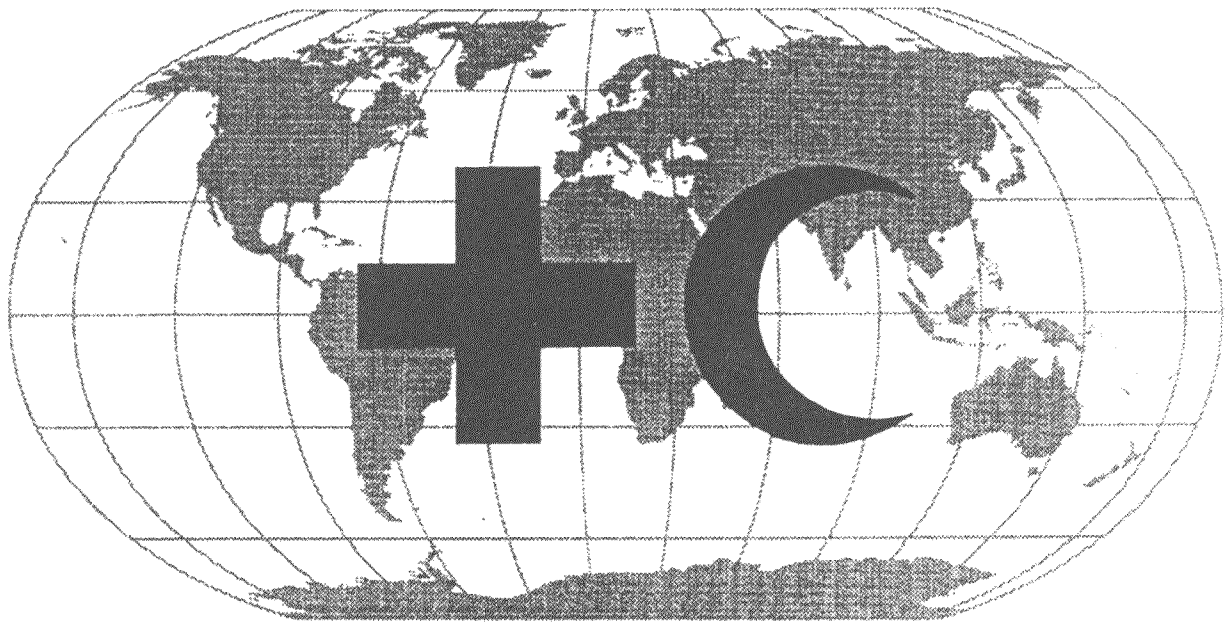

**THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION
AND THE INTERNATIONAL
COMMITTEE OF THE
RED CROSS**



THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES

THE ROLE OF THE FEDERATION IN RELATION TO THE NATIONAL SOCIETIES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

The challenge of institutional development to ensure services to the most vulnerable

The Federation has set itself one strategic goal for the 1990s—to improve the situation of the most vulnerable. The three shared global priorities emanating from this strategic goal are disaster response, community services (often focusing on health aspects), and development of National Societies.

Disaster response is globally recognized as a traditional Red Cross responsibility, for which the organization has a reputation of expertise and capacity, and for which it is well known. This is also true in Latin America and the Caribbean. In most of the region's countries the Red Cross is seen by the public as well as the authorities as the organization to turn to in an emergency or major disaster. The Federation has been seen to perform its role of supporting the National Societies' activities in this field and of coordinating assistance from sister National Societies, providing funds, relief materials, and personnel, often from within the region.

But the Federation has been less successful in providing support for program development, such as introducing the concept of prevention into National Society programs, whether disaster prevention or preventive health care. The link between environmental degradation and disasters, or lack of basic community services and vulnera-

bility to disasters, is still not well understood. With certain exceptions, such as the Child Alive and AIDS programs, the Federation's Secretariat has not had the capacity or the resources to support National Societies in the area of community development or to provide advice on how to act together with the most vulnerable communities through advocacy in their favor. This becomes all the more important since, as a result of the economic crisis and national adjustment policies and their social consequences, more and more people will find themselves in a vulnerable situation and in need of assistance from organizations such as the Red Cross.

Another area of concern is the institutional development of National Societies. The Federation has recognized its responsibility in this field, but practical support to the National Societies in the Americas region has so far been very limited. There is an important need, even if not an explicit demand, for technical assistance in fields such as planning, program identification, human and financial resource development, and management. The Federation's Secretariat itself needs to develop a capacity to provide such technical assistance.

The Federation has not been successful in responding to especially difficult situations in some National Societies, which at times have raised questions about the credibility of the Movement as a whole. There is an urgent need to develop mechanisms to deal with such situations which, if prolonged, prevent the National

Societies concerned from performing their humanitarian work.

The Americas region has suffered from a certain administrative weakness in the Federation's Secretariat. This has been reflected in particular in what National Societies perceive as deficient communication between the National Societies and Geneva, which has created a sense of isolation and lack of direction in the region. The problem has been attributed in part to the fact that key positions in the Americas Department, in both Geneva and the field, have not been permanently filled. The Secretariat is now trying to improve the situation by strengthening the capacity of the Regional Delegations.

The economic situation in Latin America and the Caribbean shows encouraging signs of improving in the 1990s even though a difficult social situation persists and will do so in the future. The Red Cross faces an important challenge: either to respond to the situation with new strength and new programs geared towards the most vulnerable, or to let other organizations do so. The Federation has a key role to play in supporting those National Societies that are willing to take up the challenge. To do this successfully, it urgently needs to translate its numerous innovative policies of recent years into practical action and to mobilize the necessary human and financial resources.

The Federation's structure in the Americas

Geographic coverage

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is a federation of its member National Societies, whose total number in December 1992 was 153, 35 of which were situated on the American continent.

The National Societies in the region are divided into subregions as follows: nine belong to Subregion I (North and Central America)—Canada, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, and the

U.S.A.; 10 belong to Subregion II (South America)—Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela; and 16 to Subregion III (the Caribbean)—Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Cuba, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago. Two National Societies in the Caribbean, Antigua and Barbuda and St. Kitts and Nevis, which at the time the Study began were "Societies in formation," were subsequently recognized by the ICRC as independent National Societies and admitted to the Federation in 1992.

In addition, there are a number of branches of other National Societies in the Caribbean, namely, Montserrat, the Bermudas, the British Virgin Islands, Anguilla, the Turks and Caicos Islands (British); Martinique, Guadeloupe, St. Martin (French); and Saint Maarten, Curaçao, Aruba, Bonaire, Saba, and St. Eustatius (Dutch).

The governing structure and the Secretariat

The Federation has a governing structure composed of representatives of member National Societies and a Secretariat based in Geneva. The highest decision-making body is the General Assembly, which comprises all National Societies and meets every two years. An Executive Council, composed of the President, nine Vice-Presidents, and 16 member Societies, acts between meetings of the General Assembly and meets twice a year. There are also five Commissions, representing 13 member National Societies each, which have advisory functions and report to the General Assembly on matters relating to finance, youth, disaster relief, development, and health and community services.

The executive and operational responsibilities of the Secretariat are limited by the federative nature—as indicated by its name—of the Federation, and because its structure is based on the

principle of the sovereignty of each of the National Societies which make it up. This fact defines the Federation organizationally as an international "network" of organizations, characterized by flexibility and autonomy, instead of being a strictly hierarchical and centralized organization. This is a clear "comparative advantage" in relation to other international organizations, even if it sometimes weakens internal cohesion, unity of action, and broad compliance with overall policies.

The Federation's Secretariat in Geneva is divided into two divisions, the Operations Division and the Program Development and Support Division, and five Departments (Administration, Human Resources, Public Affairs, Information Systems, and Finance), which report directly to the Secretary General. The Operations Division comprises five geographic Departments (Africa, Americas, Asia/Pacific, Europe, and Middle East/North Africa) plus two units common to them, the Appeals and Reports Service and the Supply and Logistics Department. The Americas Department deals with operational matters relating to the 35 National Societies in its region and consults with the technical departments of the Program Development and Support Division concerning their respective areas of expertise—Disaster Policy, Refugees and Displaced Persons, Development and Structures, Health, Blood Program, and Youth.

In December 1992 the staff of the Americas Department in Geneva consisted of a Department Head, four desk officers, and two administrative staff. In addition, there were two Regional Delegations, one in San José, Costa Rica, and the other for the Caribbean in Jamaica.

Regional representations of the Federation

As of 1 January 1990, the Federation established a Regional Delegation in San José, Costa Rica, to cover the entire American continent. In addition, a Caribbean delegation, which reported

directly to the Americas Department in Geneva, was maintained in Kingston, Jamaica. Until the end of 1992 a Health Delegate, covering Central America and the northern part of South America, was based in Guatemala and reported directly to the Health Department. During 1992 plans emerged to reinforce the San José and the Caribbean delegations and to establish a separate Federation delegation for South America.

The system described above was preceded by three subregional offices established in 1985, with bases in Costa Rica, Paraguay, and Antigua. The Paraguay office ceased to function after a short time, however. Before this, an Inter-American Regional Office had first operated in Managua, starting in 1974, and later in San José, where it and many other international organizations moved as a result of the events in Nicaragua in the late 1970s.

The Americas regional systems of interaction

The National Societies in the Americas have designed a regional system of interaction based on the Inter-American Red Cross Conference, which meets every four years (the XIV Conference was held in Ottawa, Canada, in June 1991) and the Regional Inter-American Committee (CORI) which, consisting of two representatives of each subregion, assumes the functions of the Conference between its meetings.

The function of the Inter-American Conference is to review the general situation of the National Societies in the region, analyze their activities, and propose plans for the following four years. It defines itself as an instrument of unity, mutual exchange of experiences, and development promotion. The functions of CORI are defined as providing follow-up to the decisions of the Conference, encouraging development, and serving as a facilitating agent in relations between National Societies and other components of the Movement.

The Rio de Janeiro Conference in 1979 is considered of historical importance in this con-

text, as it approved the lines of action and supporting activities that came to characterize the development plans and, in some cases, the statutes of the National Societies in Latin America. This was done through the implementation of the recommendations of the "Tansley Study." The decision also promoted a certain homogeneity in the documents of the different National Societies. The Rio Conference also promoted the establishment of CORI, the initial organization of which was designed by the then Secretary General of the League.

Another component of the regional system of interaction is the subregional meetings of Presidents and Technical Seminars, which are held every two years, especially in Central America, and which used to constitute an important element in follow-up and development in different fields of action of the National Societies.

In recent years the Inter-American Red Cross system has stagnated somewhat, and as a result has not exercised the same kind of influence on the development of the National Societies as during the 1980s. There is great potential in such a system, however, for it could become an important instrument in advancing the National Societies in the Americas. Closer cooperation between the Federation, and especially its Regional Delegations, and CORI, as well as more active participation by the Federation in organizing the Inter-American Conferences and subregional meetings would certainly be useful. Clear definition of the role and functions of the different bodies would be needed, however, to ensure smooth and efficient working relations.

Apart from the system of regional cooperation described above, there is also direct cooperation between individual National Societies in the region. This may take the form of emergency assistance, exchange of information and experiences, or support in certain fields of action. Such direct contacts and cooperation could be much increased so that the expertise of the different National Societies would benefit others which have not yet developed a capacity of their own in a certain area.

Policies and practice: the road from disasters to development

Objectives of the Federation

According to its general objective, as defined in its statutes (revised and accepted in November 1987), the function of the Federation is at all times to inspire, encourage, stimulate, facilitate, and promote all forms of humanitarian activity by the National Societies with a view to preventing and alleviating human suffering and thereby contribute to the maintenance and the promotion of peace in the world.

Specific functions stemming from this general objective include the Federation's permanent role of liaison and coordination between member National Societies and its role of bringing relief to all disaster victims, as well as organizing, coordinating, and directing international relief actions. The Federation is also supposed to assist National Societies in disaster preparedness and in organizing their relief activities. It is further expected to stimulate and coordinate National Societies' participation in activities related to safeguarding public health and promoting the social welfare of the population, in coordination with local authorities.

The objectives described above were recently translated into strategic goals and priorities for action in the Federation's Strategic Work Plan for the Nineties (adopted by the General Assembly in October 1989 and updated by the Executive Council in May 1992). This important policy document defines addressing the needs of the most vulnerable individuals and communities as the top priority for the Federation and the National Societies. The strategic goal of improving the situation of the most vulnerable includes three shared global priorities—disaster response, community services, which often focus on health matters, and development of National Societies. The Strategic Work Plan also puts strong emphasis on an advocacy role by the Federation and its components, and includes new initiatives in areas such as human rights.

Disaster response in the Americas

Recent years have brought a dramatic increase in the need for disaster relief all around the world. This is reflected in the Federation's relief appeals, which have risen sharply. The total amount sought in 1989 was CHF 54 million; it doubled in 1990 to CHF 111 million; more than doubled again in 1991 to CHF 263 million, and reached a high point of CHF 304 million in 1992. Even if the Americas as a region are historically quite disaster-prone, the region's share in recent years has been the smallest overall, representing less than 10% of the worldwide total. The reason for this is the dramatic increase in relief assistance in other parts of the world.

Assistance in disaster situations has dominated the Federation's activities in the Americas. Frequent earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and floods in Central and South America, and hurricanes in the Caribbean have been reasons for a number of disaster operations during the last few years.

The Caribbean continues to be a victim of devastating hurricanes. This was again proved when Hurricane Gilbert, in September 1988, and Hurricane Hugo, in 1989, hit the region. In March 1993, Cuba was attacked by a major tropical storm, as a result of which an international appeal was launched, the first in decades for Cuba. Hurricanes are a threat not only to the Caribbean islands but to the Atlantic coast of neighboring countries as well, as has been experienced on occasion by Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, and Colombia.

Since 1981 the Federation has been involved in the Pan Caribbean Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Project (PCDPPP), initiated by the Governments after several disasters hit the region, and implemented jointly by the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO), Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), and the Federation. Its role has been to assist National Societies through training, technical and material support, and advice on preparation of disaster plans. Experience from the operations related to Hurricanes Gilbert and Hugo show that the

network of trained people and the heightened awareness created by the program in the National Societies helped to carry out relief operations more effectively. Not only was there a common approach to problems, but trained Red Cross members from islands that had not been affected were also able to participate in the assistance.

Earthquakes are a major threat in the Central American region. Between 1985 and 1992 earthquakes occurred in El Salvador, Costa Rica, Panama, and Nicaragua, as well as in Mexico and Peru. Volcanic eruptions also occur with some frequency. The Nevado del Ruiz volcano erupted in 1985 in Colombia, resulting in 23,000 deaths. The Colombian Red Cross mounted a major relief and reconstruction operation with assistance from the Federation. A large number of projects related to health and education as well as small business and housing were initiated. In 1992, the Cerro Negro volcano erupted in Nicaragua. Floods are a permanent feature of the Americas region. In 1992 alone, flood relief operations were undertaken in Ecuador, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentina. The Central American countries of Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica, and Panama are often affected by flooding as well.

In emergencies such as those described above, the Federation has demonstrated experience and know-how in tackling the first phase of a disaster. Delegates have been made available from the region or outside, and material and financial response has been quick in coming. In some cases a reconstruction phase has followed the immediate assistance activity. In El Salvador, a permanent delegate assisted the National Society in implementing a housing and community facilities program following the disaster.

National Societies receiving disaster relief have generally been satisfied with the response and manner in which the assistance was provided. Their experience in working with delegates is, generally speaking, positive as well. About half of the delegates in the Americas are recruited from within the region. In some cases, however, National Societies would have expected

more cultural sensitivity from the Federation's representatives in dealing with relief assistance.

As far as regional preparedness goes, the Federation maintains a warehouse in Panama, administered by the Panamanian Red Cross and stocked with basic relief items such as tents, blankets, and kitchen utensils. During the early 1980s an international radio communications network was operated from Costa Rica, but it was later transferred to Panama, where it became inoperative for lack of maintenance. The radio system of the Regional Delegation in San José is now being updated and should become operational again in early 1993.

To enlarge the Federation's disaster response from prevention and preparedness to relief and rehabilitation, a special Disaster Policy Department was created at the Secretariat in 1991. The Department is developing practical tools for delegates and National Societies for use in disaster-related situations. Handbooks on vulnerability and risk assessment and on basic needs assessment are being produced.

The Federation's emerging role in development

Although the National Societies of the Americas region are generally satisfied with the performance of the Federation in disaster relief, many feel that they have not received enough support in program and institutional development. Most do not explicitly express their needs in this field, as they often lack the capacity to define them clearly. The Federation has hesitated to identify these areas of weakness, such as lack of planning and definition of priorities and lack of financial sustainability, which have continued to hamper the development of the operational capacity of these Societies. It is also true that the National Societies themselves have in many cases not sought to use the instruments that do exist, such as Frameworks for Development Cooperation.

The statutes do not explicitly require the Federation to support the general development of its member National Societies, including infra-

structure building. This aspect is emphasized, however, in the first comprehensive Federation policy document on development, the Strategy for the Eighties (approved in Manila in 1982). It introduces the concept that a National Society's operational capacity can be strengthened successfully only if its infrastructure is developed simultaneously with its programs and services. It further states that it is the responsibility of the Federation to provide such support. This approach is maintained in the Strategic Work Plan for the Nineties, which defines the development of National Societies as one of the Federation's three global priorities.

While the Strategy for the Eighties focused on the development of individual National Societies, the Federation's Strategic Work Plan for the Nineties aims at improving its work as a whole, on both national and international levels. Cooperation and partnership are seen as a basis for improving the Federation's ability to respond to the expected dramatic increase in human vulnerability and disasters.

The first phase of the Strategic Work Plan aimed at improving the capacity of the Federation's international headquarters. The second phase focuses on the National Societies, which are encouraged to gear their activities towards the needs of the most vulnerable in society and pay more attention to prevention of suffering. The Federation headquarters again commits itself to developing better means of coordination and support, such as methods of vulnerability analysis and evaluation, Principles and Rules for Development Cooperation, the Development Fund, and various forms of training.

The Principles and Rules for Red Cross/Red Crescent Development Cooperation were approved by the Federation's Executive Council in October 1990. They aim at creating a mechanism through which better planned development support would reach National Societies in need. To this end, a system of Frameworks for Development Cooperation and Development Program Contracts was designed. The Frameworks would be established by the National Societies and include their priorities for cooperation, these

documents would be signed by both the National Society and the Federation. Development Contracts are also established between Operating and Participating Societies, in consultation with the Federation, to cover specific projects or programs. The Federation's role here is to coordinate and ensure that assistance is consistent with other Development Contracts and conforms to a National Society's priority needs as expressed in its Framework

It is to be noted that by the end of 1992, only two Frameworks for Development Cooperation had been produced in the Americas region, by the National Societies of Colombia and St. Lucia. Two others, those of El Salvador and Belize, were being developed. In comparison with other parts of the world, this is very few, and obviously an area where Federation technical support is essential in order to advance.

The Federation's Development Fund was established in October 1990 and became operational in mid-1991, when the required minimum capital reserve of CHF 1 million was reached. It is intended to strengthen the capabilities of the National Societies by providing seed money to help prepare plans, frameworks, and projects, and to initiate pilot projects in areas such as human resources, infrastructure, disaster preparedness, research, and policy. By January 1993, a total of 19 grants had been made in response to 41 applications. Three National Societies in the Americas (Dominica, Paraguay, and St. Lucia) received grants, two for drawing up their Development Plans and Frameworks for Development Cooperation. The Fund depends on the constant support of Participating National Societies to keep it operational, however.

Another recent effort by the Federation to boost the institutional development of National Societies is the Resource Development Program, started in 1990. In its initial phase it has concentrated on the financial aspect. Seminars were held to identify particular characteristics of support needed in different regions. From the Americas the Bolivian and the Salvadoran Societies were selected for the pilot phase of the program, which is now being evaluated

The Development Appeal: an exercise in coordination

In 1989 the Federation started what has since become known as the Development Appeal. The first document was a "Relief and Development" Appeal aimed at assisting Operating and Participating National Societies in "improving the planning and implementation of relief and development programs by identifying programs and outstanding funding needs." National Societies were invited to present projects to be included in the document and to be presented to sister Societies for funding. The initiation of the Appeal Document coincided with the approval by the League's General Assembly of the first version of the Strategic Work Plan, which emphasized the need to decrease vulnerability, and of the Provisional Principles and Rules for Development Cooperation. The first appeal stressed the need to reduce vulnerability. The second Appeal Document (for 1991) focused on National Society plans to strengthen capacity and provide services, and the most recent one covers a three-year period, emphasizing services for the most vulnerable in both National Society and regional programs.

What was designed to assist National Societies in their development efforts has created strong frustration among the National Societies in the Americas. Even though most recognize the merits of having a commonly agreed procedure for seeking development assistance, there is severe criticism of the way the current system works. The criticism mainly concerns the slowness of the process and the lack of feedback of results. About a year later (late 1991 and early 1992), several National Societies had received no response, positive or negative, about projects they had submitted in mid-1990 for inclusion in the 1991 Appeal Document. This creates feelings of disappointment and uncertainty.

Some National Societies do not fully understand the system, believing that once a project is included in the Appeal Document it is "accepted" for funding. Others feel that the Secretariat is not doing a good enough "selling" job to pro-