



Micronesia Red Cross*

Founded:	1998
Members/volunteers:	1,421 (2001)
Staff:	5 (2001)
Expenditure:	CHF 227,705

1. National context

The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) is a young nation, which achieved its independence in 1979, reached an agreement with the United States for a 15-year Compact of Free Association in 1986, and joined the United Nations in 1991. It consists of 607 islands with a total land mass of 436 square kilometres that are spread over approximately 1,609,000 square kilometres in the western Pacific Ocean. These 607 islands vary in size from small islets and atolls to the largest volcanic islands of about 80 square kilometres, lying between 1 degree South and 14 degrees North latitude, and between 135 West and 166 East longitude. Approximately 65 of these islands are inhabited. The most striking and pervasive physical characteristics of the FSM are the smallness and wide dispersion of the land area and the great expanse of water that separates these clusters of small islands. These two factors have always been obstacles to trade and mobility. The matter of logistics must, therefore, be considered in every enterprise undertaken in the FSM. Most of the inhabited islands are accessible, however, by ships and the main islands by air.

The FSM is a democratic country with a national government supporting four relatively autonomous state governments: Chuuk, Pohnpei, Yap and Kosrae. The capital is in Pohnpei where the national headquarters of the Micronesia Red Cross Society is situated. The country's government is modelled after the federal system of the United States with a national president and four state governors with respective legislatures and judiciaries. The main industries of FSM are agriculture, fisheries and tourism. As a developing nation with limited resources, the health sector and education are two areas needing additional attention and resources.

The islands are prone to a variety of climatic changes, and the effects of 1997 El Niño caused severe drought and related problems. In addition, typhoons, mudslides and other natural disasters are also frequent in these islands.

Capital:	Palikir, Pohnpei
Population:	107,008 (2000)
GNP per capita:	US\$ 1,800 (1998)
Life expectancy:	66 years (1997)
Infant mortality rate:	20 per 1,000 live births (1997)
Adult literacy rate:	81 per cent (1995)

2. Foundation

Mission

The fundamental mission of the Micronesia Red Cross (MRC) is to "provide assistance to those in need without discrimination; and to prevent and alleviate human suffering". Its purpose is to "protect life, improve health and ensure respect for the human being".

The MRC is a society still "in formation" and is guided by the Fundamental Principles and statutes of the International Federation. It also works in close collaboration and consultation with other well-established societies in the Pacific region through the International Federation's regional delegation in Suva, Fiji.

Legal base

The MRC constitution and bylaws were adopted in February 1998 and the MRC was formally chartered in April of the same year, but the fledgling society became the largest NGO in the FSM. On 15 June 2000 at its eleventh congress, the FSM national congress adopted a resolution which recognized the Micronesia Red Cross as the only Red Cross society in the country and the only one authorized to use the Red Cross emblem.

The society is working towards full recognition by the ICRC to be a member of the International Federation. A formal request to this effect was submitted in June 2001; however, the joint commission of the ICRC and International Federation found the society's constitution and bylaws to be wanting in some critical areas. A delegation from the joint commission is visited the National Society in late April 2002 to witness on-site the progress made thus far.

Constituency

The chairman of the board, who also served as chairman of its executive committee, led the society as it moved towards realizing its governing structure as set forth in its constitution. The three-year terms of office of the members of the first board of directors expired in December 2000, which necessitated another election for the new members. The election was held in December 2000 resulting in six members returning and five new members. National coverage was initially confined to

Pohnpei, the location of the MRC national office. However, this had been extended to include Kosrae chapter, Pohnpei chapter and Yap chapter, with an interim committee covering Chuuk state, thus increasing coverage to all the states of the country.

As of May 2001, there were 1,421 active members in the society (811 in Pohnpei; 225 in Kosrae; 224 in Yap; and 161 in Chuuk), an increase of 1,260 since the founding of the society in 1998.

During 2000, the society assisted 1,200 beneficiaries in connection with disaster relief, elderly services, the sick and injured and families of FSM citizens serving in the US Armed Forces.

The MRC has five full-time staff to oversee programmes and activities throughout the country. These include the executive director, a senior programme officer; a youth programme officer, a field officer and a finance officer. Volunteers are involved in programme implementation, supporting full-time staff. The MRC has also begun its efforts to include some of the smaller outlying islands into the main state chapters, especially in the state of Yap. Since the effectiveness of the MRC blood-donation registry programme depends on a large number of participants throughout the country, the MRC aims to have most of the 107,008 citizens and other resident aliens as subscribing members. The society encourages the participation of the foreign community members including those in the diplomatic corps and other foreign businesses present in country.

3. Capacity

Leadership

At the country level, the board of directors, which is comprised of 11 members, two members representing each of the four states, guides the society and three are at-large members. Four of the 11 members are officers, i.e., chairman, vice chairman, treasurer and secretary. One of the at-large members is the first lady of the country who is also the honorary president of the society. By virtue of her status, she could play an invaluable intermediary role between the society and other local and regional organizations. The other members hold chairmanships and membership of the various standing committees of the board, which include programme development; blood-donation service; disaster preparedness and emergency relief; membership drive; and finance and fund-raising. An executive director, hired in February 2001 provides the day-to-day management of the national headquarters with the support of four full-time equivalent staff. Each state chapter of the society has an advisory council, which oversees the overall operation and management of its activities.

The society is required by its bylaws to hold its annual general membership meeting (AGM) no later than the last week of February of each year. The fourth AGM was held on Pohnpei on 24 February 2001.

Human resources

From 1998 to February 2001, the chairman of the executive committee functioned as an unpaid executive director. The executive director's position was filled, however, on 12 February 2001 and the incumbent works under the direct leadership of the chairman of the board of directors. The MRC, led by the executive director, has four other full-time paid staff. When Pohnpei state experienced a cholera outbreak, which reached epidemic proportions in May to August 2000, over 100 volunteers were mobilized and trained to visit the communities to teach and disseminate information on cholera prevention. In addition, members of the board of directors, chairpersons of the standing committees and other volunteers participate in the work of the organization.

Financial resources

The MRC is still in its early stages of development. As such, its annual projected cost of operation of CHF 110,000 needs to be modified. In the 1999 fiscal year, MRC received locally CHF 31,000 in its unrestricted fund category and maintained a balance of CHF 14,000 in a restricted account (emergency relief). In addition, the MRC has received contributions or pledges of approximately CHF 111,000 in overseas grants (cash and goods).

Fund-raising strategies being implemented include collection boxes at major hotels and restaurants, a membership drive, fund-raising dinners and direct appeals to local and international companies based in Micronesia and individuals who have lived there. After the February 2001 first-aid cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) training, one of the state chapters began commercializing the training module and has, so far, generated slightly more than CHF 1,500. The society still does not have access to first-aid kits, which complement the first-aid training and could also be sold to interested parties.

Material resources

At present, the society does not own any buildings. By an agreement reached between the Society and the leaders of the Pohnpei congressional delegation to the FSM congress, the society occupies office space with an adjoining conference room in the FSM congress Pohnpei delegation building in Kolonia, Pohnpei. The office space would cost the society about CHF 2,300 a month if it had to pay rent.

Through a development fund, donated by the Kanagawa chapter of the Japanese Red Cross, the society was able to purchase office supplies and materials, furniture and equipment for its headquarters and three chapters of

Kosrae, Pohnpei and Yap. Equipment includes desktop computers (monitors, keyboards, printers, and accessories), fax machines, VCR, TV monitors, overhead projector, portable movie screen, etc. Fixed assets include four air conditioners, one at Kosrae chapter and three at the national office. Office furniture includes office desks with drawers, executive and secretarial chairs, filing cabinets, living room set, foldable tables, two large conference tables, etc. The Kanagawa chapter also donated two mini-vans to the MRCS, one of which is used by the national office/headquarters while the other one was donated to Kosrae chapter. The Kanagawa chapter has also provided, together with the Tokyo chapter of the Japanese Red Cross and through the International Federation's regional delegation in Suva, three disaster containers in Pohnpei, Yap and Kosrae in support of the National Society's disaster preparedness and relief assistance programme.

Organization/planning

The MRC is structured along the general guidelines set out in its constitution and bylaws. In the first year, the board of directors and its standing committees took on the task of policy development, programme development and implementation. With a centralized office and staff, these paid staffs are now coordinating activities at the national level. The MRC also enjoys a cadre of members with experiences in a variety of fields who are active members of the national standing committees – disaster and emergency relief, programme development, fund-raising and membership. The four state chapters are also the MRC programme delivery channels and officers of the state advisory councils comprise a director, deputy director, treasurer and a secretary. As of 2001, Kosrae chapter was the only chapter with a paid programme officer.

Partnerships

The MRC has received support from the International Federation and participating National Societies including the Japanese Red Cross. Other partners include the New Zealand Red Cross, which assisted MRC in training its first-aid trainers. During the cholera outbreak in Pohnpei in 2000, the Australian Red Cross detailed one health delegate through the Pacific regional delegation in Suva to assist the MRC in its efforts to help the government contain the epidemic. The delegate also assisted the society with its outreach education programme, the launching of the international appeal, and distribution of water containers. The American Red Cross purchased radios that were used to improve communication between the volunteers in the field and the national office and also donated the water containers that were distributed throughout the island. Other societies and organizations also responded to the international appeal launched by the International Federation, and donated monetary assistance, medical supplies and other goods. These include AusAID and the American, Icelandic, Japanese, Korean and Swedish

Red Cross. The International Federation also assisted the government with a cholera kit. At the country level, the national government is also seeking to obtain FSM congressional appropriation for annual donations to the Movement.

4. Performance

Activities

Relief

The MRC participated in relief operations after mudslides in 1997 destroyed many homes and killed more than 20 people in Pohnpei state. On three separate occasions, it took care of fishermen from other Pacific nations whose boats were lost at sea and who were hospitalized in FSM. It dealt with them during their recovery and arranged and paid for their return to their home islands. In 1999, the society distributed food items to drought-stricken atolls in the outer islands of Pohnpei, Chuuk and Yap.

Disaster preparedness

The role of the Micronesia Red Cross is outlined in some of the states' emergency preparedness and response manuals. Efforts are under way to work with the four state and national governments to identify specific areas where the society can be most effective in its assistance. A disaster preparedness planning workshop, funded by the Kanagawa chapter of the Japanese Red Cross, is scheduled for early 2002 and aims to teach participants how to prepare for and respond to disaster.

First aid

In 1999, 17 people were trained at a community first-aid and CPR workshop to develop and deliver MRC programmes in first aid to Micronesian communities. Each of the four FSM states had at least two trained individuals (ten in Pohnpei state) to develop this programme for their respective state chapters. A retraining in 2001 certified seven trainers and five assistant trainers. Pohnpei chapter trainers began commercializing its first aid/CPR course and, in 2001, trained 48 US Peace Corps volunteers and 100 teachers and staff who are part of the "Head Start" programme (a US federally funded pre-school programme). Another first aid/CPR course will be held for teachers of a private school on Pohnpei.

Blood

The MRC blood-donation registry, while in early stages of development, has been used by local hospitals in Pohnpei, Kosrae and Yap to identify and source potential blood donors for surgical and other procedures. In 2001, MRC members and volunteers donated more than 200 pints of blood. It is expected that with a larger number of members (potential donors) in its database and inter-linked to the four state chapters by a computer network, the MRC will provide a much-needed service

to the hospitals throughout the country as well as during disaster situations when blood donation is required.

Social welfare

As many of the citizens of FSM are enlisted the US military, in 1999 the society began coordinating with the American Red Cross to forward information to enlisted soldiers about illness of their family members and to help them return to the islands, if necessary, in the event of family death and serious illness. From 1999 to December 2001, MRC has been involved in more than 100 requests in this regard. MRC has also conducted food delivery programmes to bedridden patients in the Pohnpei hospital.

Dissemination

The Fundamental Principles and mission of the Movement have been discussed during the last four annual meetings of members and potential members. Information pamphlets are provided to new members. However, to date, the MRC has not conducted any humanitarian law training.

Relevance/effectiveness

As a society in formation and still developing its operational structure, the MRC is operating and delivering some of its programmes effectively, given its limited resources in the areas of financing, human resources and guidance. ■