

Development of National Societies and co-operation: The viewpoint of the Red Cross of Cape Verde

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Introduction

Cape Verde, a small archipelago formed by ten islands and eight islets, is located 455 km off the west coast of Africa, between the Tropic of Cancer and the Equator. It has an area of 4,033 sq km and a population of 320,000.

The dry climate and sparse rainfall characteristic of these volcanic islands, which constitute a prolongation into the Atlantic of the arid Sahel region, are extremely unfavourable to agriculture.

In 1983, Cape Verde's gross domestic product stood at 360 US dollars *per capita*. There is a high rate of emigration from the country, involving an estimated 500,000 people to date.

The population of the islands over the last 500 years has been primarily of African and, to a far lesser extent, of European stock. This has given rise to a culture which, today, can truly be called Cape-Verdean.

The country gained independence on 5 July 1975. The Red Cross of Cape Verde was officially recognized by the International Committee of the Red Cross on 14 March 1985 and admitted to the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies on 18 April 1985.

Development

National Societies must develop both their operational structures and their services to the community.

The Red Cross of Cape Verde is a natural outgrowth of the branch of the Portuguese Red Cross present in the country prior to independence in 1975.

took over its predecessor's premises and also inherited its lack of specific development goals. Assistance activities were poorly defined, based on vague criteria, and essentially dependent on donations.

This situation prevailed until the end of 1980 when the Cape Verdean Government recognized that the time was ripe to upgrade the institution. In December 1980 a presidential decree appointed a president to give a new impetus to the Society pending the election of a managing committee. This initiative coincided with the emphasis placed by the Twenty-fourth International Conference of the Red Cross (Manila, 1981) on endowing the Movement with a totally new development policy. Contacts established at that time with the League Secretariat, and the human and material resources it provided, played a key role in the development of our National Society between 1981 and 1987, enabling us to build up our operational capacity and expand our community services.

The Society adopted a development strategy based on four goals: the training of leaders, economic independence, administrative efficiency and the creation of a body of dedicated volunteers.

Training of leaders

We consider properly trained leaders as a *sine qua non* for the development of a National Society and, therefore, of the Movement. Whatever its goals or means of external support, a Society cannot develop without competent leaders. They must be **thoroughly familiar with their working environment**, knowledge which cannot be taken for granted even after a lifetime on the spot. They must also have **time** to devote to Red Cross work, and enjoy the community's **trust**. Future leaders must acquire a basic knowledge of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement before embarking on any activities: it is inconceivable that an "apostle" should not know the fundamental principles. Qualities such as energy, sensitivity, initiative and imagination are desirable but, in our opinion, secondary.

From 1981 to 1984, the Red Cross of Cape Verde focused primarily on recruiting and training leaders throughout the islands. Its pool of leaders grew from two in 1981 to nearly 100 in 1987. The training programme involved frequent travel, both for seminars and for individual meetings. In 1985, a food aid operation for some 3,000 malnourished children below the age of six years was organized on the island of Santo Antão. This constituted a milestone in the training experience of the island's leaders and volunteers.

Economic independence

It is difficult to imagine an active Society that is economically independent in a country as bereft of resources as Cape Verde. The Government deemed it preferable and more constructive to offer the Society the means to achieve such independence rather than to grant it subsidies which, although more convenient and requiring less effort, would nevertheless considerably restrict its freedom of action. An unhealthy relationship tends to develop between a donor and a recipient, since the former may apply pressure which the latter is unable to resist. To avoid placing the Society in such a position, the Cape Verde Government offered it the opportunity of setting up a lottery. This had already been attempted by another institution prior to independence, but without success. The Government also decided to allocate to the Red Cross of Cape Verde the proceeds of the sale of a Red Cross stamp required on certain official documents.

The Red Cross stamp brings in nearly 35,000 US dollars per year. The lottery, which at first often showed a deficit, from 1982 began gradually to show a profit. Today it has become the Society's main source of income, having single-handedly raised its revenue from 72,000 to 315,000 US dollars between 1981 and 1987. This economic upswing has allowed the Society to run two kindergartens for the community. These establishments not only serve one hot and one cold meal to 200 children daily, but also provide educational support and distribute school supplies for a token fee. About 90% of these children belong to the most underprivileged section of the population. At an annual cost of 45,000 US dollars, the kindergartens constitute the Society's most expensive social welfare activity.

The Society's income also sustains an entire administrative system, at an estimated cost for 1988 of 35,000 US dollars, including transport between the islands and room and board for staff on mission in the archipelago. Lastly, the Red Cross of Cape Verde finances several small-scale projects at an annual cost of 3,000 US dollars, and 25% of the large-scale projects.

So has the Red Cross of Cape Verde achieved total financial self-sufficiency? Not at all, but we have deliberately chosen to tailor our activities to our pocketbook. "The climate of relative uncertainty experienced by the League in the past year, the reticence of the Red Cross Societies of certain wealthy countries and the current world economic situation all indicate that we must rely essentially on our own resources if our Plan is not to remain a dead letter. It is therefore vital to make every effort to find new sources of income to supplement those already existing (Red Cross of Cape Verde Development Plan 1988-1989, Praia, 1987).

Administrative efficiency

Certain countries are in the habit of employing, in institutions such as the Red Cross, pensioners who can no longer work in other organizations. This only strengthens the general misconception that Red Cross work is secondary and undemanding. It also renders the administrative work arduous, inefficient and costly, as was the case with the Red Cross of Cape Verde until 1985. The Managing Committee was aware of this, but national labour legislation in force prevented it from taking radical measures to overhaul this obsolete administrative structure. It took five years to replace and reorganize the Society's entire administrative sector. Not until then were its leaders able to design, plan and implement the Society's Red Cross activities. An inefficient administration virtually paralyses a National Society's work.

Creation of a body of dedicated volunteers

In addition to training leaders, we have devoted ourselves to preparing volunteers. In general, all our volunteers have followed an elementary, 18-session first-aid course providing them with basic knowledge of the Red Cross, first aid, health education and sex education. All the volunteers have thus received the same basic training consisting in practical as well as theoretical knowledge. The number of our volunteers has grown from two in 1981 to close to one thousand today.

Here we should like to mention certain facts demonstrating that the activities carried out by the Red Cross of Cape Verde are conducive to overall development as defined in the "Strategy for the Development of National Societies in the eighties".

— Until 1987, the Red Cross had never been mentioned in official documents pertaining to the country's development. In the Government's Second National Development Plan, however, the Red Cross is considered as a social partner on an equal footing with other, well-established organizations working in the country.

— The 1985 Santo Antaò operation (aid for malnourished children) was almost entirely devised, planned and carried out by the National Society.

— The National Society is the only institution in the country to organize first-aid courses. This activity extends even beyond the traditional confines of Red Cross work, since the Society has been asked to give courses at the Police Academy, and for physical education teachers.

— The Ministry of Education recognizes the National Society as qualified to run kindergartens for pre-school children.

We believe that the concept of development adopted for the eighties and applied by the National Society is still valid. **The main goal of National Societies in the coming years should be the acquisition of satisfactory operational capacity.** Were we to begin again from scratch, we should probably not alter the course we have followed.

Development Strategy for the Nineties and co-operation

The admission of many more National Societies to the fold is bound to bring changes to the Movement in the nineties. Pressure for development exerted by the new National Societies is steadily increasing. These National Societies, by requiring that the Movement's other components recognize their due role in development, will cease to be, as so often in the past, mere passive recipients.

The League Secretariat will have to be well-informed of the stage of development of the National Societies so as to be able to discuss and tailor strategies suitable to their respective needs. In our opinion, the League Secretariat is the body best placed to discuss with donor Societies the areas and Societies showing priority needs. It can assess the situation of each new Society, and subsequently foster dialogue between operating and participating Societies. We feel that it would be ill-advised to attribute to the more highly developed Societies the responsibility of assessing needs and determining allocations. As preference may occasionally be given to a certain Society for reasons other than pure solidarity or humanity, we generally disapprove of direct bilateral co-operation between two National Societies. Such co-operation may also induce the participating Society to impose supervision and methods of action which could nip the operating Society's potential in the bud. While it is undoubtedly important to assist a Society, it is equally important to leave it full creative and operational scope. Co-operative efforts undertaken on behalf of the National Societies with the lowest operational capacity should be impartial.

As for development, it should, to the greatest extent possible, be global and integrated. This requires that particular consideration be given to the four factors enumerated above: the training of leaders, economic independence, administrative efficiency and the creation of a body of dedicated volunteers. Development should be fostered in one particular sector only in the event that one of the above-mentioned sectors fails to keep pace with the others.

The type of services provided by a National Society naturally varies from one community to another. New Societies should, as a first step, select only two or three activities for their volunteers. Social welfare or health-care activities generally correspond, and are therefore easily adapted, to the needs of

countries in which new Societies have been created. As each Society develops, its field of activity will expand.

The ICRC's continued support for National Societies will be needed in regard to the principles of the Movement, dissemination and information. The role played by information is particularly important, not only because it raises public awareness of the Movement's major principles, but also because it spreads knowledge of each National Society's achievements in its own country. This bears fruit in the short term by increasing public familiarity with and support for the National Society. The ICRC will also have a key role to play in monitoring the progress of the Societies with which it is in most direct contact, thereby supplementing the League's assessment. Continuous consultations between the two institutions could then provide useful guidelines for the development of the National Societies with the most pressing needs.

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