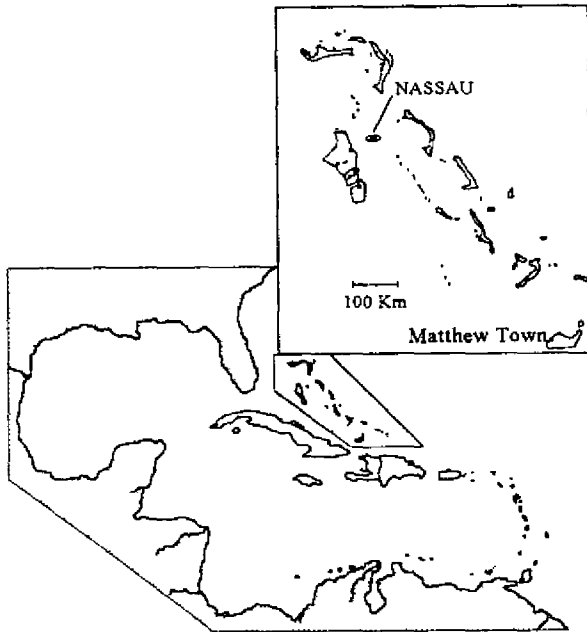

BAHAMAS



Capital: Nassau
Area 13,880 km²
Population: 238,000 (1988) (a)
Population density: 17/km²
Urban population: 62% (b)
Per-capita GDP in USD: 11,320 (1989) (c)
Life expectancy at birth: 71.5 years (d)
Infant mortality rate: 25‰ live births (1990) (e)
Illiteracy: 1% (f)
Population under poverty line: Not available
Human Development Index 1992: 0.875 (31st) (g)¹

Confronting unemployment and combating drug trafficking—challenges for the 1990s

The Bahamas consist of 29 islands and more than 700 coral keys scattered southeast of Miami. Most of the country is swampy, useless for agriculture, and almost at sea level: there are scarcely any elevations. Only about 30 islands and keys are inhabited. The largest of the islands, New Providence, contains 60% of the population and the capital, Nassau. The other island of economic importance is Grand Bahama, on which the city of Freeport is located; it has another 15% of the population. The estimated population in 1988 was about 238,000, and in the 1981-1989 period the average growth rate was 1.4%. Eighty-five percent of the population descends

from the slaves who worked on plantations during the colonial era. The 1970 census showed that 18% of the population were migrants, chiefly North Americans, Britishers, Jamaicans, inhabitants of the Turks and Caicos islands, and Haitians. Although there are no later data, some immigration to the islands has continued. A fair number of Haitian immigrants are illegal. Most of the population live in urban centers, though during the 1980s the proportion of rural population increased.

The economy of the Bahamas is based on services and its character as a "tax haven." Today it revolves around tourism, the offshore

banking center comprising more than 300 banks, and reexportation of oil processed at the refinery on Grand Bahama. Among these activities, tourism is the most important in terms of gross national product (GNP), representing approximately 33% of the GNP and 50% of employment. More than 3 million tourists, mostly North Americans, visited the islands in 1988. It is also an extremely open economy whose exports and imports amounted in 1985 to 59% and 53% of the GNP, respectively. During the decade the economy's average annual growth rate was 3%. The Government has tried to diversify the economy, especially light industries (*maquilas*), agriculture, and fishing in order to develop export agriculture and reduce the islands' food dependence: more than 80% of foodstuffs are imported. Because of the peculiarities of the economy of the Bahamas, the country is not part of any regional integration agency such as CARICOM. External debt is very small, even among the low debt levels of many Caribbean countries, and does not represent an economic problem.

Per-capita income is by far the highest in the Caribbean. In 1989 it was USD 11,320. In terms of "human development," the Bahamas is among the countries considered to have "high human development," ranking 31st in the world classification proposed by the United Nations Development Program for 1992, behind Uruguay and ahead of Poland and the USSR. It is nonetheless significant that countries with a per-capita GDP of between a third and half that of the Bahamas are in a better position as to human development: such is the case with Barbados, which is in 20th place with a per-capita income of USD 6,350, or Trinidad and Tobago, one position ahead of the Bahamas, and which has a per-capita income of only USD 3,230. This means that there is great potential for improving the Bahamas' indicators of life expectancy and especially infant mortality.

The Bahamas are a major connection in the regional trade network and, because of their favorable topography, in illegal trade. There is evidence that the Bahamas are one of the most active points in the region's drug traffic, especial-

ly as a transit point for cocaine from South America to the United States and for arms in the opposite direction. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) estimated in 1987 that between 60% and 70% of the cocaine entering the United States was transported by sea through the Caribbean, and at least half of it was discharged on the string of uninhabited keys and islands forming the Bahamas.² Laundering illegal funds from the drug traffic is carried out with great ease in the offshore banking center.³ The Government officially denies that the Bahamas are a tax haven for laundering narcotraffic dollars, but evidence to the contrary seems irrefutable and at mid-decade even resulted in a political crisis which affected the nation's ruling circles.

The employment situation and the labor market

The service sector, including tourism, employs 80% of the work force. Unemployment is perhaps the main economic and social problem in the Bahamas. In 1986, 22% of the active population was unemployed; in 1987, the unemployment rate was 18%. Among women and young people the problem is even greater. In 1986, the rate of unemployment among women was around 33% and among persons under 25 years, 35%.⁴

In this context of unemployment, protests by the population have occurred as a result of the hiring of Haitian refugees. Unions have demanded that the Government establish long-term economic programs to diversify the islands' economy and help lessen unemployment.

Health situation

During the second half of the decade the principal causes of death in the population were heart diseases, accidents, and cerebrovascular disorders. Diseases of the perinatal period were the fifth cause of death in the population as a whole and signaled the need to deal with this problem.⁵ Adolescent pregnancy is a major

problem, though there has been some reduction in its incidence since the mid-1980s.

The elderly represented 4.5% of the population in 1987. In 2010 they will represent almost 6%. There is a clear deficit in specialized services to care for this age group, especially in nursing and home care.⁶

The infant mortality rate in 1990 was 25‰ live births. In 1986 it was 36.7‰ live births, the highest proportion in the decade, which indicates that some progress has occurred in reducing a figure that still continues to be high in relation to countries with similar income and "human development" levels. The chief causes of death in infants less than one year old were the perinatal diseases (about two-thirds of total deaths), congenital anomalies (10%), respiratory and intestinal diseases (between 15% and 20%), and accidents (5%). Respiratory diseases, intestinal infections, and accidents are also the main causes of hospitalization in this age group. There is thus some potential for reducing infant mortality.

AIDS appeared for the first time in 1985. Two hundred sixty-nine cases had been reported by 1988. In December 1991 there were already 834 cases and 498 deaths.⁷ The route of infection is predominantly heterosexual, and a sizable proportion of patients were women and children (20% in 1985). A close correlation has been observed between AIDS and drug consumption. It is thought that the spread of AIDS is closely related to the great numbers of tourists who visit the islands.

Alcohol and cocaine are the most used drugs in the Bahamas. Since the middle of the decade a strong increase in cocaine consumption has been observed on the basis of the number of persons who seek treatment at Sandilands Rehabilitation Centre, a psychiatric hospital which serves the entire country, and the New Providence Community Psychiatric Clinic. New services have been opened in recent years to care for drug addicts.

In the area of nutrition, considerable obesity has been found in school children and the adult population. It is estimated that 10% of school children suffer from it. The problem of malnutrition occurs in isolated groups in the population, particularly among illegal immigrants, who are largely Haitians.⁸

Potable water supply, 90% of which comes from underground sources because of the absence of rivers, is polluted by salinity and aquifer contamination.

The Ministry of Health is one of the Government's largest agencies and is the one responsible for establishing health policy nationally. The health system consists of a layered network of establishments and has a certain amount of decentralization, and the outpatient level has been receiving preferential attention. At the upper level are the Princess Margaret General Hospital at New Providence, Rand Memorial Hospital, Sandilands Rehabilitation Centre (a psychiatric center), and a geriatric center. At the lower level is a widespread network of health centers and clinics.

In 1988, 86% of the economically active population (EAP) were covered by Social Security through the National Insurance Directorate, although its services were quite broad, they do not include unemployment insurance.⁹ Coverage extends not only to salaried workers but also to those working for themselves and in domestic service. Among the self-employed, who are mostly in the informal sector, coverage was considerably less, however, being 48.4%.¹⁰

The geography of the Bahamas creates problems of transportation, supply, communication, and coordination in providing services. This is related to the underrecording of vital statistics and the lesser coverage of postnatal care, among other services, in the scattered communities on the Family Islands.

Public expenditures on health represented 14% of the state's ordinary budget and 6% of the capital budget in 1988, or 3.1% of the GDP and a per-capita expenditure of about USD 329 annually.¹¹

Risk of and vulnerability to disasters

The meteorological phenomena which are the most frequent causes of disasters in the Bahamas are hurricanes, and, to a lesser extent, floods (on Grand Bahama) and occasional tornadoes. The Bahamas are located in the area of greatest risk within the "hurricane corridor" of the Caribbean and, from June to November each year, there is a high probability that such weather phenomena will occur. During this century the country has experienced the impact of seven major hurricanes which had devastating effects, among them Flora (1963), Betsy (1965), and Inez (1966). The islands' vulnerability lies in (a) their small size, which means that when a hurricane occurs the entire country will be affected; (b) the high density of population on the largest islands and, at the same time, its dispersion on the smallest, and (c) the country's great dependence on a sector extremely sensitive to such disasters—tour-

ism—because much of the infrastructure is built along the seashore.

Although the destruction caused by Hurricane Andrew in September 1992 was concentrated along the coast of the state of Florida, in the United States, the hurricane also caused severe damage on the central and northwestern islands of the Bahamas, including New Providence, Abaco, Andros, Eleuthera, Bimini, Berry, and Grand Bahama. Around 1,700 persons were left homeless on the island of Eleuthera alone; they were mostly farmers and fishermen, and among them were about 800 illegal Haitian immigrants.

The agency responsible for efforts related to disasters is the National Disaster Committee (NDC), which consists of different public and private organizations including the Red Cross of the Bahamas. Some progress has been made in planning, interinstitutional coordination, alerts, and public education in the area of preparing the community for disaster situations, though there are no "risk maps" for all the islands.¹²

BAHAMAS RED CROSS SOCIETY

Challenging geographic complexity and uneven development

The geographic sprawl of the archipelago of the Bahamas and the dispersion of its population over many islands creates serious problems of integration and communication for the Bahamas Red Cross. The unequal geographic distribution of poverty, as well as the constant migration of young people from the less-populated islands to the urban centers of Nassau and Freeport, are merely a reflection of this situation and pose various challenges for the National Society.

As the archipelago of the Bahamas consists of about 750 islands, of which only 30 are inhabited, extending over a large expanse of the Atlantic Ocean, it is very difficult and expensive to provide and coordinate Red Cross services for a population so geographically scattered. The National Society is well organized and has established central committees and member groups on the main islands. Problems of supervision and information exchange exist in providing services as well as in local fund-raising activities and initiatives, however. That most volunteers in the smallest islands are over 50 years old is also a cause for concern.

Although lying in a hurricane-prone region, the Bahamas had not experienced an emergency caused by a severe hurricane for many years when Hurricane Andrew hit the islands in August 1992. The previous Hurricane, David, which took place in 1979, did not cause the National Society to concern itself with drawing up plans to deal with disaster situations.

Rather, it concentrated on expanding its welfare services for the needy, particularly through the Meals on Wheels Program. It increased its training activities, especially those for young people, and made a special effort to motivate its 2,700 volunteers. Of special interest among Red Cross activities is the Centre for Deaf Children, which is the only one in the Bahamas and enjoys

Government support. Most services are provided free of charge.

Today the National Society conducts a wide range of programs and activities for those whose basic needs are not being met. Drug trafficking and abuse, corruption, poverty, and unemployment (which reached 18-20% during the late 1980's and especially affected women and young people, with a level of up to 35%) have become widespread social problems. A further problem is illegal immigration of Haitians, who compete for scarce jobs and are today one of the most vulnerable groups in the islands. Their socioeconomic situation is difficult; their health, housing, and nutrition are inadequate, and the local population rejects them. Hence, underneath the image of wealth projected by tourism the Bahamas have a different face.

The National Society faces several major challenges: lack of disaster and emergency preparedness; problems of organizational management, coordination, integration, and communication; and, to a certain extent, the need for diversification to include new programs to attract young people. Such programs could also be designed to meet the requirements of the neediest and the growing social vulnerabilities of the working population (especially youth, women, and the elderly). The planned shelter for abused women is one example.

Organization of the National Society

Like many Caribbean Red Cross Societies, the Bahamas Red Cross was created in 1939 as a branch of the British Red Cross. It was not until 1975 that it became an independent National

Society. It was recognized by the ICRC a year later and by the International Federation in 1977.

Organizational and geographic structure

The Central Council represents the National Society as a whole and is its highest deliberative body. It meets once a year to elect the members of the Executive Committee and approve the annual report, accounts for the previous year, and any amendments to the statutes. It is composed of the members of the Executive, Finance, and Management Committees, the chairpersons of Regional and Branch Committees, and local representatives.

The Executive Committee, which meets every three months, administers the National Society, elects the President and other officers, and appoints the Management and Finance Committees and the Director General.

The Executive Committee delegates authority to two committees, the Management Committee, which advises and provides guidance to the Director General on administrative procedures, and the Finance Committee, which is responsible for disbursing funds, preparing the annual budget, and auditing finances.

Many members feel that there are internal organizational and managerial problems: the length of time it takes for statutory provisions to become effective; and the fact that matters have to pass through many committees before practical and effective measures are adopted. In general, it is also thought that the organizational chart and communications system could and should be updated and improved by eliminating unnecessary committees and by reorganizing and modernizing the organization's entire structure.

The Commonwealth of the Bahamas comprises almost 750 islands spread over some 233,000 square kilometers of the Atlantic Ocean. The Red Cross in the Bahamas conducts its work through four Central Committees and more than

100 member groups on the islands. It encounters many coordination and communication problems in its activities. Although the statutes provide for the establishment of branches, none had been organized as of early 1992. The Central Council's main criterion is that no Central Committee may become a branch until it achieves self-sufficiency.

The National Society has its own headquarters, built about 10 years ago with a bank loan which will be completely repaid by 1994. The main building houses offices, a large meeting room, and some storage facilities. A separate building is used as the kitchen of the Meals on Wheels program and for additional storage.

Administration and planning

The National Society has a radio communication network linking its headquarters with several of the islands in the archipelago. Enlarging and improving this network through the purchase of additional equipment would help integrate the National Society.

In addition to its permanent radio contact with some of the islands, the headquarters has computer equipment to carry out its work.

No official annual plan is prepared. Instead, the Director General presents a "schedule of events and activities" to the Executive Committee for approval and reports on its implementation at each meeting.

A comprehensive annual report, including details of activities, the status of member groups, and audited financial statements, is widely circulated every year.

A five-year Development Plan was prepared for 1983-1987. It contained general goals for different National Society operations as well as activities expected to be taken to implement them. No further plan has been drawn up since 1987. The National Society did prepare an updated evaluation of the main accomplishments of the 1983-1987 Plan, however.

Human resources

Red Cross membership in the Bahamas is estimated at around 2,700 persons, including some 1,500 junior Red Cross members between 6 and 14 years of age. A majority of volunteers and staff, including Executive Committee members, are women. Youth groups are very important when it is realized that the National Society—especially the island committees—have generally elderly members and leaders owing in part to the heavy migration of young people to the Nassau and Freeport urban centers and the United States. This situation demands additional efforts to promote more youthful involvement in Red Cross work through appropriate recruitment drives and training. According to some leaders, it is also necessary to increase the number of trained volunteers as well as activities and programs to ensure that junior Red Cross members remain in the movement as they advance educationally and enter the country's occupational and social structure.

It has been proposed that a register be established to enable identifying and adjusting the National Society's activities and training to the skills and needs of volunteers as a mechanism to help motivate them and carry out specific programs in accordance with their interests and abilities. There are difficulties in meeting the demands for more volunteer training for want of enough instructors, programs, and services which later could make use of volunteers' availability and motivate them to remain in the institution.

The National Society has 10 paid staff (nine at Nassau headquarters and one at Freeport), including the Director General, the Deputy Director General, Youth Director, and transport, secretarial, and kitchen staff. Some members suggested a need to provide more specialized training for the staff as a way to improve their motivation and productivity, especially in the area of cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

While there are more women than men in the Bahamas Red Cross, this is not perceived as a problem, as is the case in other National Societies in the region.

Finance and budget

The net worth of the National Society is more than USD 1 million, but 90% of it consists of the value of the headquarters building and other fixed assets. This means that the National Society depends mainly on the revenues it generates itself to cover day-to-day operations.

Annual income has increased steadily in recent years (from USD 313,310 in 1988 to USD 501,542 in 1990). The Government provides an annual grant equal to USD 50,000 for the Meals on Wheels program and USD 10,000 for the islands' milk distribution program.

Fund-raising (in the form of public campaigns and specific activities such as dances, raffles, and fairs) is carried out with enthusiasm, broad participation, and energy by the members at Nassau headquarters. Fund-raising is being encouraged in the Central Committees and member groups to increase their ability to contribute financially to their own development. Donations, subscriptions, and fund-raising campaigns accounted for more than 56% of total revenues in 1990, while member subscriptions and donations accounted for almost 19%. In addition to other large donations, about USD 200,000 was collected from the public in 1991.

Revenues exceeded expenditures by USD 162,709 in 1990. The main expenses are those related to program implementation, which constituted 37% of total expenditures, salaries (22.5%), office expenses (13.7%), and travel and motor expenses (8.5%).

The Centre for Deaf Children, whose accounting and financial operation is reported independently, had total revenues of USD 93,793 in 1990. Most of this income (73%) was produced by fund-raising activities and donations. The Government contributed USD 15,000. The Center's operation produced a USD 77,529 surplus in 1990, which is part of the USD 162,709 revenue excess noted above.

The Society's leaders are concerned about its present and future financial situation, including overspending on food purchases, the high operating costs of vehicles, and maintenance and

administrative tasks which sometimes overlap those of other agencies. The Government could curtail its subsidy, and fund-raising has become increasingly difficult. The dance that the Society organizes every January earned USD 10,000 less in profits in 1992 compared to the previous year.

Some time ago the National Society discontinued the preparation of annual budgets. Some members would like to see this practice reinstated as a way to help control expenditures and at the same time establish general goals for fund-raising activities.

Funds are administered and raised by headquarters at Nassau. Should the committees and member groups raise funds of their own, the headquarters would allow them to administer such funds. Each year some USD 25,000 to USD 30,000 is spent on expenses and supplies for the islands. Most of this money is spent on food, blankets, and other relief items. The headquarters feels that the committees and member groups should contribute more toward their own development, as many do not even pay membership dues.

It is the policy of the National Society not to charge for the many and varied services it provides.

Role and activities of the Bahamas Red Cross in the context of the country

Principal activities

The most important programs carried out by the Bahamas Red Cross are welfare activities, which are generally implemented with a charity focus. There is concern about how to broaden the coverage of such programs. For example, more assistance is needed for the poor and suffering, to defend the human rights of prisoners and illegal refugees, and to pay more attention to women's problems. In the last area, there seems to be strong support for establishing a shelter or

emergency center for abused women and their families.

The following is a brief description of the main programs.

Social assistance and welfare services

The Meals on Wheels program provides hot food daily to housebound persons, handicapped persons, and others who are not able to prepare meals for themselves or cannot afford to eat properly. The program is carried out by headquarters and on most of the islands. In Nassau, cooking is done at Red Cross headquarters, while on the islands volunteers perform this service on an individual basis: one person cooks for another person in need.

The number of meals cooked and delivered was 33,280 in 1990. About 130 people benefit from this service daily, mostly older people whose pensions fall short of ever-rising market prices or who live by themselves and are blind, handicapped, or very poor. A future development being studied is the possibility of providing special diets for diabetics.

Through the food parcels distribution program, food is provided monthly to people who can cook for themselves but do not have the resources to buy food. Six hundred fifty-one parcels were distributed in 1990. Food parcels are also distributed monthly in emergency cases.

Fresh milk cannot be obtained in most of the islands. Through the school milk plan the Red Cross purchases milk in special containers and sends them to school principals or leaders of groups on the main islands who distribute it to about 2,000 school children.

Home help service is offered to old people who are not able to do housework because of physical handicaps. The Bahamas Government pays a minimal salary to unemployed persons to perform this work under Red Cross supervision. In the islands of the archipelago this service is performed by volunteers.

The day care program helps mothers who cannot afford to pay for the care of their young children while they work.

The day rehabilitation center is open to handicapped persons aged 22 to 84 years and to the elderly. They meet three days a week for 10 to 14 hours to receive physical therapy and take part in different kinds of activities (lectures, games, movies, excursions to the beach, and handicrafts). Transportation is provided, as well as a hot meal. The Bahamas Red Cross's cleaning and senior citizens' clubs offer help and a meeting and socializing place for needy and elderly people as well as a cleaning service to help old people manage their homes with the help of unemployed persons paid by the Government and Red Cross volunteers. This program is now being reviewed to broaden its coverage to reach more handicapped and needy elderly people.

Health services

The Bahamas Red Cross Centre for Deaf Children includes a primary school which provides individual assistance for deaf children and their parents. It also provides audiometric testing for infants and preschool children. The center works in close cooperation with the Princess Margaret Hospital and the Government official in charge of school clinics. The Government pays the staff but the Red Cross administers the school. Some 35 children are transported daily to school and home again.

Through the supplementary ambulance and hospital transport service, Red Cross volunteers transport disabled and handicapped persons to hospitals and clinics for check-ups and therapeutic sessions in two ambulances, one in Nassau and the other in Freeport. A specially equipped vehicle, donated by the Japanese Red Cross, is used for this purpose.

In the medical equipment loans program, wheelchairs, crutches, special beds, and other rehabilitation equipment is offered to the needy.

The rehabilitation club for youth provides out-of-school services to indigent youths 6 to 16 years old. It offers, for instance, help with homework, training in arts and crafts, and supervised games

First-aid and emergency services

First-aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation training is provided to Red Cross volunteers, students and the public at large. First-aid courses include AIDS prevention talks. All first-aid courses, in addition to an AIDS prevention section, cover the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross Movement and the Geneva Conventions. These activities have been quite successful. In 1990, 710 persons received training at headquarters and, when possible, on the other islands

Trained volunteers provide first-aid service at national events and other large gatherings of people. Beach patrol is also provided on weekends and public holidays. An innovative service is transportation for tourists who arrive in the country in wheelchairs.

Although the archipelago was spared major disasters for many years until Hurricane Andrew struck in September 1992, there have been some sizable fire and tornado emergencies. The Red Cross has provided assistance to adults and children in such cases. According to leaders of the National Society, however, additional preparation for emergencies and disasters is required. Relief activities now consist mainly of aid to fire victims.

The absence of major emergencies in recent years has made it difficult to convince people to attend emergency and disaster preparedness courses. The National Society stresses the need to be prepared for such emergencies but finds little support in the community. The Government does have a National Disaster Preparedness Committee, however, and in it the National Society is specifically responsible for communications and shelter management in case of a disaster.

Other activities

Foreign detainees—mostly illegal Haitian immigrants—are visited periodically and provided with basic personal items such as toothbrushes, toothpaste, soap, towels, blankets, and clothing.

Relations with the Government

The National Society has stable and positive relations with the Government, and its social service agencies often refer cases to the Red Cross. Its confidence and trust in the National Society are evidenced by the subsidy and grants it provides, referral of cases for Red Cross attention, and its inclusion as a member of the National Disaster Preparedness Committee. Due to fiscal problems and the general economic recession, however, the Government of the Bahamas has reduced its grants to the Red Cross and other charitable organizations by 20%. The National Society is concerned about larger reductions in the future.

Relations with other organizations and agencies

There are no specific relations with other national NGOs working in the archipelago since the leadership of the Red Cross considers their organization the most important NGO in the country. For this reason, it is likely that other NGOs view the Red Cross as a strong competitor for public support and funds.

Role of external cooperation

The National Society would like to have more cooperation with other National Societies in the region and be better informed about what is happening in the Americas as a whole. Because the Bahamas Red Cross has attained a high degree of financial self-sufficiency through local support, its activities do not depend on external support. Close contacts are maintained with the American, British, and Canadian Red Cross Societies.

Relations with other Caribbean National Societies have been maintained through opportunities for assistance. For several years the Bahamas Red Cross has provided in-service training for Directors General from several Caribbean Societies. Aid has also been provided in the form of personnel and funds for disaster relief. The National Society seeks to increase and diversify cooperation with other National Societies in the Caribbean.

International cooperation has provided the National Society with training and some special equipment such as vehicles and radios.

In 1990 the National Society was paired with the Sierra Nevada Chapter of the American Red Cross. This has resulted in mutual visits, but the relationship is still in its initial stage of development.

Assistance in the form of vehicles, training materials, and rehabilitation equipment has been received from the Empress Shoken Fund and the Chinese and Austrian Red Cross Societies.

The Youth Department has hosted two International Leadership Training Camps and participates in an annual exchange of youth through the American Red Cross. Young people are trained every year in leadership courses given by that Society in Florida.

The National Society's perceptions of its public image

The National Society believes that the general public sees it as the principal welfare organization in the archipelago. In view of present difficult economic conditions, however, a need is felt to heighten its profile and visibility by establishing a public relations committee to better project its message and work to the population.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The most important activities of this National Society are charitable and directed toward some of the most vulnerable sectors of society. Some of these activities include food assistance to the needy (through the "Meals on Wheels" program), care of children and elderly housebound persons, and rehabilitation of deaf children and handicapped persons. The last program has a comprehensive focus which includes physical, occupational, and recreational therapies and is supplemented by provision of orthopedic equipment. Still in the early stages of development and without high priority, activities are carried out to assist youth with social problems as well as illegal immigrants, most of whom come from Haiti. Lastly, a center to assist abused women is under study. These activities are of special interest in the sense that they respond to some of the most pressing social problems in the Bahamas. It is important to mention other problems such as AIDS and the situation of children since they are a potential field of activity for the Red Cross. All these problems are of some importance even though these islands have high income and a high level of "human development," according to United Nations statistics.

As for relief programs, the National Society has first-aid training and assistance activities, but considers its ability to respond to disasters still weak. This weakness is mainly attributed to the limited support of the population. Some of the weaknesses became evident when Hurricane Andrew hit the islands in August 1992. The hurricane also revealed the vulnerability of certain population groups to this type of disaster. One of the top priorities of the National Society will be to address operational weaknesses during disasters, since given their location the Bahamas face a permanent risk of hurricanes on one hand, and on the other the National Society is a member of the National Disaster Preparedness Committee, within which it has been given responsi-

bility for communications and shelter management.

The activities and programs of the Bahamas Red Cross are characterized by their diversity and difference in relative importance. These two facts do not correspond to an established set of priorities and strategies, given that the National Society has not formulated a broadly articulated planning framework, plan, or system since 1987, when its last development plan ended. Instead of annual plans there are "schedules of events" prepared by the Director General's office which, because of their short-term nature, do not allow strategic lines of action to be adopted. Annual budgeting is sporadic, despite being statutorily mandatory. This hinders the appropriate allocation of resources and fosters excessive centralization in decision making. With respect to finances, the reduction of state subsidies and the policy of not charging for any services worsen an ever more difficult situation.

The organizational and geographic structure of the Bahamas Red Cross responds to the peculiar geographic setting of a small country characterized by dispersion and fragmentation. There are four central committees to which more than 100 member groups belong. Problems of communication and coordination with local groups on the keys and remotest islands always exist, and their improvement is viewed as an urgent need. The central committees have not yet been upgraded to branches, as provided for in the statutes. A prerequisite for this, established by the National Society itself, is that they be financially self-sufficient.

Total human resources are satisfactory, but the fact that most members are children creates demands for educational and promotional activities suited to that age group. At the moment the instructors and programs needed to meet these demands do not exist, even though there is great demand for training at all levels of the National Society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Redefine the structure and orientation of programs and services**
- 2. Develop a planning and budget-making system and prepare a development plan**
- 3. Promote a human resources development policy**
- 4. Establish a program to develop branches and committees as part of the development plan**
- 5. Improve institutional administration**
- 6. Review the interinstitutional relations policy**

1. Redefine the structure and orientation of programs and services

- 1.1 Make an analysis of the main social problems and of governmental and other NGOs' social activities to identify the most vulnerable sectors of the population and their problems. This in order to guide the National Society's activities precisely in order to prevent duplications, improve coordination, and so make better use of resources.
- 1.2 Coordinate the different services, projects, and activities of the Bahamas Red Cross in two major programs: a) relief and emergencies, and b) health and social welfare. For this purpose, redefine the objectives, activities, resources, leadership, and organizational and operational structure of all closely related projects.
- 1.3 Broaden the scope of and diversify health and welfare programs to cover the neediest, especially illegal immigrants, elderly persons without resources, marginal youth, and abused women.
- 1.4 Review and redefine the direction and strategies of these programs to make them as comprehensive as possible and avoid partial or charity approaches. For instance, supplement "Meals on Wheels", home assistance and prison programs, and distribution of food packages with community development components, as well as educational, primary health care, and social welfare, as the case may be.
- 1.5 Establish and articulate the Relief and Emergencies program by taking advantage of the impact Hurricane "Andrew" had on public opinion and the authorities. Evaluate the Bahamas Red Cross's role and operational response in this disaster, identify existing weaknesses, and adopt measures to overcome them.
- 1.6 Put strong emphasis on disaster prevention and preparedness as well as on communications and administration of shelters in this program.

Conclusions and recommendations

- 1.7 Draw up and implement a project to increase national awareness of natural disasters, with emphasis on overall understanding of the vulnerability of the population and possibilities and means of prevention.
- 2. Develop a planning and budget-making system and prepare a development plan**
 - 2.1 Get the National Society's members to analyze the Society's activities and its social environment in order to formulate proposals for a medium- and long-term development plan.
 - 2.2 Develop a multi-year development plan and establish annual plans and mechanisms for evaluating each geographic body and program, specifying their operational organization, priorities, beneficiaries, and goals in order to guarantee implementation of the plan in a flexible and coordinated manner.
 - 2.3 Reestablish the preparation of annual budgets as a basic management tool in the National Society, including allotments to the committees and groups.
 - 2.4 Establish a fund-raising plan which takes into account new sources of funds, including charges for certain services provided to businesses, the state, and/or in some instances individuals who are able to pay for them.
 - 2.5 Obtain a commitment from the Government for multi-year financing for services the National Society provides.
- 3. Promote a human resources development policy**
 - 3.1 Carry out a census of and establish a data base about volunteers so as to place them in different programs according to their skills, training, desires, and interests, and thus prevent excessive concentration of volunteers in fund-raising activities.
 - 3.2 Carry out a volunteer recruitment campaign aimed especially at strengthening the member groups of the islands of the archipelago.
 - 3.3 Extend the educational and dissemination activities into the formal education system and to community organizations that work with youth.
 - 3.4 Strengthen the educational, recreational, and promotional content of activities for children and adolescents who have joined the institution.
 - 3.5 Establish a plan of continuing education for adult members using participatory methods and stressing trainer training.
- 4. Establish a program to develop branches and committees as part of the development plan**
 - 4.1 Diversify the central committees to decentralize decision making and the ability to respond to local demands and needs.
 - 4.2 Review the system for raising and distributing funds among the headquarters and the central committees by establishing a scheme for financing the committees which is also based on the principle of self-sufficiency and sustainability of the latter, and redistributing resources from the headquarters to those committees and groups which have the smallest financial capacity.

- 4.3 Take measures to improve internal communication, including broadening the radio communication system to facilitate daily activities, especially in times of emergency, and decision making.

5. Improve institutional administration

- 5.1 Adapt the administrative system to go hand in hand with the reorganization of programs and services by eliminating bureaucratic mechanisms, reducing the number of committees, and making decision making flexible.

6. Review the interinstitutional relations policy

- 6.1 Study the program profiles of other national NGOs to identify possibilities for collaborating in the most important program areas.
- 6.2 Undertake coordination, collaboration, and liaison activities which would enable greater effectiveness, utilization of local resources, and impact on public opinion.

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