

ECUADOREAN RED CROSS

The challenge of diversifying services

Blood services have been the main field of activity of the Ecuadorean Red Cross for more than a decade. These services operate through the National Blood Program, which was conducted with strong support from the Bavarian Red Cross (German Red Cross), and they have been diversified to include an AIDS prevention and diagnosis program. The program is of high quality and very professional, and it is conducted at both the central headquarters and in blood banks of the 24 provincial branches. It shows the development of the institution and the extent of its geographic coverage.

The leadership achieved by the Ecuadorean Red Cross in this field is one of the factors that stimulated the promulgation, in November 1986, of an executive decree by the Government conferring exclusive responsibility for managing and conducting blood services nationally on the National Society.

The coverage, quality, and execution of these services is, however, not matched by that in other areas related to health, relief, and social welfare. These activities are still new or have not achieved a satisfactory level of development. The challenge of diversifying and improving social programs and other services is thus viewed by various circles in the National Society as the most important strategic challenge for developing the Ecuadorean Red Cross in the 1990s.

The need to modify the provision of programs and services also goes hand in hand with the difficult living conditions and high vulnerability of the population, which worsened during the crisis of the 1980s. Indeed, more than half of the Ecuadorean population has unmet basic needs, and although poverty in rural areas continues to be greater, the proportion of urban poor has increased in recent years. In the health arena, Ecuadorean society suffers from high rates of child mortality, serious environmental sanitation problems, and, especially, a high incidence of malnutrition, particularly in Andean rural areas.

These problems of deterioration are still more serious among the indigenous population which, through a recent grievance movement, has called the country's attention to its historical neglect.

Finally, Ecuador's great vulnerability to natural phenomena such as floods, earthquakes, droughts, volcanic eruptions, and landslides, about which very little in the way of prevention, planning, and preparation of the population has been done, must be stressed.

The National Society has initiated useful, though still weak and inadequate, diversification actions in various areas: in the relief and emergency sphere, renovation of its vehicle fleet and specialization of relief workers; in the health arena, primary health care (PHC) activities in remote communities and new clinics created in peripheral areas; and, finally, in the social welfare field, the establishment of child care centers and banks of orthopedic appliances is of note. New impetus has also been given to publicizing International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

These initiatives, often spurred by the provincial branches and various groups of leaders and volunteers, are having developmental problems, some of which are rooted in the present statutes and the organizational structure. As the latter revolves around the blood services, human and material resources for conducting other activities continue to be limited. In addition, the structure itself tends to minimize the autonomy of the provincial bodies and gives volunteers a limited role in decision making. A statutory reform has therefore been initiated which may help solve these and other participative and organizational problems.

The institution's leadership is shared by both the central headquarters and the other large center of the Ecuadorean Red Cross, the Guayas branch in Guayaquil. The latter is spearheading efforts to innovate and diversify programs and reform organizational structures by promoting greater autonomy for the branches.

Organization of the National Society

Organizational structure and geographic coverage

The most important governing bodies are the National Convention, National Board, Executive Commission, and Presidency, with its Legal Adviser's and Auditor's offices. In practice, the Advisory Committee and the Public Relations and Financial Resources Development units provided for in the statutes are inoperative. A financial adviser's office was recently established to solve urgent reorganization problems. The remaining units function as directorates and departments subordinate to a strong Technical Directorate, which is in turn linked directly to the Presidency.

The administrative and financial organization of the central headquarters operates around the Executive Commission. Members in some of the provinces note that its leaders respond above all to the needs of the capital area and to a lesser extent to those of the rest of the country. In reality, it has little influence nationally, as a result of which the Provincial, Cantonal, and Parish Boards enjoy considerable financial, administrative, and operational autonomy, while normatively and formally they are subject to centralized authority concentrated in Quito.

The governing bodies of the Ecuadorean Red Cross were convened in November 1991 to reform the statutes, but not its structure in a functional, operational, and program sense. The reform was very specific in that it would not require some of the members of the Board or highest authorities to live in Quito, an exemption that the Guayaquil and other boards had promoted for some time.

The limited scope of this reform and its restricted dissemination among middle-level officers and volunteers, who have little familiarity with the statutes and regulations, has been noted. The reform seems to be an important democratizing step, however.

The Ecuadorean Red Cross operates in 19 of the country's 20 provinces. It has less impact in rural and distant areas where the most vulnerable population and ethnic groups live.

Taken as a whole, the central organization of the Ecuadorean Red Cross tends to be the same in the provincial branches, which have a management nucleus which is very centralized in their presidencies and very weak bases in cantons and parishes. Though it may promote streamlined decision making in emergencies, such centralization usually produces red tape and friction, inhibits delegation of duties, authority, and responsibilities, and limits the organization's flexibility in adapting itself to different conditions and needs.

Administration and planning

The formal structure at the executive and operational levels is not suited to the reality of the situation. For example, the Administrative Directorate has only one personnel management office. The Technical Directorate has been confused with the National Social Welfare Directorate and carries out most management and administrative control tasks, all of which are centralized in a single-person authority.

The central administration of the Ecuadorean Red Cross focuses its efforts on supporting the national blood and blood-products service and, to a lesser extent, Relief and Ambulances. Generally speaking, the administration of the Ecuadorean Red Cross has two dominant and differentiated poles of great complexity: the central headquarters (Quito) and the Guayas provincial headquarters (Guayaquil). The more influential programs, systems, and technologies are concentrated in both, which creates advantageous specialization and economies of scale. In the second there is a tendency to change the management style by promoting innovative programs (such as child care centers), which are not always approved by the central headquarters. Lethargic administration prevails in the rest of the institution, and for many of their members it is outdated or traditional.

Despite its long management experience and the dedication of its highest leaders (all volunteers with long years of service), the administration level of technology is rudimentary. There is little use of statistics, data processing has barely begun to be used in accounting, and modern information systems are lacking.

To deal with this situation, the Executive Commission has promoted the start of a financial and accounting reform which is intended to be extended gradually to the administrative area to open up an "administration for development" which is managerially oriented and more effective, streamlined, and efficient.

According to documents provided by the National Society and information from workshop participants, the Ecuadorean Red Cross does not have a national development plan or a unit responsible for preparing one, as a result of which it operates on a short-term basis and without a perception of future scenarios in which to intervene. This hinders the institution from implementing planning, follow-up, and continuous evaluation, and diversifying and undertaking innovative programs to respond to the needs of social groups that have become newly vulnerable because of the long economic and social crisis which Ecuadorean society has experienced since the last decade and recent policies of structural adjustment.

Many leaders think that these shortcomings may inhibit potential for growth, administrative modernization, and provision of new services, in addition to making improvements in the physical and technological infrastructure difficult. Information received from the National Society after the Study's workshops were held states, however, that there is a long-term plan, which was approved at the Rio de Janeiro Conference in 1979.

Human resources

The volunteer corps is weak in Quito and the rest of the country. Although there are some 5,200 enrolled volunteers, only 10% of them are active. The number of volunteers registered at the

central headquarters is estimated at about 1,000, of whom around 150 are active; at times (to cover certain events), there are 500 active volunteers. This volunteer contingent is guided by 70 volunteer instructors. The number of volunteers in the branches fluctuates greatly.

In general, the Ecuadorean Red Cross's volunteers believe there is a "quantitative crisis," or one of affiliation and number. This is in part explained by the country's economic situation, which forces volunteers to leave Red Cross service and devote their time to paid work in other organizations, many of which compete with the Ecuadorean Red Cross. But it is not the only crisis affecting them since there is another, "qualitative" one having to do with the limited options for taking part in decision making and the non-existent or very restricted specialization, which encourages dropout and creates frustration.

Because activities other than in the blood services are meager, the leaders think that even a very large influx of volunteers would not solve the problem. It would be difficult for the organization to absorb them since it lacks both means and strong programs as well as participative management systems. There are gaps in doctrinal and technical training, as a result of the fact that the National Training Center is still under construction and the specialized training project is in its infancy.

Another factor discouraging the entry of new volunteers and causing malaise among current ones is that the privilege of voting and being elected to office is reserved exclusively to members.

Fifty-one paid employees work at the central headquarters, which is considered too few to deal with services. Clear administrative policies about their selection, promotion, and development are lacking. Salaries are tied to the minimum national wage, and there are no incentives to reward long service, educational programs, or training to improve quality and efficiency. There is a tendency toward overloading staff with work and duplication of duties, discouragement, labor unrest, and resignation. The organization of a union similar to that in Guayaquil is feared.

There are very few paid administrative staff in the provincial headquarters (an average of three or four people, except in Riobamba, which has 12 officials). Most administrative activities are performed by the presidents of provincial boards. In Guayaquil, however, there is an administrative director and a stable team of about 70 employees.

Finance and budgets

Because of internal difficulties, which are being overcome, no adequately reliable financial reports have been prepared for about three years since record keeping is in arrears. An estimate places 1990 revenues at about 288 million sucres (approximately \$254,000), of which the blood bank contributed around 50%. Those responsible for finances state that there is an unquantifiable deficit.

The blood bank accounts for 40% of expenditures, the serology laboratory for 18%, the Technical Directorate, Presidency, and other units in the central administration for another 18%, ambulances for 11%, and other services for the remaining 13%.

There is no national accounting or budget, according to the National Society, because of the administrative autonomy of the provincial bodies. Nor is there any clear idea of their exact financial condition.

Generally speaking, a draft budget is based on calculations from the previous year, the Technical Directorate discusses it with the departmental chiefs, and in the end it is approved by the Executive Commission. The method of budgeting by objectives or programs in support of planned administrative management is not used, and there have been few initiatives to raise the funds required to increase and balance finances, undertake new activities, and provide greater support to the provincial bodies. Also lacking is a specialized unit for designing and promoting self-financing projects to increase financial resources.

The institution is interested in correcting deficiencies in financial control and internal accounting. The Executive Commission appointed

a financial adviser to conduct a review and overhaul the administration and finances. It is expected that a computerized control program, strict external auditing, and periodic treasury audits will be applied for the fiscal year 1992-93.

The National Society believes that it is in a "transition phase" toward a more efficient and reliable financial system emphasizing self-financing and the use of stricter controls.

Role and activities of the National Society in the context of the country

Principal activities

Health services

The basic activities of the Ecuadorean Red Cross are conducted through the National Health Directorate by providing specialized blood and blood product services. Among them are the blood banks, hematology and rehabilitation services, and serology (AIDS). In 1986, the Government made the Ecuadorean Red Cross responsible for supplying and supervising the management of blood in the country, with the sole exception of the Armed Forces. There are 25 blood banks in all. Twenty-four blood banks or stores and 10 serology laboratories are located in the branches. There is a plan to modernize and regionalize these services. The anti-AIDS campaign has recently reinforced these activities, in which the National Society carries out publicity and diagnoses cases at the request of individuals and organizations.

Among the most important achievements of the blood service are the high scientific and technical level attained by the blood banks, the quality assured in delivery of blood and blood products, and the training and upgrading of staff in this field.

In some provincial areas (such as Guarandas), experiments have begun with mobile primary health care and prevention services, as well as so-called "people's pharmacies" in Carchi Province

with participation by pharmaceutical companies and support from the Ministry of Health. These stores offer 100 basic drugs at low prices to the urban poor and indigent.

Relief and emergency services

Relief activities received much stimulus from the 1987 earthquake, which brought major external support and much experience. At the same time, it greatly increased awareness of the National Society's limitations in dealing with such emergencies and of the opportunities they would offer for its expansion, especially in view of the fact that Ecuador is one of the South American countries at greatest risk of natural disasters and thus in need of programs to prepare the population for them.

Emphasis has recently been placed on relief and emergency work through the Disaster Preparedness and Training Program. For this the Ecuadorean Red Cross wants to initiate the so-called Series 3000 Program, with technical advice and financial support from the American Red Cross. It is likely that the Colombian Red Cross will provide advisory services and several already-translated manuals.

The ambulance program has 38 units throughout the country and is a most useful service. It is not provided completely free, nor does it receive support or subsidies from the state. There is a major plan to renovate the entire vehicle fleet with participation by the provincial bodies, which will purchase ambulances by installments and commit themselves to maintaining and improving them.

Social assistance and welfare services

There is a small social welfare program that looks for stray children, provides aid to poor, needy families, and is responsible for the missing-persons program with ICRC support. It occasionally conducts social investigations so that very poor persons may receive free health care and blood services in the central headquarters.

The Volunteer Ladies focus their efforts on raising funds among the well-off and managing

the orthopedic appliances bank for persons of limited means. In disasters they collaborate in relief and emergency work and with the blood donor program.

Other services

Publicizing International Human Rights is a recently created program that is gathering force and undergoing consolidation. Workshops, seminars, and courses for civilians and the Armed Forces are held. It also has good television coverage, all with ICRC financing.

Relations with the Government

Though limited, relations with the Government are harmonious. There are formal agreements with the Armed Forces and police to support publicity of International Humanitarian Law. Nevertheless, the National Society believes that the Red Cross's potential in the relief area is not made use of or stimulated. Although by law it is defined as a Civil Defense auxiliary agency in dealing with emergencies and disasters, the state agency in charge promotes the establishment of other agencies in relief activities, which restricts the role of the Ecuadorean Red Cross in these fields by creating a conflict of interest. Civil Defense has even organized a relief body of its own, well financed with state funds, and has asked the Ecuadorean Red Cross to train it. This has led to resistance among volunteers since Civil Defense does not recognize such Red Cross cooperation and it is inadequately publicized in the mass media.

The Youth Department gives some courses on first aid and safety to the National Child and Family Institute (INFA). The relief department supports the traffic police at mass events. The missing children search program coordinates some activities with the police and courts.

There is good coordination with the Ministry of Health as to blood and relief services.

Relations with other organizations and agencies

These are largely limited to a long-standing relationship between the Volunteer Ladies with the National Association of Volunteer Ladies. Except for the Friends of the Americas, there are no formal agreements or informal relations with other NGOs

Good relations are maintained with the Quito representatives of international bodies and agencies such as PAHO and USAID, although it appears that many contacts and opportunities for establishing agreements and joint efforts with health sector agencies and private companies in areas such as industrial safety are neglected. It is feared that other NGOs will compete more aggressively in recruiting volunteers, displace the Ecuadorean Red Cross in humanitarian activities within its competence, and raise funds, as a result of which a true "identity crisis" would be created that in a short time would limit or eliminate several of the roles that the Ecuadorean Red Cross has traditionally filled, except for blood services.

First-aid and accident-prevention courses are provided to unions and private companies for which very low fees per person are charged. An average of four courses a month are offered by the Relief Department.

Role of external cooperation

Up to now, the most significant external cooperation has been provided by the Bavarian Red Cross (German Red Cross), from 1982 to 1990, in the amount of DM1.6 million for installing, equipping, and training 25 blood and blood product banks throughout the country

Using funds from its Government, the Luxembourg Red Cross is financing a National Training Center on the grounds of the central headquarters. Details of the cost of this project are unknown.

Under an agreement, the Japanese Red Cross has provided a television production team which has strengthened the program to publicize International Humanitarian Law. Its cost is \$18,000.

In general terms, it is thought that external cooperation could be better used if the Ecuadorean Red Cross had a specific unit responsible for designing projects and searching for external funds and financial compensation; this would diversify procedures and means for channeling projects and funds by streamlining present procedures and respecting branch initiatives.

Many leaders believe that offers of external cooperation more reflect donor needs than those of the Ecuadorean Red Cross, are not adapted to local conditions in their methods and concepts, and are slow and bureaucratic.

The National Society's perception of its public image

There is a marked perception that the Ecuadorean Red Cross projects its image only through the blood bank and charitable programs, something it has still not been possible to overcome through recent television programs. It has also been found that some segments of the public have an "undifferentiated" or confused image in that they believe that the Ecuadorean Red Cross is a state agency linked to civil defense.

With regard to relief and disaster activities, the public (especially the middle and upper classes) is still ignorant of some of the innovative activities and has a distorted image of the institution, even though they have begun to be publicized with greater frequency.

There is no overall publicity and public relations or communications plan, as there is no uniformity in the message disseminated.

The constant use and abuse of the symbol and emblem of the Red Cross by individuals and organizations is another factor adding confusion to the diffuse public image and aggravating the "identity crisis." Many leaders regret that there is no respect for the law to protect the emblem or for regulations on use of the uniform, which contributes to deterioration of the image.

A short time ago it was arranged to broadcast a program entitled "Names and Facts" on television's Channel 2 (Gamavisión) that partly offsets

the deficiencies of radio and print publicity. An effort has been made since 1989 to publicize International Humanitarian Law in universities and the Armed Forces and among law students and the Bar Association. It may be that the opening of the National Communications Secretariat (SENAC) will improve publicity and enhance initiatives to strengthen the institution's image.

In addition, it believes that the prevailing attitude in the mass media toward the Red Cross is one of reticence, except when information can be exploited sensationally. In contrast, it was reported that provincial media give greater space to branch news, especially in emergencies.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

There is widespread local and international recognition of the advances made by the National Blood Program of the Ecuadorean Red Cross, as a result of which the state has conferred exclusive responsibility on it for this area. This is its greatest strength, but also its greatest weakness in that it has led to specialization according to an unbalanced regional pattern which also responds in a limited way to the physical and social needs and vulnerabilities of a population suffering from a long-standing economic and social crisis.

Administratively, the National Society's Guayas branch is the most developed, but the rest of the country is characterized by lethargic and traditional administration making meager use of information technology. At the central headquarters, confusion exists as to the roles of some departments, and management and control are

fairly centralized. This centralization is reproduced in the branches and especially their presidencies, which weakens cantonal and parish bodies, causes red tape and friction, and inhibits more grassroots participation.

Efforts are being initiated in the Red Cross to bring about decentralization and adjustment of services and to expand primary health care activities and natural disaster relief and emergency interventions.

Although there are indications of reform at the national level, there is still no comprehensive national development plan to guide innovations and meet the challenges of the 1990s. This is the greatest strategic challenge facing the National Society, together with the readaptation of external aid, which until now has been aimed almost exclusively toward blood banks and intervention in disasters

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Diversify services to deal with vulnerability situations under present Ecuadorean conditions**
- 2. Elaborate a strategic planning system**
- 3. Make the organizational structure more flexible and autonomous**
- 4. Strengthen and update human resources training**
- 5. Promote greater openness and change in the public image**
- 6. Diversify the sources and methods of external cooperation**

1. Diversify services to deal with vulnerability situations under present Ecuadorean conditions

- 1.1 Promote balance in activities by diversifying services.
- 1.2 Establish new programs and projects emphasizing primary health care and social development aimed at groups living in extreme poverty and social and ethnic marginalization.
- 1.3 Orient priority activities on the basis of information about the country's most pressing risks and vulnerabilities in order to be able to focus programs.
- 1.4 Promote greater inclusion of and support by the population in programs and projects by gradually increasing the number of indigenous persons, women, and young people in the Red Cross's social base.
- 1.5 Increase interorganizational relations with national and foreign private and state agencies in order to coordinate joint activities and prevent overlapping.
- 1.6 Maintain and perfect blood-bank basic technology and services without the implication that they will continue to be the institution's exclusive priority.

2. Elaborate a strategic planning system

- 2.1 Elaborate and implement a national development plan based on a new view of the institution's role by including in the plan diversification of the services noted in the point above.
- 2.2 Convene all units and sectors of the National Society so that they will become familiar with and take part in discussing the new strategic guidelines
- 2.3 Gradually adapt the objectives of programs, technologies, and operational scales of existing services to the plan's guidelines.

- 2.4 Stimulate research on and installation of streamlined and precise information and evaluation systems as an integral part of specific projects that are reformulated or established.
- 2.5 Strengthen the human team in charge of the plan so that it becomes a standing unit for strategic planning, creation, and promotion of key projects.

3. Make the organizational structure more flexible and autonomous

- 3.1 Initiate and implement decentralization in decision making.
- 3.2 Promote the statutory reforms needed to support that process.
- 3.3 Make diagnoses of internal needs and promote correction of problems in key areas of administrative, operational, and logistic systems, especially those linked to programs of greatest impact or that increase capacity for institutional action.
- 3.4 Make governing units flexible by promoting participation by branches and volunteers in decision-making organs and generational turnover in senior and middle-level posts.

4. Strengthen and update human resources training

- 4.1 Adapt the Specialties Plan and functions of the National Training Center to training programs that enhance professionalization and stimulate promotion and stability among volunteers and improve their doctrinal training and motivation.
- 4.2 Train administrative and professional technical staff to deal with the institution's new diversification and technical renewal options.
- 4.3 Implement new training programs in the spheres of social action, community development, and primary health care.

5. Promote greater openness and change in the public image

- 5.1 Improve the public image in accordance with the new mission and the proposed new style of institutional development
- 5.2 Strengthen the National Communications Secretariat by emphasizing publicity of development, relief, and International Humanitarian Law activities.
- 5.3 Reinforce the change in identity by ensuring that the law requiring respect for the institutional symbols is respected and the role of the Red Cross in civil defense is recognized.

6. Diversify the sources and methods of external cooperation

- 6.1 Gradually adapt external cooperation, including that assigned to intervention in disasters, to the strategy of national and organizational development, according to the Federation's overall guidelines.
- 6.2 Promote greater support by external donors of the new development methods, especially in the areas of primary health care, specialized relief, and community-based social development.

SOURCES

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