

Reflections on the subject: Development of National Societies and Co-operation

by Oscar Ernesto Morales

1. The concept of development in the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

We can say from experience that the ideas put forward in the document "Strategy for the development of National Societies in the Eighties"¹ have served as a reference in the preparation of our general plans for the periods 1980-1985, 1982-1986 and 1987-1990.

We wish to point out, however, that before that document had been approved by the XXIVth International Conference of the Red Cross in Manila in 1981 the subject had already been considered at the XIth Inter-American Red Cross Conference (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1979) in Resolution No. 4 (document entitled "Five-year development plan for the Red Cross in America 1980-1984").

- At that meeting the following matters were debated:
 - the ten previous inter-American meetings (1923-1974);
 - the launching of the development programme in the League (1963);
 - the reassessment of the role of the Red Cross (1973-1975) by the Tansley Report.

¹ *Strategy for the Development of National Societies in the Eighties* (hereinafter *Strategy*), League of Red Cross Societies, Geneva, 1982.

Many questions were asked on the subject of what the future appeared to offer in America because of social and military tension, widespread poverty, the decline in health, etc.

- In conclusion the wish was expressed to “promote the development of National Red Cross Societies in accordance with the needs of their peoples”.

This provided a new dimension, but the scope of the idea entails the risk that the National Society concerned may lose sight of its basic mission and come up against difficulties relating to appropriate planning.

Considering national development as part of the National Society’s development means that any project is regarded as a development project.

- In formulating its programmes the Salvadorean Red Cross Society always considers the following *concepts* as being of *fundamental* importance:

- “The aim of the Red Cross is to make a better world, but only in certain respects. It is not possible for it to take on just any task it considers beneficial; on the contrary, it has to keep to its specific duties and must know exactly what these are.

Thus the Red Cross must guard against a dangerous dispersion of efforts, that may adversely affect its performance in the field where its efforts are most useful, and may prevent it from assuming its primary responsibilities”.

- In this sense the Salvadorean Red Cross Society has remained faithful to the basic task of “providing emergency aid, without conditions and impartially, where there are human needs for protection and assistance because of natural disasters and conflicts”.

- In situations of internal conflict in particular, we have always borne in mind that the National Society must “always care not to allow itself to become involved in situations damaging to its image and reputation. The further it stretches itself the more vulnerable it becomes, while the risks of error or malpractice grow in geometrical proportion. Purity of intention must always be coupled with prudence”.

- We also consider that in every activity, programme, project or plan of work we must not lose sight of our terms of reference: it is “the Fundamental Principles that give the Red Cross its specific character and the reason for its existence; they must be faithfully observed so that the cardinal principle of humanity permeates reality without becoming distorted”.

- Accordingly, we have used the “Strategy for the development of National Societies in the Eighties”, together with the “Five-Year Plan for the Red Cross in America 1980-1984” and the assessments carried out at the XIIth and XIIIth Inter-American Conferences.

- After evaluating our national development activities we have tried to follow in practice the definition contained in paragraphs 49 and 50 of the “Strategy”². However, in our case, we feel that since 1982 when the Five-Year Plan was evaluated in San José, Costa Rica, we have not relied on the assistance of the League, for the development programme to the extent that we had hoped and that was stipulated in the “Strategy”³. Nevertheless, since 1981 it has made an effective contribution, although by other means, to promoting the development of the National Society, especially in the respects mentioned in the “Strategy”⁴.
- Lastly, we think that for the definition to correspond to the requirements of the modern world, and especially of the National Societies of the Third World countries, it should include the idea that the National Society can and must participate in “additional programmes”, that is, programmes

² *Strategy, op. cit.*, paras. 49, 50:

“49. Development means the process of strengthening the capacity of National Societies to provide Red Cross services based on national resources. It is thus concerned with both the development of National Societies’ operational structures and with the development of the services they provide.

“50. The concept of self-reliance encompasses both the need for National Societies to remain independent and their role as auxiliaries to governments”.

³ *Strategy, op. cit.*, para. 45:

“45. The aim of the Development Programme in the eighties is therefore to assist National Societies to become self-reliant and effective partners within the International Red Cross.”

⁴ *Strategy, op. cit.*, para. 51:

“51. The concept of effectiveness is met by a National Society which:

- (a) complies on a continuing basis with the conditions for recognition of National Societies by the ICRC and for membership of the League;
- (b) is independent of interference from outside bodies in its decision-making and possesses sufficient financial, personnel and material resources to implement its plans;
- (c) has defined the role of the Red Cross in the national context and prepared a plan or statement of objectives for the Society in the future—taking into account government policies and community needs;
- (d) ensures that the Red Cross emblem is respected in time of armed conflict and peace;
- (e) has the capacity to anticipate, prepare for and meet needs in the fields of protection and assistance independently, or as a partner to its government and/or other organizations;
- (f) provides regular services in at least one field which, in the opinion of leaders both within and outside the Red Cross, significantly benefit those in need in the community;
- (g) has a governing structure which gives representation to members from the local levels, and functions according to its constitution;
- (h) has and implements written policies regarding the recruitment, training and reward of members, both paid and volunteer;
- (i) has a headquarters which gives leadership and support to the local units; has basic financial management, including arrangements for independent auditing; maintains effective relationships with governments and others;
- (j) has local units which have the capacity to identify needs and provide services within their areas; provide descriptive and financial annual reports to headquarters, participate in Annual General Meetings; meet their financial responsibilities to headquarters;
- (k) participates in, and accepts the responsibilities of its membership in the International Red Cross through: involvement in the policy-making process of the International Red Cross; payment of its statutory contributions to the League; co-operating with and assisting other National Societies and Red Cross bodies, according to its resources.

additional to its basic tasks, to help as an auxiliary to the public authorities to meet the needs of the people of its country; but such programmes must be kept separate from the development of the National Society, so that it can carry out its basic task and make its contribution to meeting national needs. This will help to facilitate (a) planning and (b) selection of assistance projects.

2. Strategy for development of the National Societies in the Nineties

In accordance with our experience and taking into account the characteristics of the Movement and the Fundamental Principles, we think of the Strategy for the nineties in the following terms:

Strategy

- National Societies must be given further assistance for their development, following a general diagnosis of the degree of self-reliance and effectiveness they have achieved (paragraphs 50 and 51)⁵.
- Plans for action must be based on a process of self-diagnosis leading to the establishment of an inventory of needs.
- National Society staff must be trained to carry out such diagnoses and to draw up development plans and projects.

Principles for action

- The National Societies in more urgent need of assistance suffer from lack of planning and lack of evaluation; adequate information and training of the persons who will receive such assistance are also lacking.
- Therefore, development assistance must always include an information and training component that will ensure a multiplier effect.

Objectives

- To help National Societies to draw up and carry out programmes of education and dissemination of international humanitarian law and the fundamental principles and ideals of the Movement.
- To advise National Societies as to the application of Red Cross and Red Crescent principles and help them to overcome difficulties in the development of their organization and structure.

⁵ *Strategy, op. cit.*, see above Notes 2 and 4.

- To give National Societies assistance in keeping their relief organization up to date so that they may act effectively in the event of natural disaster or armed conflict.
- To lend assistance to National Societies for the application of the Geneva Conventions and the protection of the emblem.
- To advise and support National Societies in providing emergency assistance and in community health and social welfare programmes.
- To contribute to the training of National Society personnel, particularly in planning, evaluation and training for the tasks of leadership. The human factor is decisive and in this context quality is more important than quantity.
- To provide National Societies with technical and financial assistance to keep their administrative and operational structure up to date, as that structure will serve as a basis for the development plan.
- To help National Societies devise and carry out public relations and information programmes to make their activities and services known and to obtain the necessary backing.
- To give National Societies help and advice so that they may successfully carry out fund-raising programmes enabling them to obtain the resources necessary to support their activities and the necessary infrastructure.

Priorities

We consider that priorities could be fixed at two levels, as follows:

- *National Societies in general*
 - in regions more prone to conflicts and disasters;
 - with a limited and deficient organization, including the information service;
 - with an efficient organization, but needing assistance to expand or improve it.
 - *National Societies in particular*
 - in difficulties with regard to effectiveness;
 - in difficulties with regard to self-reliance.
- Criteria must be based on a preliminary survey of needs.

The focus of aid for development

Experience shows that if aid is to be effective, it must be considered in a global perspective. In practice, when one sector of the National Society is

developed (for example, its services) the other sectors (personnel, finance, etc.) cannot provide the required support unless the whole structure is strengthened, or at least modified accordingly.

Priority in the promotion of services

This would depend on the characteristics of each National Society and on the context in which it has to operate. Nevertheless, taking our own experience as a guide in development matters, in a conflict situation—where it occurs in an area of high risk for natural disasters and in a developing country—there are basic priorities that must always be borne in mind:

- The human factor in National Societies is decisive for the effective performance of their humanitarian mission as outlined in the Fundamental Principles. We repeat that in this context quality is more important than quantity. Of course, “being (a member of the) Red Cross means not only bearing a name, doing a job and wearing a badge but also having or acquiring a certain mental attitude and respecting an ideal”.
- The services that will have highest priority will be those that provide a means of:
 - raising the level of training of personnel;
 - carrying out activities that provide that personnel every day with practice in the tasks that it will have to perform if a disaster occurs or conflict breaks out;
 - disseminating international humanitarian law and the principles and ideals of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement both within and outside the National Society;
 - strengthening the organizational and operational capacity of the National Society to carry out the aforesaid programmes.
- The services that directly contribute to national development must be differentiated from those that constitute development of the National Society itself and are aimed at helping it to fulfil its primary mission.
- The services of National Societies for national development, at least in our sub-region, focus on primary health care and social welfare.

To define these services the National Societies must begin by undertaking an in-depth analysis of the current situation, both the state of the country and the state of the National Society; for their development they must have a high-level decision from the most senior echelons of the Red Cross that will ensure co-ordination with the government sector.

3. Co-operation for development

Because of our special situation we have had experience (varying with needs and possibilities) of working with all the components of our Movement; for example:

- *with the ICRC* we shared the experiences of the Honduras/El Salvador conflict in 1969, and since 1980 we have carried out many activities jointly with the permanent delegation;
- *with the League* we engaged in joint activities during the relief operations carried out after the earthquakes in Nicaragua (1971), Guatemala (1976) and Mexico (1985); in updating relief programmes; with the permanent delegation after the earthquake of 10 October 1986; at present, in a new phase of reconstruction, etc.;
- *with National Societies* we have participated in thirteen Inter-American Conferences held since 1983, and in the twelve Sub-regional Meetings held since 1963; and also in most of the courses and seminars held in the region.

Since 1983 we have been receiving the support of the Nordic Red Cross Societies to carry out multilateral projects for the development of the National Society and for community programmes. This support is expected to continue until 1990.

Similarly, since 1987, we have engaged in various reconstruction projects with the National Societies of the Federal Republic of Germany, Switzerland, etc.

Conclusions of experiences

This series of joint experiences relating to the various types and levels of co-operation has enabled us to reach the following conclusions:

- The League regional office in San José, Costa Rica, did a great deal to ensure that the XIth and XIIth Inter-American Conferences (Brazil, 1979 and Costa Rica, 1983) helped the National Societies to formulate their Five-Year Development Plan.

Unfortunately, since 1984 that office has become less effective and there has been little follow-up to what it initiated.

- The above shows us that only on the basis of self-analysis and a definite plan identifying needs and priorities for their development can the National Societies make progress and obtain adequate aid for their specific self-development programmes.

- The co-operation of the ICRC, the League and the Societies participating in the project in the task of providing support for the operative Societies can be effective with the help of delegates qualified to respond to needs as they arise.
- Our experience with regard to both the reception and the use of aid for development coming from participating Societies is multilateral, i.e.:
 - delegates from the ICRC and the League work together with the National Society, giving it assistance in formulating a programme;
 - when an agreement is arrived at, the operative and participating Societies, and the League and the ICRC, approve the document by signing it;
 - thereafter, both Societies carry out the plan in accordance with the provisions of the agreement signed;
 - finally, a joint group (composed of representatives of the operative and participating Societies and of the ICRC and the League) evaluates the programmes and the projects carried out.
- During the implementation of the aid programme, each body receives reports on its progress and conclusion.

Terms of reference

In the course of the experience, the respective terms of reference of the operative and participating National Societies have been as follows:

- *Operative Societies*

These Societies are responsible for the process of planning and budgeting, during which needs and priorities are fixed, and for:

 - administering aid received in accordance with the terms of the agreement;
 - arranging for the stipulated audit and supplying the required reports both to the participating Societies and to the League or ICRC, as appropriate;
 - allowing punctual evaluation and liquidation of the projects carried out.
- *Participating Societies*

These are responsible for:

 - supporting the action programmes and budgets of the operative National Societies;
 - drawing up the co-operation agreement, in consultation with the other partners and in accordance with the plan and budget;
 - receiving the required reports;
 - participating in the evaluation and liquidation of projects carried out.

● *ICRC and League*

The ICRC and the League are responsible for:

- promoting programming and aid for projects of co-operation between the National Societies and advising in this respect;
- assuming an active role with regard to support and co-ordination.

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