

# Population movement and the Chittagong Hill Tracts development programme

## Repeating the BPI analysis by the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society

On 2 December 1997, the Bangladeshi government and Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (Chittagong Hill Tracts People's Solidarity Association) signed an agreement officially ending almost 25 years of conflict, which had claimed some 25,000 lives. The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) had previously been involved in relief activities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), but became more active in the postaccord period, providing relief to large numbers of tribal refugees returning from India. The Bengali population, however, viewed these activities negatively. For them, the BDRCS was partial towards the tribal population and supported their resettlement, which had political consequences for the region.

In 1999 the BDRCS decided to use the "Better Programming Initiative" (BPI), the conflict-sensitive approach to programming adopted by the International Federation in 1998, to plan a new CHT development programme. BPI would help to identify how to use assistance to increase local communities' capacities to work together and promote long-term recovery and reconciliation. In 2004, interviews, community meetings, workshops and a questionnaire survey were carried out to analyse the impact of using BPI.

### Dividers and connectors

Workshops in 1999 identified dividers including:

- ethnicity;
- regional political control;
- land access;
- inequality;
- religion and
- culture.

Connectors included shared interest in health, education and other social services, shared need for public utilities, shared belief in democratic process, mutual respect for tradition, shared desire for peace and sports events.

The BPI methodology applies five analytical steps:

- **Context analysis:** Identify and prioritize the division ("dividers") and cohesion ("connectors") that characterize the context.
- **Aid programme description:** Describe planned actions in detail: why, where, what, when, with whom, by whom and, most importantly, how aid is being offered.
- **Impact identification:** Will aid reinforce or weaken dividers and connectors? Aid has an impact through its material consequences (e.g., how its distribution affects existing inequalities and divisions in society) and its symbolic consequences (e.g., who it legitimizes or delegitimizes).
- **Options:** For each impact identified, brainstorm programming options that will reinforce positive and decrease negative impacts.
- **Repeat the analysis:** Contexts change rapidly, as do constraints and opportunities for aid programming. Analysis should be updated as frequently as the project cycle permits.

In 2004, ethnic origin is still a divider and "lack of trust and past history" was often referred to in the surveys. Long after the ceasefire and the peace accord, distrust and suspicion still exist. BPI analysis attempts to provide options that do not exacerbate the problem and, hopefully, give opportunities for positive cooperation.



A community meeting

Improvements have definitely taken place in the CHT over the past five years. Religion and culture, for example, no longer divide; the two communities increasingly participate together in festivals and cultural events. Greater cooperation also exists in terms of business and trade links (The separate implementation of CHT development Programme and CBDP programme in CHT is seen as a potential divider).

In 1999, the Bengali community considered that not only was the BDRCS biased in favour of tribal people, who were the sole recipients of BDRCS assistance, but also the tribal population's return affected the region's demographic and political balance. After BPI analysis, the BDRCS developed a programme based on need to assist the most vulnerable members of both populations. The programme also focused on bringing the communities together and thus having a positive effect on reconciliation. In 2004, both tribal and Bengali communities said they consider the BDRCS a connector.

### **BPI: a helping hand towards reconciliation**

The 1999 BPI workshops provided a neutral space in which both communities could participate. They helped to change their relationship, moving them away from suspicion and hatred towards mutual understanding and cooperation. The subsequent BDRCS CHT development programme successfully built upon this foundation. Programme projects that strengthen connectors and weaken dividers include: water and sanitation activities (communities share village wells); income-generation activities (shared trade and business links have been strengthened); disaster preparedness and health activities



*Discussions during a 2004 BPI workshop with community based volunteers.*

(villagers discuss common concerns at community meetings and are united in their fight against disease and disaster). Disseminating Red Cross Red Crescent principles and humanitarian values has also helped community reconciliation. Villagers and BDRCS volunteers say relations between the Bengali and tribal populations are better in areas where the BDRCS is working than in those where it is not.

At the start of the CHT programme, the BDRCS trained 600 volunteers in first aid and the Movement's fundamental principles and humanitarian values. Some went on to be trained as community-based health or disaster preparedness workers. They organize meetings – neutral spaces where the two communities can discuss issues together – and activities around these core sectors. Two BDRCS health workers, Masanu Rakain (of tribal origin) and Bengali Naseema Sultan, say things have definitely improved. Neither was accepted at first by the other community. But they gradually gained their confidence and now work for those in need, regardless of the community they come from.

### **Conclusion**

The BDRCS's CHT development programme still responds to the humanitarian needs of a population on the move due to conflict.

By applying options identified in the 1999 workshops, the Bengali community's former, widespread perception that the BDRCS was biased in favour of the tribal population has been effectively corrected. Also, in the areas where it is carried out, the programme has had a positive impact on reconciliation. Using BPI to identify better programming options in the CHT to reduce the negative effects of aid has, therefore, been successful.

The BDRCS's efforts to assist vulnerable people in the CHT are now well recognized among both tribal and non-tribal communities. It is probably the only organization in the area that has unrestricted access to the entire region, works with all sectors of society and enjoys such universal respect.

These positive outcomes represent a strong testimony to the success of BPI.

**For more information, please contact:**

#### **Bangladesh Red Crescent Society**

G.P.O. Box 579  
Dhaka-Bangladesh  
E-mail: bdracs@bangla.net

#### **International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies**

P.O. Box 372  
CH-1211 Geneva 19 - Switzerland  
E-mail: secretariat@ifrc.org  
Web site: www.ifrc.org