

BOLIVIAN RED CROSS

Development expectations in an uncertain future

The Bolivian Red Cross is an organization making efforts to broaden and consolidate its position in the Bolivian reality according to guidelines laid down in 1984-1985 in the National Development Plan (NDP), which puts priority on health and education services. The major goal has been to strengthen and diversify community action in primary health care and promotion in vulnerable low-income sectors, with emphasis on participation by women and protection of families. The plan represented a deep break with a past in which a charitable approach predominated for many years and which was relatively stagnant; it led to an internal reorganization, reorientation of the organization's activities and services, and increased its profile and social impact in line with the country's difficult socioeconomic situation and the Federation's development guidelines.

The environment in which the National Society operates was characterized in the 1980s by the beginning of the period of democratization, accompanied by a major economic recession which led to a severe structural adjustment and an increase in the social deterioration of the Bolivian population, which is one of the poorest in Latin America. The gravest consequences have been a fall in and deterioration of wages, an increase in unemployment, and an unusual increase in the informal economy. The number of people who are poor and indigent is alarming, especially in the central Andean region and the metropolitan areas; and there is a high incidence of poverty among Bolivian children, of whom eight in every 10 have unmet basic needs. Basic health indicators show high child mortality and malnutrition, which is concentrated in the inter-Andean valley and marginal urban areas, a high maternal mortality rate, and a high incidence of communicable diseases. Deterioration of environmental sanitation has hastened the spread of cholera in the

country. The indigenous are one of the most vulnerable social groups. Women, especially indigenous women, have high illiteracy and fertility rates.

As for vulnerability to disasters, droughts and floods are the chief threats. The flood cycle in the eastern part of the country and altiplano droughts were the worst disasters of the 1980s and worsened the population's already precarious situation. Despite those events, the National Society's relief and emergency services are still at a very early stage.

To put the NDP into effect, the Bolivian Red Cross received financial and technical support mainly from the Swedish Red Cross.

Today the NDP is at mid-point. About 50% of the 1985 goals have been accomplished; Swedish financing continues to cover 100% of operational and administrative expenses. A charitable approach is still taken in some programs, however, and although no one hides the problems which the programs have had in their administration and communications, it appears that for the moment the concept of the plan continues to respond to the concerns of the organization's leaders.

Nevertheless, serious problems have arisen in the rush toward a new kind of development which threaten to obstruct its progress and disrupt the integrity of the organization as a whole. Some of the most important are:

The NDP's implementation led to the weakening of activities it did not include, especially in branch capitals where member recruitment and the Red Cross's presence was weakest, and the weakening of the organization's image caused financial support and credibility-building opportunities to be lost.

The NDP coordinating unit has become the overseer of almost all Red Cross activity, particularly that of the new departments, and has resulted

in confusion of roles, duties, and levels in the exercise of departmental and regional authority. In recent years there has been friction between the Presidency of the Bolivian Red Cross and the NDP coordination office in making institutional decisions and about finances, which are dominated by the flow of external aid.

The NDP's financial dependence on external funds and the limited capacity of the National Society in achieving financial autonomy threaten the continuity of new programs, a situation which may cause not only functional but also structural retrogression inasmuch as there are no clear indicators that self-financing can be achieved.

Results of primary care activities in outlying areas and rural communities appear to have no relation to the bold effort and funds invested, in addition to which there have been no dynamic and corrective evaluations of the branches and departments. The Federation recently evaluated the NDP in the Bolivian Red Cross.

In this context, the most important challenges facing the Bolivian Red Cross are: (a) searching for internal consensus to resolve its institutional organization problems and redefine the future of current objectives, goals, and ways of operating, (b) dealing with the consequences of the programmed phase-out of external aid, and (c) remedying the debilitation of the activities—especially relief and emergency operations—not included in the NDP.

Organization of the National Society

Organizational structure and geographic coverage

According to the current statutes, the main governing bodies are the National Assembly, the highest authority; the National Directorate, composed of nine members who must be residents of the capital; the Honorary National Committee, consisting of former national Presidents; the Legal Committee, and the Departmental Assemblies in each branch.

In practice the national headquarters establishes policies, executes programs, and manages external and the organization's own relations and funds.

Geographic coverage is acceptable and is expanding slowly and with difficulty. The Red Cross is present in the nine departments and is making progress in 19 provinces. There are a total of 151 operating units in the interior which provide various assistance services, particularly first aid, and in semiurban areas there are 84 mothers' clubs, which are the basic units in the NDP's community organization.

Although this network covers a large part of the country, services are weakest or nonexistent in remote altiplano rural areas and in Beni and Pando in Amazonia. Although the branches have some autonomy in prioritizing and administering their activities and mobilizing local financing, the present organizational structure promotes urban concentration of services and defective communication and coordination between the operating departments at national headquarters and local offices. Links with governmental agencies are quite weak.

Administration and planning

Executive management of the Bolivian Red Cross consists of two formal coordinating bodies. One is the Administrative Coordination Office, which oversees several small support departments and offices such as accounting, financial resource mobilization, personnel, warehousing, secretariat services, and transportation. The other is the NDP Coordination Office, which supervises the five operating departments and is based on strict regionalization of the three "development poles," in La Paz, Potosí, and Santa Cruz. Each was made responsible for conducting new education and health activities in the other six less developed departments. At the same time, three major areas of activity and planning which are still current—protection, first aid and health, and social welfare—were defined.

Departments such as Youth and Volunteers as well as Relief and Emergencies have been separated relatively recently in order to work more closely with the Presidency, and that has created unwanted overlapping and duplication.

The real administrative structure shows an organizational dysfunctionality to the extent that it is not compatible with the formal or statutory structure. The result has been tension between the policy-making, administrative, and technical and operational levels. This often creates friction in interpersonal relationships and disrespect for hierarchies and the specific duties of each level; in addition, it is common for statutes and regulations to go unfulfilled or be ignored. There are no internal regulations or job descriptions. All this has led to talk of a "crisis of governability."

Middle and low levels state that a vertical, centralized leadership style which communicates little has been created at the national headquarters which may change the equilibrium of the rest of the organization. Branch and subbranch headquarters complain of an excessive turnover of program chiefs and heads which makes fulfilling development goals and programs difficult.

Despite the existence of an NDP since 1984, no systematic evaluations have been carried out which would allow reorienting, improving, and drawing up new plans and projects and avoiding a charitable bias. It is feared that if present plans are not fulfilled, the image of the Bolivian Red Cross will be further damaged and bringing about the ideal of a "Bolivian model" of a modern and innovative, well-planned and coordinated Red Cross will be hindered.

It is also said that the planning carried out did not take into account two key elements in the process for its success: the decrease in Swedish assistance programmed for 1995 and the creation and diffusion of an image which agrees with the institution's new identity and purposes.

Human resources

The Bolivian Red Cross faced the problem of not having enough volunteers in its organization

(it is estimated that there are only 700 active volunteers throughout Bolivia), and they could be better indoctrinated and trained technically and in specialties—all matters which the NDP has not been able to correct and which are tending to become more acute. These shortcomings appear to be due to the National Society's organizational weakness and financial frailty.

In addition to the fact that there is little training, there is a high desertion rate which is worsened by poverty and the volunteers' need to search for paid jobs in a time of acute crisis, even in organizations competing with the Red Cross.

Some time ago it was hoped that Bolivia's society and Government would respond more enthusiastically to the new role of Red Cross volunteers and the NDP strategy, but the response and real support have been minimal and that has led to a certain amount of frustration.

The small paid staff consists of 15 officials at national headquarters, nine of whom are paid with Swedish NDP funds, which means that the National Society expects that their employment will cease in mid-1995.

The paid staff receives very few wage and occupational incentives, has little training, works with scant modern administrative technology, and uses outdated information and communication systems. As do the volunteers, these staff require clear occupational standards to perform their roles and duties in the organization in order to optimize their work and time.

Finance and budget

Since the middle of the previous decade external cooperation has borne most of the burden of financing Bolivian Red Cross programs, there having been major problems in raising funds locally and developing the projects' self-sufficiency. In 1991, for example, the largest foreign contribution, from Sweden, was \$85,000 for the NDP, but the funds the organization itself raised amounted to less than \$35,000. This demonstrates the low level of support of the Government and community for the organization's renovation and assis-

tance efforts of recent years, and also the National Society's lack of bold fund-raising policies. For example, despite the fact that Bolivia was one of the first countries in Latin America to implement social investment funds which NGOs could use to carry out social projects, the Bolivian Red Cross did not do so.

The national Government provides the Bolivian Red Cross only one annual grant consisting of 10% of the profits from the National Lottery which are transferred to the Ministry of Health. Although other, local contributions may be obtained, they are inadequate to meet the organization's needs. The economic crisis facing the country and its Government make obtaining greater financial support difficult. The institution continues to go unrecognized in the social sectors which could help it financially.

The branches obtain their own financing locally and that depends on regional characteristics, economic activity, and the initiative of their Presidents. The varied fund-raising activities are in general carried out by volunteers, which may cause them much wear and tear.

The greatest difficulty in the financial and budget area lies in the gradual decrease of financial assistance and the lack of viable ideas, methods, and programs for self-financing to sustain the NDP and other activities important to the Bolivian Red Cross.

To correct shortcomings in this regard and through funds contributed by the Spanish Red Cross, an officer was recently hired to develop a national program to raise funds locally. His activities have so far had little effect. In addition, the Federation chose the National Society to carry out a fund-raising pilot project.

In order to improve budgeting, financing, and accounting procedures, the National Directorate recently retained an outside firm to make a complete audit starting in 1985 to show the present state of finances and begin correcting certain deficiencies in applying standards and procedures.

The firm mentioned above is conducting annual audits to regularize the financial systems in all of the NDP's key projects, and an effort is being made to respect the limits on expenditure in

each project which the branches know beforehand and accept as part of an autonomous budget administration. Sometimes, however, departmental governing bodies divert foreign funds to other activities or do not provide prompt reports on their expenditure. This seems to indicate that many branches are unable to spend funds on NDP development programs and apply them instead to traditional charitable needs

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

Principal activities

The main activities the Bolivian Red Cross conducts are, generally speaking, part of the NDP, especially at the level of the departmental and provincial branches, and basically consist of the following:

Health services

Community action in disease prevention and primary health care aimed at the most vulnerable sectors has been the greatest activity of the Bolivian Red Cross. The 95 mothers' clubs conduct a wide range of health promotion and nutrition activities; the campaign against unhealthy conditions and epidemics is stressed; interest is taken in publicizing equal rights for women and related matters; literacy training is offered, and instruction is provided through educational talks on hygienic practices, mother and child care, family planning, and first aid.

In remote and scattered rural areas community volunteers, in addition to covering some of the areas mentioned above, are responsible for the primary health care component in rural health posts. In such areas there is generally greater participation by young men in community development projects, latrine and greenhouse building, electrification, construction of rural aqueducts, reforestation, and execution of building projects.

It is here that direct or extra-NDP cooperation is most evident between Swedish and provincial Bolivian branches.

Medical and social services are also provided through the urban branches' clinics and consulting offices—"multi-service centers"—with support by medical and paramedical personnel from the health sector and NDP community integration and participation programs. These consist chiefly of first-aid and nursing courses and paid and free primary health care, nutrition, and tooth-extraction activities for the poor, with priority given to the elderly, women, and children in suburban areas with the greatest institutional and infrastructural development. Ninety-five mothers' clubs—whose number and demand for which are growing in the suburbs—are used for these tasks, as well as local leaders, including folk medicine practitioners.

There are programs aimed at youth in the campaign against AIDS and to prevent drug abuse.

Social assistance and welfare services

Vulnerable groups in urban and rural areas are aided through social assistance activities in the form of food and used clothing distribution. The main beneficiaries of such activities are mothers' club members and their families as recompense for their cooperation.

In most of the branches, social work extends to rural areas, in which, with great effort and through the sale of clothing, members are helped in building their own facilities for future activities. In 1990 there were 2,115 beneficiaries of the supplementary food program throughout the country, and the number of mothers' club members in suburban and rural areas was 960.

Relief and emergency services

Relief activities are carried out by small, new units in the country's different branches which offer training in varied specialties such as life saving, mountain climbing, disaster relief, etc. Coverage is provided in major and varied urban emergencies and during the frequent hunger strikes. The National Society's ability to meet the

demands of the population after natural disasters is almost nonexistent, including situation evaluations.

Other activities

There are also programs aimed at protecting abused children and young people in and out of school which emphasize first-aid and emergency training, recreation, and preparation for adult life. In general, young people work with the rest of the volunteers in so-called "parallel activities," vaccination and literacy campaigns, providing care for the elderly, taking care of patients in hospitals and sanatoria, and assisting children in day-care centers and prisoners in jails.

Little publicity is given to International Humanitarian Law, though a few seminar-workshops have been organized in the last two years.

Relations with the Government

Today the Bolivian Red Cross has few relations with the Government, though it collaborates directly in efforts which the Ministry of Social Welfare and Health should carry on as well as other public sector bodies in the educational sphere, assistance for the vulnerable, and civil defense.

It is often said that the organization has lost the support of and its institutional image has worsened in the eyes of the Government, and that for that reason the state does not provide the necessary cooperation to the Bolivian Red Cross. There is still a danger that agreements about the contribution from the National Lottery to the Red Cross and other agreements will not be fulfilled.

Relations are confined to (a) cooperation with the civil defense system after disasters, (b) receiving contributions of vaccines and syringes for the relevant ministry, which also customarily provides technicians to train Bolivian Red Cross staff in latrine building, and (c) offering first-aid courses to urban and rural elementary school teachers so that they can pass along their knowledge to other communities.

Relations with other bodies and agencies

There is little coordination between the Bolivian Red Cross and other NGOs, and this causes duplication of functions and interinstitutional competition for projects and qualified human resources.

Still, exceptions have begun to occur. Examples are the child abuse victims and drug abuse prevention projects, in which agencies such as CARITAS and UNICEF take part; the narcotics educational campaign (CESE), and the National Prevention Council (CONAPRE).

Support is also given to the Maternal Breast-feeding League in the obstetrics service of the University Hospital at La Paz and the Cancer Foundation in educational campaigns and specimen taking.

The Bolivian Red Cross is drawing valuable cooperation and exchange experience from such relationships, which are of enormous strategic importance since the financial crisis is forcing such relations to become closer in search of financing and technical assistance opportunities to renovate programs, methods, and the organization's public image.

Role of external cooperation

As noted above, international support has played a very important role in the Bolivian Red Cross. Overall, the Bolivian Red Cross has received from Sweden since 1990 amounts which have been decreasing—from \$90,000 to \$80,000 in 1991—for both operating and NDP expenses and certain specific programs and activities, apart from the \$85,000 received bilaterally in the "district to district" program.

The Spanish Red Cross has supported informational activities; the British Red Cross and Swiss Red Cross have financed the construction of multi-service centers and sanatoria; the Canadian Red Cross has helped set up and equip first-aid posts. Without the European Community's contribution of foodstuffs, received through the

Federation, the social assistance department's supplementary feeding program would not be able to function.

As pointed out above, the Swedish funds will continue to decline gradually until 1995, a situation that influences the Bolivian Red Cross's agenda because it does not feel prepared to take over with its own self-sustaining projects. The National Society has also shown itself somewhat slow in conducting negotiations, developing specialists, learning Bolivia's reality, and adopting modern methods of preparing projects, which leads to loss of opportunities for financing them.

Little assistance is available for public information and relations, which help build and change the organization's public image, although the Spanish Red Cross now pays for one officer who carries out minor tasks in this area. That aid is often received extemporaneously.

In addition, links have not been established with international external cooperation agencies other than the Federation and the National Red Cross Societies.

The National Society's perception of its public image

The Bolivian Red Cross's image is more widespread and respected among the vulnerable population than among the more affluent strata of Bolivian society. In both sectors, however, the mission of the Bolivian Red Cross is not well defined for lack of adequate and timely publicity of its objectives and programs. There is one person whose duties include public relations, but the image-building program has not been fully developed.

In addition, it may be said that, despite the efforts made by the new generation, the Bolivian Red Cross still has a charitable emphasis in many of its activities and is viewed by broad sectors of public opinion, especially the upper and middle classes, as an essentially charitable organization.

It is reported in La Paz and the branches, for example, that some communities think that the Bolivian Red Cross is a welfare and charitable

institution which therefore should not charge for its basic services. Government leaders define it similarly; the Government uses it but does not help it overcome its difficult problems with responsibility and without paternalism.

To this is added the fact that among the population there is much confusion about the identity of the Bolivian Red Cross since its emblems and symbols are freely used because the organization has allowed private medical and paramedical assistance organizations to use them, which causes its image to fade still more. The National Society believes that the agreements the Bolivian Red Cross has with the state should be reviewed to evaluate, amend, and update them.

It commonly occurs that when the Bolivian Red Cross takes part in civil defense efforts or collaborates with other organizations, especially governmental ones, it does not require that it be given due public recognition for such cooperation,

which makes the organization a victim of its own weaknesses and inhibitions and causes it to lose opportunities to improve its public image. The National Society believes that efforts should be made so that the Red Cross's participation in any program is backed up by obligatory publicity in order to build its image.

A lack of cooperation by the communications media with the national headquarters in publicizing the Red Cross is perceived, though the local press collaborates with the departmental branches to a greater extent. The low level of interest of the national media in publicizing the work of the Bolivian Red Cross is beginning to be partially offset by publication of several newsletters by the national headquarters and some branches, but there is no internal mechanism charged with programming and carrying on public relations and institutional publicity.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The Bolivian Red Cross can be distinguished for having adopted an organizational, program, and operational model in 1984 congruent with the most pressing social needs in its environment and aimed at work in semiurban and rural communities in the areas of primary health care and education. Since then a new and very estimable Red Cross generation has been forged and women and local leaders have been included. Disaster relief services are still quite weak despite the population's enormous vulnerability to disasters.

Significant progress has been made in the organization's work during the past decade and about half of the goals established as objectives in the NDP have been accomplished, despite its adoption in a difficult socioeconomic context.

Nevertheless, to consolidate this important process the following weaknesses must be confronted: the institution has a two-headed executive structure consisting of two bodies carrying out coordination at the same time, which causes serious internal friction. At the national headquarters and the coordinated regional action and

branch levels there are major organizational and financial imbalances as well as high turnover of middle-level staff—all evidence that the organizational model is not adapted to flexible and decentralized action. In other areas the rapid expansion of community participation and integration has not allowed the organization's grass-roots work to be sufficiently consolidated nor to spread farther into outlying rural areas.

The National Society is also very dependent on one or few external sources of support, which may have diminished its ability to search for its own sources of financing within Bolivia and to make revisions and readjustments which would strengthen its organizational, program, and operational development. The fact that its image is weak at the national level also limits fund raising.

There are charitable biases in some areas of the NDP and departmental activities, and there are signs of deterioration and risks of organizational fragmentation and instability which could undermine unity, confidence, and understanding between different internal components.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Carry out an administrative reform of the organization**
- 2. Strengthen community development activities, especially in indigenous communities**
- 3. Strengthen the relief area and link it to community development activities**
- 4. Achieve financial autonomy, stability, and security**
- 5. Establish a human resources development program**
- 6. Overhaul the external cooperation framework**
- 7. Conduct systematic efforts to improve the institution's image**

1. Carry out an administrative reform of the organization

- 1.1 Institutionalize a mixed organizational system which is centralized but democratic at the level of directing and controlling national programs but decentralized at the operating or field (branch) level, where activities should be flexible, participative, and supervised.
- 1.2 Adapt grassroots operational activities to the varied regional environments by transferring management as much as possible to community units with autonomous leadership and broad-based groups composed of volunteers, community leaders, and members of local teams.
- 1.3 Implement an administrative reform of the national headquarters by areas and departments, establishing descriptive manuals of operations, duties, and posts as well as detailed basic regulations governing the NDP's spheres of operation which avoid overlapping of authority and organizational imbalances.
- 1.4 Establish an internal climate more propitious to change by harmonizing human relations and institutional communications within and from the national headquarters.

2. Strengthen community development activities, especially in indigenous communities

- 2.1 Revise strategic objectives, goals, plans, and programs in relation to social deterioration and vulnerability processes by giving priority to those aimed at areas in which the greatest concentrations of vulnerable groups are found, such as the poorest provinces of the

departments of Cochabamba, Potosí, and Chuquisaca, and in which the state and/or other NGOs have little or no presence.

- 2.2 Establish a system for evaluating the coverage, social impact, and effectiveness of NDP activities.
- 2.3 Define precisely the Bolivian Red Cross's field of operations, functions, and areas of work in relation to the state and NGOs in order to coordinate grassroots activities and avoid duplications.

3. Strengthen the relief area and link it to community development activities

- 3.1 Strengthen the prevention area in relief work especially to deal with the consequences for the population of the recurring floods in the eastern region of the country and of the droughts in the altiplano.
- 3.2 Train volunteers in specific areas of relief work, adapting training to deal with the most common emergency and physical vulnerability situations, with emphasis on damage evaluation.
- 3.3 Establish links with already existing initiatives of NGOs to deal with disasters in both the prevention and the mitigation and rehabilitation phases.

4. Achieve financial autonomy, stability, and security

- 4.1 Diversify sources of financing by establishing agreements with national and international organizations specializing in the social area and operating in the country, e.g., UNICEF and PAHO.
- 4.2 Strengthen and stimulate the branches' fund raising at the local level
- 4.3 Establish agreements with state agencies responsible for executing social policies such as the Social Investment Funds in order to finance activities in the geographic areas having the most vulnerable social groups.
- 4.4 Establish agreements with the state, basically in the social welfare and health areas, which enable the institution to be recompensed for the services it provides in this field.
- 4.5 Establish mechanisms to control the allotment of funds which preclude their diversion to unprogrammed local activities.

5. Establish a human resources development program

- 5.1 Define policies for recruiting and choosing volunteers and paid staff in accordance with Bolivian society's new realities and values.
- 5.2 Transform the present human resources training program into a major effort at indoctrination, motivation, and restructuring of training in specialties for the Red Cross's human capital, especially its youth.
- 5.3 Promote training adapted to the regional and national environment of local health and social development promoters who guide, stimulate, and supervise the decentralized grassroots community structure by establishing specific curricula for that purpose.

Conclusions and recommendations

- 5.4 Attack the causes of the excessive turnover of staff and local leaders by delegating duties, overseeing and evaluating the results of management based on realistic and quantifiable goals, and offering incentives centered on recognition of merit and rank.
- 5.5 Promote greater inclusion of community leaders from the middle class in NDP community programs by opening channels of gender and social stratum participation and integration to promote internal pluralism and balance the sociodemographic composition of the organization's volunteers.

6. Overhaul the external cooperation framework

- 6.1 In making the readjustments noted above, take into account the global Red Cross strategy promoted by the Federation for the 1990s, especially in reformulating ties with external cooperation to acquire greater autonomy.
- 6.2 Improve professional capacity to formulate projects by broadening and making the mobilization of external cooperation flexible.
- 6.3 Diversify external sources of cooperation and reorient them to areas and sectors of high risk and vulnerability through a focused strategy.
- 6.4 Obtain cooperation from external donors to strengthen operational technology at the central, regional, and local levels in accordance with the suggested mixed model of organization and action.

7. Conduct systematic efforts to improve the institution's image

- 7.1 Develop a public information and relations program for which a specific unit in the institution is responsible.
- 7.2 Inform the public of the institution's entry into new fields of development and its new promotional approach.
- 7.3 Develop mechanisms to protect and create respect for the use of the Red Cross emblem which prevent the weakening of its image.

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