

Development and co-operation

by Major Ali Hassan Quoreshi

Introduction

Development means attaining the capability to act today, so as to be able to cope with a specific situation tomorrow: in other words, development in its true perspective, in its universal context. A developed organization or institution is therefore one which is able to carry out its tasks efficiently. Development is achieved in a planned and systematic manner, through a continuing process that meets the changing needs and priorities of the future.

In the context of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, the concept of development is usually multi-dimensional, covering both development of a National Society's operational capacity and development of the services it provides. Both are active processes and lack of attention to either is likely to affect the other, ultimately reflecting on the National Society's overall operational capability.

The ultimate aim of development, as defined in the *Strategy for the Development of National Societies in the Eighties*, is to make the National Societies self-reliant and effective partners within the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The Strategy also describes the concepts of self-reliance and effectiveness.

The concept of development is both realistic—to economists and planners, to whom it means progress and prosperity—and utopian—to those who hold the traditional view of the future as the sum of the past, who see development, not as the *sine qua non* condition for an extra measure of progress, but as an inevitable consequence of the present and the past.

The experience of the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society

The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, considering the definition of “development” to be suitable, based its development efforts on that definition. One of its main objectives was to improve and strengthen its infrastructure of professional staff and volunteers so that it could undertake primary health care, blood and disaster-preparedness programmes. The required number of professionals from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines were selected, trained and recruited. Separate offices were established at National Headquarters. In the field, volunteers—voluntary health workers, blood-donor motivators and disaster preparedness volunteers—were carefully selected and trained.

Service delivery logically followed on the improved infrastructure. The Society is today proud to have a very commendable grassroots Primary Health Care Programme, an effective Blood Programme which has pioneered the promotion of voluntary blood donation, and a vital programme to provide safety and security to the cyclone-prone coastal population of Bangladesh.

These activities have greatly enhanced the Society’s capability to provide basic health and disaster preparedness services. Started primarily as sectoral services, they have been integrated into the Society’s overall development programme, in the true sense of the word: Primary Health Care volunteers are able to respond to disaster situations, and Disaster Preparedness Volunteers can handle Primary Health Care work during non-disaster periods.

Development: definition and meaning

The purpose of development sectoral or other should be to improve the quality of life. In the context of National Societies the purpose of development should be to enable them to respond effectively to the needs of people as a consequence either of disaster or of geographical, political, social and economic conditions.

The Movement has been stressing the importance of development for over a quarter-century, but unfortunately the term has not been properly understood or put into serious practice. Does development mean conventional socio-economic action, or does it refer to the structural and institutional growth of the National Societies? Does it imply improved capacity to plan and deliver services, or an improvement in the community services as such? Should we speak of development of different activities or of integrated activities and longer-term commitments? These are some of the questions which continue to interest the leaders of the Movement today.

The Movement must keep pace with the changing times. It took over 100 years for it to decide to look at its future. The result was “An Agenda for the Red Cross”, by Donald D. Tansley¹. The study pointed out the Movement’s weaknesses and complacency, and questioned some of its traditional practices, but it did not, for all its brilliance, reflect on the possibilities for National Societies. The concept of development, instead of being rigidly static, should be dynamic, so that it can be adapted to the global reality of the modern world and the changing socio-economic needs of individual countries.

The present definition is too generalized. It does not qualify the type and extent of services the National Societies should provide in their development efforts, and therefore services selected at random with consideration of the needs, priorities and aspirations of the people would still mean development of those Societies. But in such a case, the objectives of the development programme would hardly be achieved. Whatever a National Society does may, theoretically speaking, be called development, but development in pragmatic terms and as defined in the Strategy should be the National Society’s ability to respond effectively to the needs of the people at the right time, in the right place and in the most appropriate manner.

The ultimate aim of development, as defined in the Strategy, is “to make National Societies self-reliant.” The term “self-reliant” denotes confidence in one’s own power and ability, but it does not necessarily mean that the Society is self-supporting. Seldom does a National Society achieve self-reliance, as this is a relative term. A Society which is self-reliant today may not be so tomorrow if it is called upon to take up new roles. The term “self-supporting” may be more appropriate.

Development strategy: objectives, needs and priorities

The *Strategy for Development of National Societies in the Eighties* was adopted after long consideration and many consultations. No consideration was given, however, to the financial implications. The Strategy had far-reaching objectives and ambitious goals, but was vague and unrealistic when it came to planning funding and implementation. It was therefore deemed to be a failure from the beginning. The appropriate component of the Movement has taken the initiative to devise a new strategy for the Nineties. Drawing on the lessons of the past, the authors, it is expected, will describe the drawbacks and weaknesses of the present Strategy, and find the ways and means to overcome them and be more realistic in aims and objectives.

¹ Donald D. Tansley, *An Agenda for the Red Cross*, Reappraisal of the Role of the Red Cross—Final Report, July 1975.

The new Strategy's objectives should be to help developing Societies achieve viable organic, administrative, operational and programme capabilities. It should give indications on how to assess a Society's development needs. Such Societies should be given the opportunity to identify not only their own needs but also those of the community, and thereafter to set their own priorities. The community's needs, the availability of resources, the Society's capacity and infrastructure should dictate priorities. Once undertaken, services must be maintained even if outside help stops, otherwise the National Society may lose credibility.

The Strategy should give top priority and urgent attention to creating new National Societies where they do not exist and to Societies already formed but requiring assistance for recognition. The least-developed Societies should be next on the list, followed by other developing Societies. Relatively high priority should be given to those Societies without a minimum number of professional staff and volunteers.

There has been considerable debate on whether the integrated or the sectoral approach is most appropriate to development in our Movement. There is undoubtedly a tendency towards an integrated approach, both nationally and internationally, but in some cases, particularly for newly-formed or recognized Societies, the sectoral approach may be more effective because the Society may not be organized enough to benefit from an integrated programme. With the passage of time and in the light of progress made, the sectoral approach may develop into a more integrated system.

The country's prevailing situation will influence the choice of services and activities and their relative priorities. Preparation for conflict may be a priority for countries where conflict is a real possibility, but for a country prone to natural disasters, priority will obviously be given to disaster preparedness and a disaster response system. Preventive or curative health services may be the top priority in a country with no threat of conflict or natural disaster. In general terms, however, disaster preparedness, preventive health services and appropriate social welfare programmes deserve immediate attention.

The universal solidarity linking the National Societies and their spirit of international cooperation are unique; they make our Movement different from many governmental and non-governmental organizations. The spirit of cooperation is the essence of Red Cross and Red Crescent development.

Alternative approaches to assistance

The relative merits of multilateralism and bilateralism have also been the subject of debate in the recent past. Both have their advantages and disadvant-

ages. The principle of universality implies maintaining the multilateral approach.

Although this system has many advantages, there has been an increasing tendency of late to adopt a bilateral approach. In recent years, the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society has been increasingly involved in bilateral assistance, particularly in disaster preparedness and primary health care programmes. The bilateral system also has its advantages. The Participating Society remains in direct contact with the Operating Society. The Participating Society can assess the use of its resources in easily measurable terms and donors can therefore be better informed on how their funds were allocated. This in turn is an incentive for continued and renewed donor involvement. Another important advantage is that the Participating Societies can easily identify their involvement and the results achieved. In such cases, however, it is best to keep the League informed and involved, in particular in planning, reporting and evaluation. There is no doubt that bilateral undertakings have positively influenced the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society's development.

The consortia system of assistance is comparatively new and needs further study before any comment can be made on its usefulness. However, it could be practiced in an Operating Society with a modest structure and operational capacity.

Partners in development and their roles

As the name implies, the Operating Society should be the one to operate or implement all stages of development activities. The Participating Societies are expected to provide financial and technical inputs. The fact that an Operating Society has a non-existent or weak administrative or operational infrastructure should not tempt the Participating Society to take over implementation. In such a case, improvement of administrative, planning or operational capacity should be the first stage of the development process. The Participating Societies, besides providing technical assistance if needed, should associate with the project and help local staff and volunteers with the actual implementation.

The League should, as usual, assume the leading role in helping the Operating Societies prepare projects, circulate them and find sponsors. In a multilateral undertaking, the League Secretariat should, as in the past, coordinate, monitor and provide timely feedback on activities. If the undertaking is a bilateral one, the Participating Society should assume this role.

The ICRC seems to have made an adequate contribution to the development of National Societies. It should continue to provide technical and legal assistance for the creation or recognition of new National Societies and for the dissemina-

tion of knowledge of the Fundamental Principles of the Movement and international humanitarian law. Besides providing legal and technical assistance for interpreting and implementing the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, the ICRC can help ensure respect for the emblems. The ICRC has the distinct role of assisting National Societies in activities they may be required to undertake in conflicts. Last but not least, the ICRC should share with the National Societies its rich experience and expertise by providing general and specialized training.

Conclusion

It is encouraging to note that all the components of the Movement are becoming more aware of the importance of development. As long as there continue to be differences in social, economic and cultural conditions, as long as the vagaries of nature continue to wreak havoc, there will be a constant and continued need for development, both within and without the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Our great humanitarian Movement, with its noble aims and unique principles, shall move ahead with courage and fortitude to meet the aspirations of mankind.

Major Ali Hassan Quoreshi
Secretary General
Bangladesh Red Crescent Society
