

### **The problem of the criteria and policies for defining cooperation priorities**

An examination of the methods, flows, and patterns of cooperation, and in particular facts such as the influence of bilateralism, the specialization or geographic concentration of cooperation flows, and their poor diversification, shows that they are only a result of one of the main features characteristic of cooperation within and from the Red Cross Movement such as lack of clarity and the nonapplication of generally accepted policies, criteria, standards, and procedures for development cooperation, whether required or indicative. This has had other consequences, however, which we will mention in this and the following conclusions. Perhaps the most obvious has been that, given the shortcomings in criteria and policies, and in a predominantly bilateral framework, priorities are largely defined by donors. As we will see, this has led to certain significantly unbalanced patterns of institutional development. Other, no less important consequences have been the lessened impact and effectiveness of cooperation, frequent lack of coordination, the sometimes inadequate adaptation of cooperation to the needs of a National Society or situations of greater vulnerability in a country, or the lack of relationship which in a few instances has existed between the amount of cooperation received by the different National Societies and their greater or lesser needs for development support and assistance. A very significant fact in relation to such questions has been the strong effect disasters and emergencies have had on a National Society, which previously fell outside the channels and flows of cooperation, when it is "discovered" by donors and fully included in such flows, there to remain long after the phase of rehabilitation.

There are numerous situations which support these statements. Among programs and services we note, for example, the very complex and costly medical and hospital programs (such as blood banks) which have been decisively stimulated by external cooperation. Even taking into

account in this instance the importance of the altruistic donation of blood to prevent its commercialization, varied sectors in National Societies have questioned its relevance under socio-economic circumstances characterized by general poverty and the existence of large vulnerable population groups which lack any kind of care. As for recipient countries, there are National Societies operating in difficult national contexts which experience heavy demands for humanitarian action but despite that have received less cooperation than other National Societies whose countries have higher levels of income and relative development. Finally, as for the institutional development needs of the National Societies, we should note that some of them, in need of strong support to consolidate themselves as organizations, were on the periphery of the decade's major currents of cooperation. In some cases, however, this situation was due to the strong internal conflicts that some such National Societies experienced.

A manifestation of this, which can be seen clearly in development appeals, is that on many occasions the weakest Societies are those that, just because of their weakness, have a smaller number of projects and whose viability is more uncertain because of their lesser ability to absorb and implement external assistance. Those which are relatively more developed, with planning departments or project offices and more cooperation experience, are those which in contrast have been more able to mobilize external financing and create greater confidence among donors. This is obviously reflected in their greater presence in development appeals.

The problem of defining cooperation criteria and priorities and correctly allocating resources on the basis of aptly identified priorities and demands has to do not only with relations between donors and recipients of assistance. The Study showed that this problem also occurs, with similar if not greater intensity, in Societies that receive cooperation, and specifically between central headquarters and management, on one hand, and the branches on the other. In particular, it was observed that in most of the

National Societies the branches, or in a few instances certain operational departments, voiced the problem by questioning the exclusive competence of the headquarters in this sphere and asking for direct channels of communication and dialogue with donors

That the central headquarters should be the exclusive channel for communication with donors is considered correct from the formal viewpoint, enables it to be effective and is a precondition for making fluid communication possible, but it is compatible with both centralized models of decision making and cooperation as well as decentralized models. It has been observed that in many National Societies the internal process of reaching decisions about identifying projects and distributing resources is not only very centralized but also is not based on objective criteria, clear development priorities, or well-defined and explicit policies, and informal procedures and a lack of transparency in this regard predominate. As we noted above, branches or certain departments are often marginalized from cooperation resources or their proposals are not given consideration when sent to headquarters. At times it was observed that the allocation of resources responded basically to a power structure favoring the headquarters or specific departments or branches and not to their development needs, from which it may be concluded that in terms of operations and development they are of little or no effectiveness.

These problems only began to be corrected at the start of the 1990s with approval of the "Principles and Norms for Red Cross and Red Crescent Cooperation in Development"<sup>10</sup> at the end of 1990. The procedures provided for in the "Principles and Norms," particularly the Frameworks and Contracts for development cooperation, include the participation of the Federation, in addition to the operating and participating National Societies, in a contractual scheme of cooperation which defines the role of each more exactly and could be called "multi-bilateral." The National Society's development priorities, internally defined beforehand in a Plan of Development or similar mechanism, would provide clear guidelines within the logic of the "Principles and

Norms" for cooperation and assignment of resources, both within a Society and with respect to donors, congruent with the needs of the country, the role played by the Red Cross and other agents (Government, NGOs) in social development, and the operational capacity and resources of the National Society. In support of the development assumptions and the rationale of the "Principles and Norms," it is significant that the Study revealed that the problem noted above occurs much less often in certain National Societies which have more developed planning systems and more decentralized decision-making procedures.

Accordingly, the Decision on "Support of National Societies which most need to improve their capacity," adopted at the Federation's VIII General Assembly in 1992<sup>11</sup> is also noteworthy. In the same vein as the "Principles and Norms," this Decision recommends that priorities for providing assistance to National Societies be based on criteria such as the situation of and trends in poverty in the population of the country in question, the number of particularly vulnerable persons among the poor, and, at the same time, the National Society's present and future ability to deal with such needs, carry out programs, and make use of international support.

Up to now, however, very few National Societies in Latin America and the Caribbean have drawn up their Frameworks of Cooperation, and in addition many such Societies have been unable to do so or at least formulate them correctly because they did not previously prepare a Plan of Development or similar planning instrument. In addition, many National Societies do not have adequate human resources to do so, since this is an area in which a considerable assistance and cooperation effort is needed.

### **The impact of cooperation on institutional development**

As noted above, external financing often represents a very significant proportion of the

revenues of a National Society and sometimes considerably exceeds them. This obviously has a significant effect on institutional development. Thanks to external cooperation, a National Society may grow well above the threshold of what it can sustain in personnel, programs, and services when its ability to raise funds or generate revenue does not grow at the same rate. In such cases it is usually very hard to maintain what has been achieved (especially if the withdrawal of funds occurs in a very short time) once cooperation has been withdrawn. This is true of those Societies which, involved in very intense armed conflicts such as El Salvador and Nicaragua, have received large amounts of financial and material support from the ICRC. In both cases, for example, maintaining present levels of personnel or ambulance fleets, which have grown in great measure due to the ICRC's direct contributions, entails heavy operating expenses which are beyond the financial capacity of the National Society after the conflict has ended, the ICRC withdraws, and its support thus ends. This problem, which worries both National Societies, has also occurred in Paraguay. The large investments in infrastructure and equipment for the National Society's hospital in that country, as well as construction of a new hospital, financed by the Spanish Red Cross, not only reinforce a pattern of unbalanced development but will also entail heavy equipment and maintenance expenditures in the future whose financing by the Paraguayan Red Cross is still uncertain.

In other instances it has not been unusual for an area which received external funds to grow disproportionately by fashioning a new organizational structure and redefining relationships and levels of authority and power, as was seen in the Bolivian case, or by orienting the National Society's activities and profile, as happened with the blood banks in Ecuador. For almost a decade that Society had the support of the Bavarian Red Cross (German Red Cross) in setting up a network of blood banks which even today does not meet its operating costs. In all these cases—perhaps the most evident—as well as others, external cooperation has had effects which could

be called distorting. In sum, a clear relationship has been observed between the problem of program imbalance, which was mentioned above, and the situation noted of National Societies which have received the greatest flows of external cooperation, although this relationship cannot be established mechanically since there are National Societies whose profile of activities is characterized by similar imbalances while they are nevertheless on the periphery of the major flows of cooperation, as is true in Venezuela.

### **The increase in external dependence**

As noted in the chapter dealing with financing, external cooperation has come to represent an ever-increasing proportion of the revenues of the National Societies, due to both the increase in external funds and the fall in their own revenues. There are different situations in this regard, however. Some National Societies have adopted an institutional policy of not accepting external cooperation unless it is strictly necessary, as in major disasters or emergencies, or of deliberately limiting its amount to manageable levels defined on the basis of the National Society's own resources. This is true, for example, of the Brazilian, Chilean, and Mexican Red Crosses. Others, in contrast, perceive themselves as recipients of cooperation despite having achieved a great degree of development and financial solvency, which demonstrates how widespread a certain "culture of dependence" is in the region.

In other cases, as we saw, cooperation has not only become the most important individual source of revenue but has come to widely exceed a Society's own revenues. As we noted, in this extreme category are the Belizean Red Cross, the Bolivian Red Cross, and certain Societies in the English-speaking Caribbean, though this situation affects many others, as was reflected in previous pages. In some cases, furthermore, an added effect of "displacement"

or "substitution" has occurred. To the extent that external funds have been available, their own efforts at traditional fund-raising, which are costly in human resources and often of poor yield, have been abandoned without the establishment of new fund-raising systems or methods. As we have already noted in the section on financing, very few cooperation programs have aimed at improving the institution's finances or, having other goals (institutional or service development), have tried to incorporate mechanisms or systems which guarantee future sustainability, with the exception of the programmed and gradual withdrawal of funds, a mechanism which in itself is not a guarantee of future sustainability but only a means to stimulate it. We will not expand on this point since it was dealt with previously.

In this vein, it is significant that a substantial portion of the cooperation projects presented by the National Societies in development appeals do not entail the creation of new services or extraordinary investments but are to maintain existing programs, or in other cases are projects which were created through international cooperation and whose maintenance—due among other things to their high cost—continues to depend on it.

The problem of dependence has to do not only with the volume of funds and their ratio to National Societies' own revenues, but also to the diversity of donors. A certain tendency has been noted to depend, in cases in which the problem of dependence is clearest, on a single large donor. From the viewpoint of operating Societies there is a greater degree of diversification in those Societies which have also been the main recipients of assistance, such as the Societies in Bolivia, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua; Costa Rica and Uruguay are exceptions. This diversity is only partial, however. It has been found that in many of the cases cited there is a donor of major importance, while the remainder make only small contributions for specific activities.

External dependence, with all the problems which, as we have seen, it creates, raises serious questions at a time when all data suggest that cooperation with the region is no longer a priority

and is decreasing in a context of international recession which has led to major cutbacks in official development cooperation budgets, as has already occurred in some European countries. This is even more marked in the Red Cross Movement, which is subject to the appeal rationale and thus inclined to redirect financial flows very quickly toward areas or countries where new situations of tension or disaster occur, such as Eastern Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and the former Yugoslavia.

### **The weaknesses and potential of regional cooperation**

Regional cooperation units such as CORI, or subregional ones such as the meetings of presidents and technical seminars of the National Societies in Central America, have been of some importance as a channel for communication, the exchange of experiences, and establishing joint action criteria in fields such as development planning. This has involved mechanisms which scarcely operate in the field of development cooperation, and particularly in the sphere of technical assistance, however. This shortcoming is especially significant if we take into account that it occurs despite the fact that very similar situations and problems are confronted and often similar values and concerns are shared, while at the same time there is a great variety of successful experiences and institutional strengths on which such assistance and cooperation could be based.

It has been pointed out that considerations of prestige are an often insurmountable difficulty to one National Society in the region requesting technical assistance from or providing it to another. Another difficulty is the widespread perception that it is not possible to expect any kind of assistance from the National Societies in the region since only Societies in industrialized countries are considered "donors." This perception has been noted even in some of the region's most developed Societies, which clearly have

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the ability and resources to lend their capacities and experiences to other, weaker Societies.

There are a few exceptions in this field. In disaster situations, some of the region's Societies have responded in solidarity to appeals for relief from neighboring Societies by sending medical teams and various kinds of financial or in-kind aid. Experiences in the field of development are even scarcer, but the support the Colombian Red Cross has provided to various Societies in the planning area, bilaterally and through the Federation, are noteworthy. These exceptions show that there is great potential for cooperation between

the region's National Societies, which can horizontally share their knowledge and positive experiences with Societies that have not yet developed their capacities in similar areas.

Finally, it must be stressed that bilateral or trilateral cooperation between National Societies in countries sharing borders has been very small, though there are geographic areas which belong to two or more countries and share a risk of natural disasters, such as the Plata Basin, or similar social problems, such as Mexican-U S. migration.

## **NATIONAL SOCIETIES' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR PUBLIC IMAGE**

### **The absence of reliable information about public image**

The great sensitivity and concern of the National Societies about their external projection and public image has no relation to attempts to gather up-to-date and reliable information on these matters, whether from independent studies or sources on the one hand or their own serious surveys conducted with rigorous methods on the other. This shortcoming is well known both because it contrasts with the National Societies' statements and because it is common to the great majority of them. As a result, their own image is based above all on subjective and very general perceptions. This has various consequences. First, views about the public image of National Societies are largely unreliable, imprecise, and often biased and orchestrated on the basis of various kinds of interests, among which should be mentioned the prestige inherent to any organization. Second, there is no feedback of the impact of the activities and services provided, which makes evaluation and planning difficult. Third, relevant data are lacking for designing possible publicity, volunteer recruitment, or fund-raising campaigns. Finally, the lack of information helps isolate the National Societies from public opinion and hinders them from adapting their messages or activities to the demands and concerns of the population.

### **The persistent problem of complacency**

Most of the National Societies confirm the existence of image problems of various kinds which affect both the Societies and the Movement as a whole, and which are due to multiple and complex causal factors. In this context, it is

significant that when they identify the causes and problems, the National Societies prefer to note factors outside the institution and deliberately overlook factors or weaknesses in the organization itself in this area. There is, then, a strong resistance to asking questions about factors within the Red Cross itself which determine the external image it projects, especially about the social role the institution plays, the media and channels being employed, or the nature and content of the messages being disseminated. At the same time, most of the National Societies, and especially their leaders, demonstrate great self-esteem and at times a clear overestimate of their role, the meaning and impact of their activities and services, and the extent of their acceptance by the community and public authorities. This leads to the conclusion that complacency, a weakness which was noted almost twenty years ago in the Tansley Report, continues to be a reality in the Red Cross Societies in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Among the most important image problems, which have been mentioned repeatedly by the National Societies in the Study, are difficulties in projecting a broad-reaching, realistic, and pluralistic image to overcome the ignorance of the population or an image linked only to the "emblematic" activities of a National Society (ambulance service, relief, hospitals, or blood banks); an image of closeness to the Government, and negligible familiarity with the institution in the middle and upper social strata which are able to provide funds. The Societies in the English-speaking Caribbean have at times expressed concern about their feminine image, which has a direct bearing on their recruitment of volunteers. Only in a few instances have the leaders or, more often, volunteers and the most advanced branches explicitly noted as broad a problem as the traditionalist, charitable, and

assistance-oriented image which the institution projects.

Among the causes of these image problems which are mentioned repeatedly, with varying emphasis depending on the different National Societies, are the activities of other NGOs, which obscure those of the Red Cross, the use of the emblem by other bodies, the negative attitude of the communication media, difficult access to them or their high cost, lack of public recognition of activities carried out, Government intrusion, and the low cultural level of the population. The importance attached to such factors is a demonstration of one of the most important components of the attitude of complacency: the tendency to assign responsibility for the problem to external factors instead of recognizing the Societies' own weaknesses.

The relationship of these problems to situations which originate in the institution itself is clear, however. Among such situations should be mentioned the orientation and characteristics of the activities and services in relation to the problems of a country, imbalance in programs and consequent specialization in one activity, subordination to or dependence on a Government, the traditional profile of the institution's values and behavior, the restricted social origin of members, and centralization of decision making, which hinders or limits branch publicity activities or campaigns. As for abuse of the emblem, for example, very few National Societies have used publicity or legal measures, or have resorted to the public authorities to guarantee its respect and exclusive use. As we noted above, the National Societies themselves mention such situations only occasionally.

In addition, several Societies have experienced difficult situations which have decisively undermined their image and credibility. On one hand are Societies which have been questioned because of financial irregularities, as in Argentina, and on another are those which have experienced major crises and internal conflicts which have been widely publicized by the communication media and not a few times by the members of the institution themselves, as happened in Gua-

temala, Nicaragua, and Peru. It should be pointed out that, despite the seriousness of such problems in terms of image, some tendency was found to minimize their consequences or importance, as shown by the fact that extraordinary measures have not been adopted to counteract their effects in those instances in which a crisis or irregularities have been resolved or overcome.

### **The weakness of publicity and image activities and units**

An internal weakness on whose diagnosis a good number of National Societies agree is the precariousness or absence of departments, plans, or programs dealing with publicity, image-building, and public relations. Although they are found in most organizational structures or development plans, the Societies generally do not have adequate resources or permanent staff. When they exist they are rarely communications professionals. Societies such as the Colombian, Costa Rican, and Salvadoran Red Crosses are noteworthy exceptions to this rule. All this helps make publicity activities weak and unsystematic, and, as also happens in fund-raising activities, means that communication strategies are not designed on the basis of heterogeneous and segmented population groups. The use of modern marketing and publicity methods, designed by professionals in that field, is common in only a few of the most developed Societies which are open to modernization. They are not used in other Societies for lack of resources, and in some very localized cases, such as in Chile, they are outrightly rejected on grounds that they do not agree with the Principles or the basic nature of the Red Cross. This traditional interpretation is, however, merely a trait peculiar to a specific organizational culture which reacts against modernization.

We noted above that the lack of cohesion between publicity and image-building campaigns and campaigns to raise funds and recruit volunteers is a factor which helps diminish the impact

and effectiveness of the latter. A contrary problem has occurred in various National Societies, however: subordination of publicity and image-building campaigns to fund raising. An example is the strong and continuing campaigns which the Costa Rican Red Cross conducts via the press, radio, and television.

A final matter to be noted in this section has to do with the conceptualization, focus, or content of the campaigns conducted by most National Societies. When they do not directly involve fund raising or dissemination of the Red Cross's Principles, they are usually a vehicle for messages related to programs dealing with disaster preparedness, AIDS or drug abuse prevention, voluntary blood donation promotion, or, in situations of conflict or violence, diffusion and promotion of International Humanitarian Law. This very kind of approach can be used—in a rationale of social promotion—to sensitize society and call the attention of public authorities to the situation of vulnerable groups which are being neglected such as street children, the abandoned elderly, or groups living in extreme poverty, or to promote respect for human rights. In this vein, it must be noted that promoting the Principles of the Red Cross may be done through campaigns to publicize these and other situations by avoiding their publicity in a general or abstract way remote from real and immediate problems of vulnerability existing in a national context. This is related to one of the conclusions mentioned earlier, specifically the scant attention paid to social promotion and the overvaluation of the Principles of neutrality and independence.

### **Improving public relations: a solution to image problems?**

For most of the National Societies in Latin America and the Caribbean, as has become clear, image problems may be solved by improving the human, technical, and financial resources of public relations and information departments and information and image-building campaigns. Still, though this identification between means and ends

is correct in the short run, it must be pointed out that improving an image is only possible in the medium and long run if a National Society is really independent, provides services important to the community on the basis of its most urgent problems, such services are efficient, efficacious, and broad-based and their administration and use of funds is transparent, and, finally, that there is coherence between talk and practice. In other words, it is impossible to dissociate—as often occurs—a National Society's general activities from any image-improvement activities being carried out. Such efforts need to go hand in hand with a process of general improvement, but if they are dissociated from reality the result may be an image which is difficult to maintain and in the end is discredited in the public mind.

### **The effect of emergencies on the institutional image**

The disasters and emergencies which have occurred in various countries in the region have had varied effects on the image of the National Societies. Those Societies which have been able to respond quickly and effectively to operational challenges stemming from a disaster have noticed a significant improvement in their image and credibility in the communication media, public opinion, and Government. Among the most recent instances we might cite, as an example, the Nicaraguan Red Cross, whose response to the eruption of the Cerro Negro volcano and the tidal wave on the Pacific coast, both in 1992, led to appreciable improvement of an image weakened by a long institutional crisis.

Some disasters and emergencies, through appeals or other cooperation mechanisms, have resulted in a major flow of resources to the National Societies involved. This has had effects on the image which the affected Societies' members unhesitatingly call negative. In particular, an image has been created of a prosperous and powerful organization rich in resources which does not need local help, which has had



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negative effects on fund-raising ability. Added to this mistaken image is confusion in public opinion as to the different parts of the Movement (Federation, ICRC, the National Society) in places where they operate together, as happened in El Salvador

and Nicaragua. The profusion and wealth of resources customarily at the disposal of ICRC delegations, contrasted to the daily shortages facing local National Societies, contribute powerfully to this image problem.

## SOURCES

1. These are collected in the document *Contribution of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to respect of human rights*. Geneva, Commission on the Red Cross, Red Crescent and Peace, 1989.
2. League of Red Cross Societies. *Estrategia para el decenio de los ochenta*. Geneva, League of Red Cross Societies, 1981, p. 8.
3. International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *Strategic Plan of Work for the Nineties, 1992 updated version (Approved by the XXX Meeting of the Executive Committee, Córdoba, May 7, 1992)*, Geneva, IFRC, 1992, p. 14.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
5. Among others, see point 139 in the Strategy of the League for the Eighties, in League of Red Cross Societies 1981, p. 14, and chapter V in the Strategic Plan for the Nineties (Updated 1992 Version), in International Federation 1992, p. 21.
6. The Tansley Report of 1975 noted a lack of planning and evaluation as one of the Movement's main weaknesses. See Donald D. Tansley, *Final report: An agenda for the Red Cross*, Geneva, ICRC/League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 1975, p. 48.
7. League of Red Cross Societies 1981, pp. 8-9.
8. League of Red Cross Societies 1981, p. 8.
9. In the Movement's terminology, "Participating Society" means one that contributes assistance, while an "Operating Society" is a local National Society which receives the assistance.
10. Approved by the Executive Council at its 26th meeting, in Geneva on October 24, 1990.
11. Decision 22 of the VIII General Assembly of the Federation.