

A concept of development for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

by Luis Nunes *

1. Introduction

The League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has a long tradition of development work. At every new stage the objectives set are therefore not simply the outcome of a purely intellectual process, but are reviewed and adapted in the light of this tradition.

2. Strategy for Development in the 1980s

It was on the basis of this long experience of sixty years and more that the "Strategy for the Development of National Societies in the Eighties" ¹ was adopted in Manila.

For the first time, a definition of development for the Movement was formulated. For the purpose of this Strategy, development was taken to be "*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*".²

The Movement had a document which, to be coherent, covered all development activities. It is difficult to assess the efficacy of an instrument before its

* The opinions expressed in this article commit only the author.

¹ General Assembly of the League, Second Session, Manila, 1981, *Decision 31* and Twenty-fourth International Conference of the Red Cross, Manila, 1981, *Resolution XXV*.

² League—*Strategy for the Development of National Societies in the Eighties* (hereafter *Strategy*), Geneva, 1982, p. 8.

time for implementation is over. Nevertheless, an initial assessment has been made for the first half of the decade.³

Although it is still too early to know whether the objectives of the Strategy will be achieved,⁴ it is already clear that the resources deployed are inadequate and that several Societies have lacked concrete support.⁵

The Strategy is justified by the need to overcome several shortcomings in the Development Programme, stating that “most of (the projects) have focused on the provision of services” and that “sometimes they have had a positive impact but in other cases the project has had little or no lasting effect on the development of the Society as a whole”.⁶

The philosophy of the Development Programme of the 1960s and 1970s, based on theories of the time, maintained that the setting up of a well considered project and structure would inevitably result in the overall development of the Society. Today, matters have changed somewhat. A good number of Societies, for example, are devoting much more attention to improving their administrative and operational sectors, even though they still have some difficulty in obtaining assistance for this kind of activity.

3. An attempt at a new definition

We consequently believe that a new definition and a new approach are needed.

We feel that within our Movement: **Development is a means of improving National Society structures through a dynamic, integrated and balanced process in such a way that, within the framework of the fundamental principles of the Movement, they will be able at all times to offer humanitarian services to their community while simultaneously preparing to take effective action in the event of armed conflict or natural disaster, in their national territory or anywhere else in the world, thus contributing to a lasting peace.**

4. Development, a means and not an end

We should like to emphasize from the start that development can be no more than means to an end, to achieve a *purpose*. This seems obvious, but we

³ ICRC, League—*Development of National Societies as a Contribution to National Development*, Geneva, August 1986. A document prepared for the Twenty-fifth International Conference of the Red Cross, October 1986.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶ *Strategy, op. cit.*, p. 6.

stress the point because we observe that development is all too often construed, by organizations and even by States, as an end in itself. This approach frequently results in any action whatsoever being regarded as development so long as it “produces” some kind of growth.

In our opinion, and in very general terms, we consider that development could well be defined as a means serving to satisfy human needs. However, as human beings are by definition in a state of evolution, their needs are infinite.⁷ Accordingly, development itself cannot have a perfectly defined time frame.⁸

5. Improvement of structures

It is therefore by a steady process, defined as “the action of passing through continuing development from a beginning to a contemplated end... going along through each of a succession of acts, events or developmental stages”⁹ that one improves the structures of an organization.

We may hence assert that development is a means put into effect via organizations and by persons engaged in setting up, maintaining or strengthening structures whose ultimate purpose is to render service. For a Red Cross or Red Crescent organization to exist and endure, its services must correspond to the needs,¹⁰ these being determined by the standards and principles which govern the organization.

5.1. Structures

It is difficult if not impossible to define in a standard formula what constitutes a “good” National Society. An institution which is present in most of the countries of the world and devotes itself to an extremely wide variety of activities can in no case follow an “ideal model”. It is much easier to determine what constitutes a “bad” National Society.¹¹

⁷ See Institut universitaire d'Etudes du Développement (IUED), *Il faut manger pour vivre... controverses sur les besoins fondamentaux et le développement*, PUF, Paris, Cahiers de l'IUED, Genève, 1980, 324 p., especially Galtung, J., “Le développement dans la perspective des besoins fondamentaux”, pp. 51-128; Preiswerk, R., “Identité culturelle, self-reliance et besoins fondamentaux”, pp. 129-153; Berthoud, G., “Le piège des besoins”, pp. 157-178; Rist, G., “Questions fondamentales sur les besoins fondamentaux”, pp. 197-219.

⁸ Even if we accept the present theories of ecologists, who advise negative growth for developed countries, this can be accomplished only through a form of development.

⁹ Webster's Third New International Dictionary.

¹⁰ No institution other than the State can claim to meet all human needs.

¹¹ “The ICRC, the League and the Report on the Re-Appraisal of the Role of the Red Cross”, off-print of the *International Review of the Red Cross*, Geneva, 1979, 72 p.

Tansley's review of a sample group of 23 National Societies can still be considered valid today.¹²

● *Structural and institutional problems*

By regrouping some of the failings mentioned in the Tansley Report, the sectors requiring improvement can be fairly accurately identified. Generally speaking, these failings may be divided into three main categories:

— some relate to the activities of National Societies and their status and integration in the national context, and reveal that little attention has been given to defining a national programme;¹³

— the non-existence of a national programme is due largely to an inadequate system of democratic participation by members;¹⁴

— the absence of a programme, plus the Society's inability to organize itself, results in an inability to induce its members to join in practical work.¹⁵

Thus, in order to strengthen the structures of a National Society, it is essential to define a national programme capable of encouraging the bulk of the population (both in numerical and in geographical terms) to take part, a programme put into effect by improving general management.

¹² In his report, Tansley gives 18 reasons for the weaknesses of National Societies:

1. Lack of clear purpose shared throughout the whole Society.
2. *Ad hoc* methods of selecting activities.
3. Failure to relate activities to those of other organizations.
4. Failure to measure impact and relevance of activities.
5. Concentration of activities in urban centres.
6. Complicated governing structures.
7. Leadership and membership drawn from a narrow base.
8. Infrequent changes in leadership.
9. Unclear definitions of membership.
10. Volunteers providing services denied participation in decision-making.
11. Full-time staff weak in numbers and in qualifications.
12. Reluctance to work with other groups.
13. Failure to seek professional advice.
14. Controlled or dominated by government.
15. Weak arrangements for financing.
16. Lack of understanding of Red Cross principles, functions and structure.
17. Failure to accept responsibility as a member of the Movement.
18. Self-satisfaction.

Donald Tansley, *Final Report: An Agenda for Red Cross*, Geneva, 1975. The *Strategy* (op. cit.) by the League picks up Tansley's 18 points and summarizes them under 8 headings, p. 6.

¹³ Points 1 to 5 of the preceding list.

¹⁴ Points 6 to 10.

¹⁵ Points 11 to 18.

● *Structural capacities*

The progress of a National Society therefore largely depends on the strengthening of its structures. Since this abstract term may give rise to uncertainty, we should specify that its use here denotes three kinds of structures with their respective capacities:

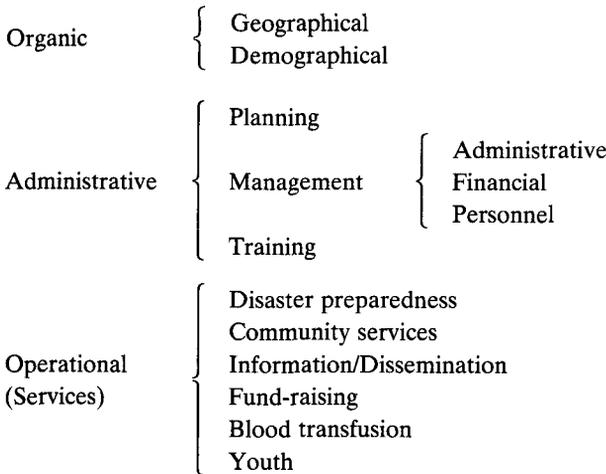
Organic capacity: this is determined by the Society’s geographical and demographic organization. For the Society to be capable, in the upward direction, of better deciding on its activities and, in the downward direction, of offering the humanitarian services most fully adapted to the people’s needs, it must extend throughout the country and cover the large majority of the population.¹⁶

Administrative capacity: this is a matter of technical ability, at the national, regional and local levels, to manage the support services for the organization’s activities.

Operational capacity: This is the capacity to determine how to turn the generally limited resources to optimum account in daily deploying and directing the humanitarian services needed by the country.

● *Essential structures*

Improvement efforts must focus on what may be called the essential structures of a Red Cross or Red Crescent Society:



¹⁶ “To carry out its aims it is essential that a Red Cross Society should be organized on a truly democratic basis. It should take all possible steps to ensure that membership of the Red Cross Society is open to all citizens.” Board of Governors, XIXth meeting, Oxford, 1946, *Resolution 12*.

5.2. Improving the Structures

It is not hard to improve each of these structures if the means are available. The problem lies in the need to do so simultaneously, in a dynamic, integrated and balanced manner.

● *A dynamic process*

Basically, the task entails a modification of the structural and institutional characteristics of the organization to be developed. Since this is a dynamic process, it will be difficult at the beginning to know exactly how much structural improvement is needed. So instead of arbitrarily creating a blueprint for a developed Society, it is better to decide stage by stage how to proceed further. It will also be advisable to have at hand the instruments needed to measure, easily, the progress achieved at each stage. This is the problem of making an ongoing evaluation of projects. In the case of the poorest countries, it is also essential to introduce the idea of continuity and constant improvement.¹⁷

● *An integrated process*

Although we have as yet no miraculous development formula, a new “integrated action” approach is being recommended, according to which development is regarded as a totality of diverse intermeshed—and interacting—structures.

In itself, this is not a novelty for the Red Cross, but it does bring with it a new and difficult requirement, namely that the various elements mentioned above must never be split up and acted on separately on the grounds that resources or capacities are insufficient.

● *Balanced development*

The need to strengthen a National Society does not stem solely from the fact that any institution needs appropriate structures in order to function, but also and above all from the specific nature, which remains to be determined, of the services we want it to provide. Indeed, although the rendering of service depends upon the structures set up, the latter must be designed according to the services it is intended to provide. It goes without saying that these two elements combined will in turn determine, the form and content of personnel training. This “integrated” process takes place naturally in an already developed

¹⁷ In our opinion, this raises an extremely important point that should be studied as part of a true “Sociology of Time”. It is perhaps because the idea of time varies from one culture to another that we see in many places, within the Red Cross, buildings that were intended to render service but which are now in such a deplorable state of dilapidation that they have no activity and offer none.

Society. For other Societies, the main difficulty is to grasp an extremely complex overall phenomenon and then assess how much effort should be devoted to each of the various elements; personnel, structure and services. The proportion of these efforts will change constantly as the Society develops, in order to prevent an excessive imbalance between these different elements.¹⁸

6. Implementation

Before setting out to plan and manage activities, once personnel has been trained, the whole range of services to be rendered by the National Society must be defined in a national programme.¹⁹

6.1. The national programme

The national programme may be defined as the whole range of services the National Society must render to attain its objectives, thereby progressively achieving its aim or ultimate purpose.

This may look simple, but we are forced to recognize that the Movement has not previously been very fortunate in its choice of definitions. We often find, fused and confused, within a single text or even a single sentence “the goal of the Red Cross and the implications of this goal, namely the many and varied activities carried out by the Red Cross in order to attain it”.²⁰ This situation has its disadvantages, since the multiplicity and variety of activities carried out in the name of humanitarian service “lead to a ruinous dispersion of financial resources, with the added risk of reducing the efficacy of actions undertaken on a wider front”.²¹

If there are many such activities,²² and if they are furthermore sometimes carried out in a disordered fashion,²³ the question arises whether there really is a *national programme*.

¹⁸ Nunes, L., *Stratégie décennale du développement Croix-Rouge*, LRCS, Geneva, September 1980, 72 p. (typescript).

¹⁹ We must not confuse a *national programme* with a *national development programme*. The latter deals with concrete actions whereas the former defines the policy of the National Society.

²⁰ Perruchoud, R. *International Responsibilities of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies*, Henry Dunant Institute, Geneva 1982, p. 45.

²¹ Freymond Jacques, *Guerres, révolutions, Croix-Rouge*, Graduate Institute of International Studies, Geneva, 1976, p. 47.

²² Tansley, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

²³ Perruchoud speaks of a “scope of action so wide that the Red Cross might come close to being a general humanitarian agent”. *op. cit.*, p. 44.

In the case of a nation, it is clear that there is no real definition of a "social policy" *per se*, since this depends upon the definition given to the country's overall policies and economy. Likewise, it is within the context of its country's social objectives that the National Red Cross or Red Crescent Society, as an auxiliary of the public services, must define its contribution, for it is on the basis of a national programme that it will be able to seek and find the most suitable resources. In addition to greater efficacy, this approach also offers it the possibility of determining priorities in the face of a real situation resulting from the nation's economic situation.

In fact the Society should take the process of defining a national programme as an opportunity to improve its operational capacity by deciding, as mentioned above, how to achieve optimum performance in the services it provides, whilst bearing in mind the limited resources available.

6.2. The reaching of AIMS by determining OBJECTIVES which are attainable by performing TASKS

The Red Cross was born of an act; it is the consequence of an action undertaken on a battlefield, amidst the distress which was an immediate and present fact, by men and women who set to work.²⁴

The institution thus set itself an aim. With this aim, it could endure and persevere through the creation of organizations whose objectives would be achieved by means of tasks carried out by volunteers; by their exemplary action they in turn would foster the development of an atmosphere of peace, essential for human fulfilment.

● *The aim*

Until quite recently, there was no definition more specific than Resolution I of the Bucharest Conference in 1977 confirming the "fundamental mission" of the Red Cross.²⁵

This resolution confirmed Red Cross dedication "to preventing and alleviating human suffering... protecting life and health and ensuring respect for the human being...".

When the men and women in the church at Castiglione echoed the cry, "*Tutti fratelli!*", they proclaimed for the first time the aim of the Red Cross

²⁴ Max Huber, cited by Pictet, J., *The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross*, Henry Dunant Institute, Geneva, 1979, p. 17.

²⁵ Twenty-third International Conference of the Red Cross, Bucharest, 1977, *Resolution I*.

embodied in the fundamental principle of Humanity, the principle regarded as essential.²⁶

Despite the clarity of the above declaration, very few authors who have given thought to the aim of the Red Cross have not raised questions as to its extent and limits. After publication of the Tansley Report, people have wondered if the very broad, vague definition of this aim does not carry with it the risk of leading the Movement into an ineffectually dispersed humanitarianism, going off in all directions at the same time.²⁷

Is it really necessary to restrict the institution's aim?

When we consider man and the protection of man, it is difficult if not dangerous to fragment the humanitarian aim, characterized as any action beneficent to man.²⁸ The needs in this domain have become vast indeed, as shown by the proliferation of humanitarian organizations; their increase in number is not a bad thing but a good thing.

However, the Movement, which cannot claim a monopoly on humanitarianism, should assert, or if necessary reassert, its specificity so as to avoid being lost in the crowd of other humanitarian organizations or, worse still, being drawn into the competitive scramble we witness in the field today. The time is gone when the Red Cross was one of the rare humanitarian institutions in existence.²⁹

To reaffirm its specificity, it must determine its objectives with greater precision.

● *The objectives*

In our opinion, many of the Movement's present development problems originate in the confusion between aims and objectives. Incidentally, the resolution at Bucharest made no distinction between aim and objective, but confirmed the fundamental "mission" of the Red Cross.

It is often forgotten that, for an institution to be true to itself, its *aim* must be immutable, whereas its *objectives* may change as conditions change.

We must therefore specify that the objective of the Red Cross, set forth, though not termed as such, in the Bucharest resolution previously cited, is "affording impartially, without discrimination as to race, nationality, religious

²⁶ Pictet, J., *op. cit.*, p. 20.

²⁷ Perruchoud, R., *Les résolutions des Conférences internationales de la Croix-Rouge*, Henry Dunant Institute, Geneva, p. 392.

²⁸ Pictet, J., *op. cit.*, p. 20.

²⁹ "The Red Cross should not seek to maintain a monopoly but to develop its effectiveness, which is based on specific and limited mandates. *The ICRC, the League and the Report on the Re-Appraisal of the Role of the Red Cross*, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

beliefs or political opinions, protection and assistance to those who need it, in the event of armed conflicts and other disasters”.

There is indeed great suffering among human beings today, but it is manifested in all its intensity in cases of war and catastrophe. Also, it is the role of the Red Cross to bring relief in proportion to the seriousness of the suffering and to give priority to those most urgently in need (the principle of impartiality). Unfortunately, we nowadays have the regrettable impression that the provision of protection and assistance for the victims of war or disaster is becoming a secondary objective in the Movement’s order of priorities.

In our opinion, it would be good to keep this objective in mind in the course of development work, if only because the Movement is the only humanitarian organization which maintains a permanent state of preparedness to cope with wars and disasters.

● *The tasks*

The tasks vary. Some meet immediate human needs, others maintain the continuity of the institution through the years, alive and prepared. We cannot carry out the tasks of protection without the necessary preparation and planning. Furthermore, the work of volunteers calls for a continuing apprenticeship, more practical than theoretical.

When the Bucharest resolution stresses the extreme importance of medico-social activities in relation to development, the affirmation should be considered from three points of view: in terms of a permanent training programme enabling people to act in emergencies; in terms of the work that must be done before the emergencies occur; and last but not least, in terms of encouraging members to develop a sense of social responsibility and provide voluntary service.

Some authors do not regard working for peace as a Red Cross task, thinking of peace rather as a result of Red Cross activities. Perhaps this is too restrictive. Since several International Red Cross Conferences have decided that dissemination of the principles and ideals of the Red Cross makes a real contribution to the establishment of lasting peace, this work is indeed a task for the organization. Dissemination of the principles as a framework for action, for example, offers an ever-increasing part of humanity a common ideal—peace. We should also remember that Red Cross/Red Crescent voluntary workers acting in this way will be trying to incorporate in their action, at least indirectly, what is their ultimate purpose, namely the welfare of the whole of mankind.

6.3. Legislation on the principles

Until recently, all these problems had to be interpreted on the basis of resolutions and recommendations by the International Conferences. This is not

the place to discuss the obligatory or binding character of such resolutions. At all events the document which should govern their application by the organizations constituting the Movement, the Statutes of 1929 and 1952, did not mention the aim, objectives and tasks of the Red Cross. Worse still they were almost silent about the roles and functions of the National Societies.

Since 1986, this is no longer the case. The Statutes approved by the Geneva Conference,³⁰ *proclaim* in their Preamble the aim of the Movement, "... whose mission is to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found", its principal objective, namely "to protect life and health and ensure respect for the human being, in particular in times of armed conflict and other emergencies" and the tasks of the Red Cross, which are "to work for the prevention of disease and for the promotion of health and social welfare".

How can we achieve this aim?

In brief, when deciding and preparing a national programme, we must always bear in mind that it is designed to achieve an aim through the selection of objectives, the main one being preparedness to bring relief by supplementing the activities of the public authorities. In times of peace or of "non-disaster", the organization should focus on health and social welfare tasks deriving from and inspired by the fundamental principles of the Movement, selecting above all those tasks which are the most necessary and urgent, and which also serve to maintain and develop voluntary service and to promote a spirit of solidarity—and by this example to help promote world peace.

7. The Fundamental Principles inspire the pattern of action and influence the results, in conformity with the Red Cross ideals and doctrine ³¹

To draw inspiration from the principles we must recognize that they constitute a whole and cannot be taken piece by piece or be applied retroactively to justify an action already taken. Too often, certain Red Cross activities, although not actually violating the principles, fail to comply with them in their entirety.

³⁰ Twenty-fifth International Conference of the Red Cross, Geneva, 1986, *Resolution XXXI*.

³¹ In 1921, the ICRC adopted four principles: Charity, Universality, Independence and Impartiality. In 1946, the League adopted these and added thirteen other fundamental principles and six "Rules for Application". In 1948, the International Conference of the Red Cross adopted ten conditions for the recognition of National Societies. In 1952, the International Conference of the Red Cross adopted four tenets: universality, impartiality, independence and equality. In 1955, Jean Pictet published a book entitled *Red Cross Principles* and the International Conference of the Red Cross in 1965 at Vienna adopted the "Fundamental Principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality".

In order to treat them as a whole, we have to consider these principles as an ideal that we should strive to attain, as guidelines enabling us to prepare ourselves for action and, finally, as a code of conduct for all Red Cross activities. If they are not understood in these three aspects, disturbing lapses may occur, false interpretations and incorrect actions may result, leading to doubt and uncertainty.

8. Conclusion

As we said at the outset, the proposed definition is not the result of a purely intellectual exercise but is rather readjustment of traditional views.

If we wish to evaluate recent results, especially in terms of the Strategy for the Eighties, we have to carry out a detailed analysis. Even in the absence of such a study, it is nevertheless possible to say that we have never before devoted so much effort to improving our structures and so much time to training National Society personnel. Never have we had at hand so many development plans prepared by these Societies and—an extremely important phenomenon—never before have we “delegated” such powers to participating Societies.

In the immediate future we have to tackle two problems. First, everything referred to above must be programmed, planned and scheduled, preferably at the regional level. Then, to coordinate efforts by participating and operating Societies, and bearing in mind that several systems have been tried with greater or less success, we shall now have to concentrate on mechanisms for autonomous decision-making by the Societies seeking assistance.

We must recognize that only by developing and perfecting the National Societies' organic structures will it be possible to evolve policies from the base upward, thus creating an endogenous system of decision-making which is the ultimate aim of development geared to self-reliance.

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