and an alarming rise in the maternal mortality rate because of secret abortions. AIDS has grown spectacularly since 1990, the number of cases doubling annual-

ly. Environmental sanitation has worsened significantly.

Children have been especially hard hit by the crisis. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) data for 1990 reckoned at 90,000 the number of street children in Greater Buenos Aires, associated with an increase in juvenile delinquency and violence. As a result of the crisis, the entry of young people into both the formal and informal job markets has grown, and more young women have entered traditional activities under more unfavorable conditions.

As for vulnerability to natural disasters, Argentina is exposed to earthquakes, floods, avalanches, and droughts in different parts of the country which cause large agricultural and infrastructural losses as well as numerous human victims.

In this troublesome context of the population's new demands and needs, the Argentinian Red Cross is trying to diversify its activities through social promotion strategies which avoid a charitable approach. In both the headquarters and many of the 79 branches, new activities are being undertaken in the field of social action and health. Relief activities have been strengthened since the beginning of the 1980s. It is thought that this is a field with potential for development of the institution taking into account that the social situation has deteriorated and the country is repeatedly affected by disasters, especially floods.

Although there is still some caution in the institution as to such efforts, they are supported by many volunteers and middle-level and senior officers in the National Society, an indication of the arrival of a generation anxious to define a new development model for the Argentinian Red Cross.

It must be noted, however, that there are major obstacles to the ultimate success of this

process, obstacles which at the same time represent the main challenges to the National Society in the near future.

In the first instance, possibilities for raising funds are limited for several reasons. On one hand, the crisis has reduced the population's ability to contribute; on the other, the image and credibility of the institution were affected by irregularities in another administration, the collection of funds by "promotional companies" and private interests of various kinds, and periods of inertia in its profile of activities. All this affected the organization's self-esteem and the trust of public opinion, and alienated many contributors and volunteers. Efforts are being redoubled to raise funds and improve financial administration and accounting to counter this situation. The finances of the Argentinian Red Cross are clearly in the red, however. Organizationally, it is important to achieve greater decentralization in decision making in the supreme council or headquarters so as to facilitate development of participation, renewal, and growth of branches and operational departments. It is also imperative to include a new generation in the leadership to revitalize the institution. Communication, integration, and coordination in relations with the branches are inadequate and at times impede operational decentralization and a more rational and stable division of work. This worsens the problems which in themselves stem from the deep territorial imbalances and geographic characteristics of the country, particularly the dispersion of and distance between urban centers and the low demographic density of Argentina.

In the area of planning it is necessary to integrate and implement programs and projects in an overall planning scheme.

Finally, renewal efforts and transition toward a new development model have still not been forceful enough to attract young people and reactivate volunteers. Specialization in nursing still persists and implementation of new social promotion programs is delayed. The Red Cross has also taken a cautious stance regarding the quickening renewal of the state and Argentinian society, a position that lessens its ability to com-

pete with dynamic nongovernmental organizations which operate in fields similar to the institution's, especially in health.

## Organization of the National Society

### *Organizational structure and geographic coverage*

The governing bodies of the Argentinian Red Cross are the general assembly, the supreme council, and the executive committee. All are in Buenos Aires.

The assembly is composed of branch delegates representing their associates and representatives of governmental agencies to renew the elective posts on the supreme council and analyze the period in the light of the report on activities and financial statement.

The supreme council is composed of 14 councilors elected by the assembly, the chairmen of the 10 regional councils, and six delegates from the state's ministries. It is the highest governing and administrative authority. As with the assembly and other organs, its structure is reproduced in the branches as directing committees. The supreme council delegates its immediate agreement-making powers to an executive committee consisting of the president, two vice presidents, secretary, and treasurer.

Advising the supreme council and the executive committee are several internal bodies such as a standing national finance committee and a committee to review accounts which analyzes annual financial statements.

At the organization's intermediate level the 79 branches are grouped into 10 regional councils which include provinces and departments. Eight of the regional councils were organized after 1985 as middle-level coordinating bodies, but they are now undergoing evaluation as a result of criticism for lack of activity. This may be due to the fact that they are located at branch headquarters, meet very few times yearly, and lack assigned resources

This situation has led the supreme council and executive committee to keep fairly centralized control of the organization from the national headquarters, despite the fact that the organization is federal in nature.

Centralized control limits the internal flexibility and participation required to modernize the institution's organizational structure in order to adapt it to the enormous changes facing the country. In addition, there clearly is no generation ready to replace the current leadership and so contribute to the organization's renewal.

The branches are at the base of the organization. Some of them are developed in their infrastructure, variety of services, and modernity, and are even stronger than the national headquarters. Others, in contrast, do not have a headquarters building, lack or have very weak relief and youth programs, and suffer from poor financing, and some of them have been placed under governmental control or are paralyzed.

### *Administration and planning*

Central administrative and program management is conducted from the offices and departments at national headquarters. In practice, each branch administers its own services and resources, and some have planning and administrative processes for managing new projects.

The daily administration of the national headquarters is the direct responsibility of an administrative secretariat or coordinating office which implements the guidelines of the executive committee, supervises the paid administrative and accounting staff, maintains files, and controls the flow of internal and external communications.

There is a chief financial officer whose office supervises accounting, disbursements, purchasing, and inventory and which is aided by another office that maintains close liaison with the coordinator's office and national treasurer.

In common with the general administration, the technical and operational departments are weak in their budgets, office technology, computing and communications systems, and human

resources. They comprise nursing and paramedical specialties, life-saving, youth, relief and relief activities, primary health care, and the blood donor, personal tracing, and drug programs. The social action program was recently created. According to the Argentinian Red Cross's general bylaws, each branch should have at least four such sections and is required to have disaster relief and youth programs.

Because the central and departmental administration has few resources, it is inadequate for meeting requests for support, coordination, and technical advice from branches, carrying out many of the supreme council's decisions, and implementing some statutorily defined duties.

There is no office responsible for planning, programming, and evaluating activities. Nevertheless, there are specific programs and projects in the fields of financial administration, social and community intervention, and human resources training which have plans and planning systems. Some of these projects have been submitted to the Federation. The need to integrate them into some kind of multi-year plan for the entire National Society has been raised, but nothing has been done about it.

### *Human resources*

The scarcity of adequately trained human resources is one of the chief weaknesses of the Argentinian Red Cross. There are no clear policies and incentives on recruiting, selecting, and training volunteers. The exact number of volunteers in the country is not known. Young people are especially wanting in the programs of the provincial branches, but in general there is a good balance between men and women in the National Society's decision making.

Initiatives have recently been undertaken to deal with this situation by offering new programs and incentives in order to stimulate young people to take part as Red Cross volunteers. It is also intended to invite many trained volunteers back who left the institution during the past decade for reasons already noted. There is a national plan

and several projects are under way to improve the training of leaders and strengthen middle-level managers. But funds and volunteers to carry them out are scarce and the mass campaigns launched toward that end a short time ago have not produced the hoped-for results.

The need for an intermediate generation in the Argentinian Red Cross to rejuvenate its higher ranks has increased interest in reactivating areas of work done by young volunteers, who in Argentina range from 16 to 25 years.

The major competition represented by other NGOs, which deal with social vulnerability problems using more attractive approaches and methods than those of the Argentinian Red Cross, is considered a threat to an increase in the numbers of volunteers, especially young ones.

The professional, technical, and administrative staff continues to be limited and exists only in the administrative and accounting areas of the national headquarters. In those areas only the administrative coordinator, chief of finance, and director general of schools of nursing and paramedical specialties are paid salaries, on a half-time basis.

As noted above, the teaching staff in the 36 nursing schools are paid by the state, and it is possible that they will be transferred to the provincial Governments, a situation that creates uncertainty about the future. There is considerable reluctance to increase the staff, not only to economize but also from fear of the staff's possible unionization.

### *Finance and budget*

The Argentinian Red Cross lacks stable and adequate resources to meet its needs and develop its capacity for action. Its central budgeting system only partially meets the needs of the headquarters in the capital, i.e., the supreme council, executive committee, and their subordinate units.

After many years of imbalances and irregularities in previous administrations which threw the Argentinian Red Cross into heavy debt and also lessened its public credibility because of the crisis,

it has still not been possible to balance the institution's precarious finances. In addition, the country was generally impoverished and the Argentinian Red Cross lost much of its ability to raise funds among the upper and middle strata of the population. Contributions from members and other supporters also fell, and the institution reached a state of near-bankruptcy.

As already noted, the state subsidizes the salaries and fixed expenses of the network of nursing schools, but that might change in the future, something that causes concern.

Significant progress has been made in establishing relatively rational financial and accounting procedures, including efforts to develop program budgets, improve internal controls, and launch fund-raising campaigns such as the 1989 National Crusade. Even so, the Argentinian Red Cross is going through a serious insolvency crisis which limits its entire institutional development.

A financial statement for the period from July 1990 to June 1991 gives an idea of the national headquarters' financial situation. During that year revenues were 3,179,000 australs, or approximately \$335,000, which came chiefly from student fees, 31%; subsidies, 26%; donations, 14%, promotions and raffles, 8.4%, and rents, 5%. Expenditures amounted to 4,311,000 australs, or approximately \$454,000, which included salaries and benefits, 41%; expenses for legal proceedings, 11%; amortizations, 7.4%; professional fees, 6.2%; barem, 4.7%; and payments for services and taxes, 4.6%. The deficit accumulated during the fiscal year was 1,132,000 australs, or \$120,000.

Some leaders have pointed out that there is a lack of ideas for creating new methods of obtaining resources to deal with these realities; others, in contrast, maintain that there are too many ideas and not enough action, and that the public's response to campaigns is feeble, as shown in 1988 and 1989. At the same time, there is indecision about the need to charge for some services, which for some leaders militates against the humanitarian and charitable spirit which such services should have.

Finally, there is a suitable climate for carrying out reform measures in internal financial and accounting administration as promoted by the national treasurer's office. Examples are updating standards, rationalizing space in buildings and properties belonging to the Argentinian Red Cross, training staff to draw up self-sustaining projects, developing self-financing projects, campaigns and collections regulated in association with public service bodies, and continuation of cooperation project audits by external bodies.

### **The National Society's role and activities in the context of the country**

#### *Principal activities*

##### *Health services*

The programs of greatest impact in the Argentinian Red Cross are traditional instruction in nursing and the paramedical specialties, and training of life guards and relief workers.

Through a network of 36 Schools of Nursing and Paramedical Specialties—hemotherapy, laboratory practice, surgical instrumentation, and radiology—throughout the country, the National Society is the country's chief educator of professional nurses. Instructional and program activity has been declining in recent years, however, due in part to the lack of training options and motivation of the teaching staff as a result of the interest of some parts of the Government in transferring instruction in nursing to university schools and municipal hospitals, and in part to changes established by the state in requirements for entering the discipline.

Although the Argentinian Red Cross has still not managed to establish a blood bank, despite having presented several projects abroad, there is a National Volunteer Blood Donors Service (SENDA). This program is experiencing growing problems because of the decline in the number of persons enrolled in it due to fear of contracting

diseases. In 1990, only 152 donations were received at national headquarters and the program was in operation in only 14 of the 79 branches.

Programs against drug addiction and especially AIDS have recently been intensified. An information and prevention campaign against AIDS is being conducted through a blood bank in cooperation with the Philips Lighting Company.

The national headquarters still has a program to search for drugs abroad—mainly in neighboring countries, the United States, and Europe—in coordination with Aerolíneas Argentinas. An average of 250 requests are handled annually. Following a pattern of unequal development, some branches offer various primary health care and prevention services, school medical kit programs, drug banks for very poor patients, maternal and child centers (as in Corrientes), and even comprehensive school mental health, audiology, and psychology services with charitable and preventive aims (as in the Lomas de Zamora branch). Such programs should continue to be strengthened in the future.

##### *Relief and emergency services*

Because Argentina is a country subject to many and frequent natural disasters and has experienced domestic tensions and disturbances in recent years, the training of auxiliary volunteers and specialized relief workers has been pursued to some extent so that the Argentinian Red Cross can conduct operations in such situations.

Because of major floods in the northern part of the country, activities in this area since 1982-1983 have been strengthened with assistance from the International Federation of Red Cross Societies in coordination with the Ministry of Defense's National Civil Defense Directorate. In May 1989, because of various social disturbances and acts of looting, the Argentinian Red Cross took part in Operation Solidarity to distribute food and other assistance. Later, with support from the European Community and the Federation, 866 tons of food were distributed and 227,400 people were assisted in 33 branches, a valuable intervention which has been repeated in other emergencies

arising from the economic and social crisis. This is evidence of a strong potential for organizational growth and the development of human resources in this area.

### *Social welfare and assistance services*

Although it is not one of the National Society's traditional areas of activity, a department of social action was recently established at the national headquarters which takes a different approach than traditional charity and is oriented toward community work, organization of cooperatives, and family integration to solve problems of economic and social vulnerability.

In the area of social action, the Argentinian Red Cross has up to now taken part in distributing the "solidarity" vouchers which the Ministry of Health and Social Action provides to poor families. Many branches have specific, small-scale services such as drug banks for patients in and out of hospital who lack resources; drug, alcoholism, and smoking treatment programs; services to care for street children, and day-care or maternal and child care centers.

### *Other activities*

Among the new activities and projects it is desired to undertake, it should be noted that those dealing with youth and the recruitment of volunteers are priorities, but they are still in the early stages of development. During the last two years there has been a good deal of activity in these areas, especially in the youth area. Still, only 11 of the 79 branches have managed to set up Youth Committee programs in which adolescents and young people actively participate. Thirty other branches have groups called School Centers which offer traditional school and college activities. Youth is one of the few activities that have well-established policies, delimitation of groups by age, and central, regional, and branch organizational guidelines.

Teaching of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is on a limited scale and is carried out

from the National Nursing Directorate. The national headquarters traces missing persons.

### *Relations with the Government*

Relations with the Government were closer in the past, especially through the functions of the Civil Defense agency, an area in which the Argentinian Red Cross is still considered an important auxiliary body in disaster relief interventions. Relations with that agency today, as well as with the armed forces and the state in general, seem to have become warier as a result of earlier criticisms of transgressions of the organization's autonomy.

Nevertheless, links have increased since 1988 with municipalities in the area of emergency committees and with the Ministry of Education and Social Action in dealing with situations of economic and social conflict—outbreaks of violence and disturbances—and taking part in youth and prevention activities. Further, a very close relationship has existed with the same ministry for years through the National Superintendency of Private Instruction and with the Foreign Trade Secretariat, agencies that regulate and subsidize nursing education and the teaching of paramedical specialties, respectively.

Despite the existence of relations with the state and local governments, many leaders believe that mutual cooperation is not adequate and that initiatives are lacking to bring the organization's policies in line with public policies in areas related to the Red Cross's activities.

### *Relations with other organizations and agencies*

Relations with other NGOs are inadequate, though they are on good terms in a competitive environment. The proliferation of numerous NGOs in the capital and provinces means that the Red Cross must not only compete but also cooperate directly or through other public or autonomous agencies, such as CARITAS, AMIA, the Scouts, and

other lay and pastoral associations in the youth area.

Innovative activities in this regard began in 1990 and 1991. Warranting mention among others is a contract to conduct a pilot project to raise funds to aid the disabled in collaboration with the association that operates the Santa Fe Comprehensive Center for the Disabled (CILSA), a social activity which it was decided to extend to other branches.

Also significant is the joint effort of the Argentinian Red Cross and the Philips Lighting Company, headquartered in the country, in the AIDS control and prevention campaign, which might lead to other activities against drug abuse and serve as a model for new cooperation initiatives with the national and transnational private sector.

The long-standing collaboration with Aerolíneas Argentinas to coordinate collections of drugs outside the country should again be mentioned.

### **Role of external cooperation**

The external cooperation currently received by the Argentinian Red Cross is limited. According to Price Waterhouse reports, it did not exceed \$90,000 in 1990, and it was feared that by the end of 1991 it would fall to less than \$15,000. Such cooperation could increase, however, if the projects presented through the Federation are approved.

The Finnish Red Cross financed a training course for young leaders of health and social action projects at a cost of \$17,000. The Spanish Red Cross contributed \$103,963 to build a maternal and child care center at Corrientes. Among innovative projects is one to finance the work of a team of technicians specializing in planning and managing highly profitable projects, which was submitted to the Spanish Red Cross. Collaboration has been requested from the American Red Cross to rebuild an annex to the national headquarters as a first-aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation training center.

Some limitations which make obtaining greater external aid difficult are, according to branches in the interior: the centralized mechanisms for negotiating and evaluating projects in the supreme council, the branches' lack of information and experience in project mechanics, and the weakness or absence of technical staff and professionals to advise on the research, design, execution, and evaluation stages of projects.

### **The National Society's perception of its public image**

The National Society believes that the public image, identity, and self-esteem of the Argentinian Red Cross has been in crisis for several years, as explained above, and it is working hard to overcome this deterioration. The organization's credibility and potential for diversifying entrepreneurial programs are probably still limited for this reason. As it is not currently able to conduct a public information and relations campaign to surmount this obstacle, this critical perception may be inhibiting redefinition of overall goals and support for new and modern noncharitable programs.

A certain inability to defend the use of its emblems, which many private agencies do not respect, has also adversely affected the Red Cross's identity, as has its inability to overcome many of the competitive threats which the Argentinian Red Cross from other social-sector organizations in raising funds, taking part in development projects, and duplication of activities.

Nevertheless, the Argentinian Red Cross continues trying to surmount immediate obstacles to publicizing itself and achieving better management of its public relations. Thus, the supreme council is publishing a newsletter for the branches, though publication has unfortunately been delayed by financial problems and a lack of human resources. The formation of a public information and relations committee to strengthen the Red Cross's image in the Argentinian population was announced in mid-1991. This could become a much-needed public information department in the future.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusions

Instruction in nursing and the paramedical specialties as well as training in life saving and relief work have historically been the predominant activity of the Argentinian Red Cross

At the start of the 1990s the National Society is redefining its role, a process related to the phenomena the country has experienced in recent years such as its military dictatorship, profound economic and social crisis, and transition to democracy. Those phenomena, in addition to weakening the already fragile structure of the Argentinian Red Cross, especially financially, create new challenges for meeting the demands of a population whose ability to meet its basic needs has worsened and which lives in conditions of social deterioration.

Several campaigns to intervene in social emergencies and in response to natural disasters, as well as new prevention activities in the health sphere, show that the Argentinian Red Cross has some ability to respond to situations of vulnerability from its national headquarters and some branches. At the same time, still incipient programs to help the disabled and youth affected by drugs

and threatened by AIDS are being implemented. These are all symptoms of the first steps toward so-called "managerial development" with a change in generations of managers and the creation of a different view of the future.

Still, for this initial process to be successful, organizational problems, such as the centralization of institutional authority in the national headquarters, which make participation, renovation, and growth in the branches and operational departments difficult and limit the rejuvenation of the leading management, must be overcome.

Problems related to fund raising and the deterioration of the organization's public image must also be surmounted. In addition, finalizing and implementing the 1991-1994 development plan, now under discussion, are mandatory. Other important subjects to be considered are communication, integration, and coordination in relations with and between branches, the need to enroll young volunteers to strengthen the organization, and the need to have clear mechanisms for recruiting, selecting, and training them. Finally, it is important to promote support from external cooperation for this new plan of development.



**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1. Modernize and make the organizational structure flexible**
- 2. Establish a strategic planning system**
- 3. Widen efforts already begun to diversify activities to help improve the situation of the most vulnerable**
- 4. Extend, diversify, and strengthen sources of financial resources**
- 5. Implement a human resources development program**
- 6. Overhaul the institution's public image**

**1. Modernize and make the organizational structure flexible**

- 1.1 Adopt measures to promote gradual replacement of leaders.
- 1.2 Strengthen middle-level management in the departments by delegating to it greater authority and resources for responding to requests for support, coordination, and technical advice from the branches.
- 1.3 Strengthen the organizational structure to carry out decentralized and participative management.
- 1.4 Strengthen the operational capacity of the regional councils so that they can fulfill their role as intermediary coordination units.

**2. Establish a strategic planning system**

- 2.1 Promote discussion of and update the 1991-1994 development plan project and get it approved and implemented.
- 2.2 Establish clearly and precisely in the plan the objectives, mission, and role of the Argentinian Red Cross in the context of the country in order to make the new model of development being promoted explicit.
- 2.3 Solicit support from local public and private and international bodies so that they contribute technical and financial resources in order to broaden and raise the level of internal training in strategic planning and evaluation.
- 2.4 Consider in discussing the development plan project the priority needs of the most vulnerable groups according to the country's environment.

- 2.5 Integrate present projects and programs which will continue in the goals and objectives of the development plan to ensure homogeneous execution of planning and avoid the dispersion of specific tasks.
  - 2.6 Formulate a Reference Framework for Cooperation in Development based on the institution's four-year plan.
- 3. Widen efforts already begun to diversify activities to help improve the situation of the most vulnerable**
- 3.1 Strengthen social promotion activities aimed at the most vulnerable sectors (children, youth, the elderly, and the poor and marginalized in general) and the poorest geographic areas (e.g., El Chaco, Formosa, Jujuy, Santiago del Estero, Salta, Corrientes, and Tucumán in the rural area, and Greater Buenos Aires in the urban area).
  - 3.2 Given the country's vulnerability to disasters, especially floods, continue and strengthen relief and emergency activities by broadening preventive activities.
  - 3.3 Promote the hiring of qualified professionals as part of the paid staff to strengthen and enhance the diversification of activities
- 4. Extend, diversify, and strengthen sources of financial resources**
- 4.1 Broaden sources of financing by drawing up and carrying out a fund-raising plan.
  - 4.2 Strengthen and expand links with state agencies within the framework of new public policies—mixed public-private systems for providing services— and execution of social investment programs, especially in the health and social welfare areas.
  - 4.3 Develop, strengthen, and diversify interorganizational cooperation liaison with related nongovernmental sectors (NGOs) to broaden the execution of projects through shared financing
  - 4.4 Strengthen and systematize finance and accounting rationalization mechanisms, program budgeting, and internal controls. In addition to improving internal financial management, this would enhance the organization's public image and mobilization of internal and external resources.
- 5. Implement a human resources development program**
- 5.1 Define clear policies for recruiting, selecting, and training human resources in accordance with Argentinian society's new values and realities.
  - 5.2 Reactivate the working areas of young volunteers through more attractive and diversified program activities linked to the country's needs and in accordance with that sector's cultural values and patterns.
  - 5.3 Offer volunteers a system of incentives and awards, especially those involved in community action and specialized relief activities.
  - 5.4 Motivate volunteers and paid staff to carry out activities coordinated with other NGOs, especially in interventions following natural disasters and in new areas of social action.

### **6. Overhaul the institution's public image**

- 6.1 Design and conduct an information and image-building program to be carried out by the information and public relations commission which will help overcome the deterioration in this sphere and reestablish the organization's credibility.
- 6.2 Establish close connections between this program and the development and fund-raising plans.
- 6.3 Reinforce the change of image by achieving respect for the use of the Red Cross emblem.

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