

URUGUAYAN RED CROSS

In search of diversification to meet changes and chart a new course

The Uruguayan Red Cross is a National Society with a long tradition in the country, mostly in the social assistance and nursing areas, and has a national image of great prestige and honesty. It has not established enough new priorities and goals to adapt to the recent changes in Uruguayan society, however. Consequently, it has been suggested that it should update its community action concepts, methods, and approach without ceasing to meet the demands of its present beneficiaries.

The National Society continues to provide assistance to the needy by distributing food, blankets, and clothing to close to 10,000 urban poor. These services complement the delivery of primary health care services in a polyclinic and pharmacy located in its central office, which also houses almost 40 workshops for handicrafts and rehabilitation of older persons and a small group of "intellectually handicapped" youth. As a national tradition and symbol, it also maintains a nursing school at the Military Hospital for a hundred students.

In recent years, the Red Cross has strengthened its first-aid and relief training to deal with sporadic natural disasters. An effort has been made to enter new areas, such as AIDS and drug addiction prevention and control, care of disadvantaged children and the handicapped, problems of the elderly, and greater publicity of International Humanitarian Law, which shows that there are some promising ideas and that the first steps toward service diversification are being taken.

The country has historically enjoyed one of the highest levels of economic and social development in Latin America. In recent decades, however, it has suffered from the blows of the economic crisis, application of adjustment policies, and a long period of authoritarian rule. The consequence of these episodes has been significant

regression in some social indicators and progressive concentration of resources. From the point of view of social vulnerability, the number of households with unmet basic needs has increased, particularly in marginal urban and provincial rural areas. An increase in unemployment, which chiefly affects young people under the age of 25 and particularly women, is also visible. There are a large number of unmarried mothers, and violence against women in and outside the home is one of the greatest problems affecting women, about which there is widespread awareness.

The demographic picture is characterized by progressive aging of the population, and the elderly are Uruguay's most pressing social problem. Most elderly people live in urban areas, especially Montevideo, and a large proportion (particularly women) live alone or in institutional homes. Loneliness and isolation lead to other health problems. The meagerness of old-age pensions results in much poverty among elderly people. Despite the importance of this group and the specific nature of its problems, there is no dominant policy or agency in this area, a situation that increasingly results in abandonment of the elderly.

The country experiences relatively few natural disasters compared with other countries in the region, though floods are common, especially in the north.

Although the country's situation to some extent limits the Uruguayan Red Cross's possibilities for expansion and diversification, the greatest obstacles to be overcome lie in the volunteer situation, the organization's style, and its overall community action strategy.

There are fewer than a thousand members, and these are mostly elderly women volunteers. There are very few young people, and there is no intermediate group between the ages of 30 and 50

to assume and direct the organizational development of the Red Cross so that it may be in a better position to compete with other NGOs which, with younger and more specialized staff and more promising programs, have started to invade the functions and areas usually reserved to the Red Cross without hindrance.

Management and resources are very centralized and concentrated in the capital. There are very few stable and trained professional staff. Nevertheless, a limited managerial reorganization has encouraged a few innovative and quite positive programs such as the "Hilda" AIDS prevention project. The need to overcome the imbalances in the departmental committees' institutional, operational, and infrastructural development is clearly felt, as is the urgent need to intensify exchanges and coordination between branches and headquarters and to create regional offices.

Because of all this, encouraging signs of management change are beginning to be felt while the operation of traditional programs continues. There is now an urgent need for them to be integrated in an overall and strategic framework which clearly outlines priorities, objectives, and methods for dealing with present and future situations of social vulnerability.

Organization of the National Society

Organizational structure and geographic coverage

The main governing bodies in the Uruguayan Red Cross are the General Assembly, its highest authority, which meets every year to review the fiscal year and every two years to renew 50% of the Central Committee's members, the Central Committee, in charge of the management and administration of the Society, and composed of 30 members elected by the Assembly and six permanent representatives of official state organizations, and the Directing Committee, composed of nine members elected from within the Central Committee.

The most active organ is the Directing Committee, which is responsible for making daily decisions executed by the Presidency or the Secretariat through 15 working commissions, and to a lesser extent, through the 18 departmental committees. In fact, the commissions operate with varying degrees of independence, and few conduct activities outside the capital or headquarters. They are composed of approximately 12 members each.

The operations of the Uruguayan Red Cross are based on statutes and norms which, according to some executives, are not always suited to the new realities. Although departmental committees enjoy financial and administrative autonomy, in practice they operate under a centralized management structure which has little or no input from members or provincial committees in the Red Cross's internal events and decisions taken by the governing bodies. Most committee chairmen have repeatedly stated that they wished to correct this shortcoming and establish regional coordination and support offices.

The provincial committees differ greatly in their organizational capabilities and potential. Only five have formed local committees. Very few have real offices and service systems, or the means to draw up and implement development plans corresponding to headquarters' directives.

Administration and planning

The administrative structure is entirely centered in the capital city. At its head is an administrator who answers to the Directing Committee and works with a small number of salaried employees and very dedicated volunteers.

His main function is to support the operational areas of the polyclinic, pharmacy, relief stores warehouse, kindergarten, nursing school, and workshops, all of which are on the premises of the central headquarters.

Administrative offices operate in the evenings with the help of a very dedicated staff who, however, tend to work inefficiently because of space and equipment limitations and the lack of

modern office, information, communication, and computer facilities. The physical plant is very rundown and small for the present volume of activities.

Daily affairs and internal and external communications are conducted very informally and spontaneously, through friendly networking and much good will.

There is no coordination between the operational sectors and the provincial branches, which have almost no participation in operations. There is a lack of middle-level and regional units to better organize recruitment of young people and management of volunteers, among other things. This creates serious difficulties in achieving a comprehensive program and promotes friction between the various levels of the national hierarchy.

Existing branches in general do not have offices or a formal administration. They operate intermittently in the homes of leaders or in space made available by local authorities.

Only recently has some form of planning been started in the Uruguayan Red Cross, under the pressure of outside modernizing influences. Needs and projects require prioritization within some program areas, such as first aid, youth, and AIDS prevention. Programs are still not evaluated systematically, and there are no separate research or diagnostic operations set up to design projects, outline more precise work goals, and focus objectively on the gaps and shortcomings of the organization as a whole.

Human resources

The Uruguayan Red Cross has a small group of volunteers, mostly mature women, who are very dedicated and work long and hard with a great spirit of humanitarianism in activities ranging from handicrafts to administration.

There are almost 200 active volunteers in the capital and fewer than 300 in the rest of the country. These scarce resources are declining because of aging and other obstacles to their replacement. In recent years, member participa-

tion has fallen because of the country's economic situation, which forces people to seek remunerative employment instead of voluntary work. The number of volunteers is therefore inadequate, which limits the possibilities of undertaking projects that require more time and energy than are now given to the institution.

Even though this network includes a small number of young people, including some young men, the growth of volunteer resources is slow and is still nascent in the health and first-aid areas. Many recent recruits lose their motivation when they realize that new members must serve a minimum of five years before they can be considered active members and run for executive posts. That is why there is no generation between younger and older members that could produce immediate replacement managers.

The paid staff of the central office comprises nine persons whose wages, though comparable to those of other public and private officials performing similar functions, are nevertheless low. These workers, who are under the leadership of an administrator, need more continuing education and lack motivation despite the great work load they carry. The school of nursing has three paid nurses and one auxiliary nurse.

Finance and budget

The Uruguayan Red Cross's total revenue at the end of 1991 was close to 80 million Uruguayan pesos (or approximately \$34,500; one dollar = 2,315 Uruguayan pesos).

The main sources of financing are as follows: the funds the EPOS company collects during the summer at the Punta del Este beach resort amounts to 25% of total revenue; in addition, there is a state subsidy of less than 12 million pesos (around \$5,200), whose real value is declining; a little less than 6 million pesos from member dues; and the rest comes from enrollment to the school of nursing, lesser sources, and external cooperation's small financial contribution.

In the past, the Red Cross was able to secure 20% of the proceeds of the national lottery, but

present authorities are roundly opposed to this policy on the grounds that equal opportunity should be given to other NGOs.

The considerable deficits of a few years ago are beginning to disappear, and income almost balances outgo. The latter is distributed among wages, Christmas bonuses, and staff vacations (25%); purchases for first aid or charity (30%); administrative, per-diem, and transportation expenses (10%); the barem paid to the Federation (6%); and the rest (nearly 30%) for miscellaneous payments, such as emergency costs, polyclinics, varied insurance, and selected events.

Member dues are comparatively so low that they do not even cover the Uruguayan Red Cross's postage. Dues have recently been raised to 16,000 pesos annually, but this increase has alienated many members.

An effort will be made to raise in-kind and monetary aid from municipal authorities, especially land and materials for building offices for departmental committees. Such organizations, however, contribute little to the Uruguayan Red Cross's overall revenues.

In the medium and long term, it is necessary to increase the self-sufficiency of the institution, which will be attempted with the help of commissions, such as the women's commission; but it has been frequently mentioned that, though the Uruguayan Red Cross has used various means to obtain resources, in general it has not produced the results hoped for because of the population's reduced buying power.

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

Principal activities

In order of importance, the following are the main activities carried out by the Uruguayan Red Cross.

Social assistance and welfare services

These consist of free weekly distribution of food and clothing to the elderly and the marginal populations of Montevideo and elsewhere in the country. These activities mobilize a great many volunteers, as well as the Red Cross's first-aid workers and young members, in simple administrative tasks which are often extended to hospitals, hospices, and the homes of the poor who cannot come to the polyclinics or the headquarters' warehouse. Almost 100 tons of food and clothing are distributed annually.

Several "seamstresses" also collaborate in the selection, repair, and sale of used clothing received from abroad for individuals and families of limited means.

Handicrafts courses and occupational rehabilitation training for psychologically handicapped persons are activities typical of the Uruguayan Red Cross. Volunteers give more than 40 courses, in which more than 400 students participate. These are mostly therapeutic courses for the elderly. Of note is the Uruguayan Red Cross Job Placement Program (CRUIL), which has received strong support from the Canadian Red Cross. It consists of a workshop for the mentally disabled held for the past 10 years at the central headquarters. Today it is self-financed through the sale of handicrafts. Recently, another program, "the Canadian Institute," has been created at the Paysandú center for physically handicapped persons.

In the near future, managerial changes will have to focus on extending and improving community centers aimed at the physical and social rehabilitation of children, adolescents, and the elderly.

Health services

The School of Nursing and the Health Polyclinic offer a variety of primary services like immunizations and minor treatment, which are provided in the afternoon Monday through Friday.

by physicians and voluntary assistants. Short courses on health education for the home and prevention of communicable diseases are also given. Some dental and psychiatric treatment is also offered.

An AIDS prevention program called "Hilda" was started three years ago with initial support from the Norwegian Red Cross. This is an innovative and dynamic activity which has positive and multiplying effects on the training of youth as members. This program is being carried out through the branches, and its model may be replicated for the control of drug addiction.

The institution lends its teachers to support the activities of the geriatrics department and the Hospital of the University of the Republic's School of Medicine

Blood services are exclusively the responsibility of the Ministry of Public Health, which is why the Uruguayan Red Cross did not succeed in establishing a blood bank when it first attempted to do so in 1979. In Paysandú there is a "Live Blood Bank Subcommittee" which brings in donors and works closely with the Hospital School's Blood and Plasma Bank.

Relief and emergency services

Rescue and first-aid services operated in tandem up to a year ago. Now there is a separate plan for first-aid services which follows the same pattern as that of the Colombian Red Cross, particularly in the northern coastal area which periodically suffers from flooding. A few first-aid courses are given at the central headquarters to private and public organizations; there are, however, insufficient numbers of first-aid instructors and youth teams to meet potential demand for sports or mass events and to support social action in families affected by emergencies.

Other activities

Youth activities are in a developmental stage. They are channeled through a 10-member volunteer commission who work actively in recruiting young people of both sexes. This is carried out

though a program of regional meetings (three to date, in the resort area of Piriápolis) which has focused on the training of leaders. It has developed the school committee subprogram, a function that has traditionally involved a large number of primary school teachers, who earn hierarchical points for this voluntary activity according to the provisions of an old 1921 law.

Over the past 10 years, the Uruguayan Red Cross has been successful in publicizing International Humanitarian Law (IHL) under the leadership of a commission in charge of organizing talks between the staff of the Ministry of Foreign Relations, universities, and Armed Forces.

Relations with the Government

The Red Cross appreciates the stability of these relations but finds them inadequate with both the central and local and departmental authorities. It is aware of the need to sensitize public authorities to Red Cross work in order to obtain greater governmental support.

Though there is good ministerial representation on the Central Committee, the Uruguayan Red Cross gains little advantage from it, in part because the state has substantially reduced its social welfare activities or for that purpose prefers to contract other NGOs with specialized national and foreign professional and technical staff.

In some programs with great expansion potential, such as AIDS and drug addiction prevention and control, and sex education, the leaders of the Uruguayan Red Cross sometimes encounter resistance from conservative public authorities, to whom such subjects are taboo. The health authorities oversee the "Hilda" AIDS program, the School of Nursing, the central headquarters' Polyclinic, and vaccination campaigns.

There has been long and close collaboration with the Armed Forces in training nurses at the Military Hospital. Activities are coordinated with that institution during emergencies, and transport to the relief stores warehouse is regularly provided.

Relations with other organizations and agencies

In this sphere, it is no secret that broader and closer relations have not been established, especially as to self-financing and community action projects.

The Uruguayan Red Cross maintains relations with the so-called "21st Century Commission," composed of important businessmen and personalities in Uruguay, which has offered assistance in promoting the annual Punta del Este collection through radio, television, and the press. Liaison is maintained with the Ecumenical Institute in conducting charitable activities. The AIDS control program has links with organizations of prostitutes, homosexuals, and drug addicts for educational and prevention purposes. There are many contacts with Rotary and Lions clubs throughout the country since they request assistance by Uruguayan Red Cross delegates in their activities.

It is unhesitatingly recognized that the Uruguayan Red Cross lacks impetus to compete, make itself known, and be acknowledged in the area where other humanitarian organizations (NGOs), which have proliferated in the country and use innovative techniques and methods in the social action field, move with consummate agility. In addition to this weakness is the tendency among Red Cross members and leaders not to capitalize on prestige accumulated because of their humanitarian activity or on the potential they have of extending it throughout the country through departmental and local committees.

The role of external cooperation

External cooperation has essentially helped maintain the charitable activities of the Uruguayan Red Cross. Donations from abroad have been crucial in its history and in building up its present assets.

External aid has consisted largely of food donations (about 50 tons of oil and 80 tons of

sugar) by the European Community through the Federation and of used clothing (about 17 tons) and shoes by the Swedish Red Cross to supply the sewing rooms. Lesser amounts of blankets, tents, mattresses, and drugs have been received for emergencies.

Nevertheless, international cooperation has begun during this decade to focus specifically on fields such as the elderly and disabled which are the most promising and in which the Uruguayan Red Cross wishes to become more active. For example, a contribution of \$36,000 from the Canadian Red Cross was arranged for the Institute for Rehabilitation of the Physically Disabled in Paysandú. That Society had already contributed \$10,000 to strengthen the workshop for the psychiatrically disabled at the central headquarters. The Finnish Red Cross financed another workshop for the disabled at Cerro Largo. A project to assist the Center for Care of the Elderly, which would be opened in the community of Río Negro, is anticipated.

The "Hilda" project to finance AIDS prevention and control, which was started with support from PAHO and the Ministry of Health in January 1989, received a donation of \$28,000 from the Norwegian Red Cross in 1991 which has enabled it to operate with greater scope and effectiveness.

Still, there is a certain amount of dissatisfaction among the National Society's leaders with the amount and kind of assistance received for several reasons, among which is the feeling that national priorities are not the same as those of donors and that only financially and operationally small-scale projects interest donors.

The National Society's perception of its public image

The Uruguayan Red Cross believes that it has a prestigious public image which is reinforced by great honesty in the management of its finances. It is thought that volunteers and primary-school teachers, whose role is crucial in carrying out the programs of the student committees, are signifi-

cant publicists and multipliers of Red Cross doctrine and activities

Generally speaking, the Uruguayan Red Cross maintains good relations with various print, radio, and television media, which donate space and sometimes invite it to programs and panels. It lacks awareness, however, in segments of the population which would be better able to support its activities financially.

There is fear about, modesty in, or an excess of caution toward publicizing the Red Cross's image with modern publicity methods that would have a greater impact on the middle and upper classes. It is preferred to operate prudently and silently in order not to damage the self-esteem of recipients of charitable aid, which sometimes contrasts with the activities of other NGOs, which do use restrained appeals as well as promotional and public relations methods.

An obstacle to increasing support among all segments of the population is that the Uruguayan public became accustomed not to contributing to but receiving services from the Uruguayan Red Cross in the belief that it is a wealthy institution or subsidized by the state. A recent mass collection in the capital netted only \$400, which reveals that there may be a certain amount of insensitivity to Red Cross appeals for aid. There is thus an imbalance between what the community asks from and what it contributes to sustain the institution financially.

Another limitation is that there is no overall publicity plan, though a commission is working to increase publicity in the communications media; the commission has few resources at its disposal, however.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The Uruguayan Red Cross has a long tradition of providing social assistance and welfare services to the country's marginalized population. It also provides occupational training and recreational therapy services, as well as primary health care services through a polyclinic and a nursing school.

Within the National Society are ideas and willingness to renovate the Uruguayan Red Cross and adapt it to the new requirements of Uruguayan society. In recent years the institution has made some efforts to strengthen the first-aid and relief areas, and has begun to diversify its services by entering new areas, such as AIDS and drug addiction prevention and control, assistance to children, and the problems of the elderly. Nevertheless, it lacks an overall strategic focus which would enable it to establish new priorities to deal with the demands of a population whose lifestyle and environment are becoming increasingly complex.

The change suffers from certain problems which need to be overcome. Volunteers, an essential component of the institution, require younger and more specialized leaders. Requirements for becoming an active member are a serious obstacle to recruitment. The organization's style is characterized by very centralized management, which results in weak middle-level and regional structures. There is a lack of regional coordination and support units, and there is poor geographic coverage, especially with respect to local committees. The statutes and standards in force have not been revised and adjusted to new institutional conditions.

Against this backdrop, the major challenge facing the Uruguayan Red Cross is broad modernization of its structures and programs as well as the renewal of its human resources. To effect these changes, it would be useful to develop a new global and strategic viewpoint which would allow defining priorities, objectives, and methods for conducting programs under way and responding to the growing demands of new social groups who are vulnerable

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Design and implement an overall and strategic planning system for the entire institution
2. Further diversify services to deal with the needs of the most vulnerable
3. Initiate a human resources development program emphasizing young people
4. Strengthen the promotion approach used in new activities
5. Modernize and streamline the organizational structure
6. Strengthen the institution's finances

1. Design and implement an overall and strategic planning system for the entire institution

- 1.1 Redefine the strategic priorities and goals of the Uruguayan Red Cross.
- 1.2 Evaluate programs and projects under way in order to integrate those which will continue in an overall planning scheme, and ensure that the planning scheme is orderly and coherent.
- 1.3 Based on the above evaluation, draw up a national development plan which defines priorities, objectives, and methods for the institution's activities and includes on-going evaluation criteria and procedures
- 1.4 Maintain activities concerning the elderly as a priority action area and diversify and broaden them with special emphasis on the elderly poor.
- 1.5 Based on the plan, establish a Framework of Reference for Development Cooperation.

2. Further diversify services to deal with the needs of the most vulnerable

- 2.1 Continue and extend efforts to strengthen the first-aid and relief areas, emphasizing their prevention component.
- 2.2 Strengthen activities undertaken in new areas, such as AIDS and drug addiction control, abandoned and marginalized children, and the elderly.
- 2.3 Implement activities to deal with problems affecting women such as violence, early pregnancy, and abandoned single mothers.
- 2.4 Establish relations with NGOs that permit coordinating and conducting possible joint activities, thus preventing duplication and achieving greater efficiency.

3. Initiate a human resources development program emphasizing young people

- 3.1 Gradually replace the charitable component of programs with a promotion approach based on community and beneficiary participation.

4. Strengthen the promotion approach used in new activities

- 4.1 Initiate decentralization of the central headquarters' functions and deconcentration of its resources within the National Society by increasing the participation of members and departmental and local committees in decision making.
- 4.2 Strengthen and broaden geographic coverage by promoting the organization of new local committees in rural areas.
- 4.3 Strengthen the executive's technical staff.
- 4.4 Begin revising, updating, and applying the statutes to the institution's new conditions.

5. Modernize and streamline the organizational structure

- 5.1 Streamline the requirements for becoming an active member of the institution in order to stimulate participation by new volunteers.
- 5.2 Promote the entry of young volunteers, especially men, by implementing attractive activities embracing their cultural values and patterns and reactivating work by young volunteers.
- 5.3 Conduct continuous training activities for paid staff and volunteers in new intervention areas.
- 5.4 Motivate paid staff by establishing work stimuli and offering them specific training to increase their professionalization.

6. Strengthen the institution's finances

- 6.1 Sensitize public authorities to stimulate their support of the National Society's activities that promote social development.
- 6.2 Solicit external support to develop new fund-raising methods and units.

SOURCES

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