

IRAN: DROUGHT SUPPORT TO AFGHAN REFUGEES

3 July 2001

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period covered: 15 February 2001 - 15 June 2001

The Red Crescent Society of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRCS) is being supported in its efforts to address the needs of ever increasing number of Afghan refugees by the International Federation and partner agencies. Initial delays in the implementation of the water distribution programme were overcome during the reporting period and 20,000 beneficiaries per day are now being supplied with fresh water. The activities under the waste disposal component and health campaigns also intensified.

The context

The widespread drought which has been affecting large areas of the Caucasus, South Asia and Central Asia over the last three years is continuing to take its toll in Iran. In order to help meet the considerable needs, on 22 August 2000, the International Federation launched an appeal for CHF 2,268,146 to provide assistance to 100,000 beneficiaries for a twelve-month period. The objectives of the appeal are as follows:

- increase the water supply to Zahedan and Zabul camps which accommodate Afghan refugees, together with surrounding urban and rural areas, as appropriate and feasible;
- carry out community based sanitation campaigns in the camps; and,
- establish a community based preventive health care scheme and promote hygiene awareness.

Latest events

Although the winter season brought slightly more precipitation in the mountains, the Hirmand river which feeds Zabul and the surrounding area has been totally dry since March because the Kajaki dam on the Afghani side of the border has been closed, creating a situation worse than the two previous years. The Iranian government has given some support to the worst affected farmers in the region since it wants to encourage people to stay in their villages.

The situation in Afghanistan has brought an increased influx of refugees, prompting the Iranian authorities to tighten border controls and introduce a much stricter treatment of Afghan refugees who do not hold official residence permits.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Water Distribution •

The operation is being implemented by the IRCS, with support from the Federation in an advisory, monitoring role. During the reporting period, the national society's provincial branch has:

- made water purchase agreements with the wells in Zahedan. (At present, two wells are used for all vehicles. At the main well all vehicles are entitled to fill their water tanks twice; at the secondary well vehicles can fill their tanks once only. A third well at a distance of 85 kilometres from Zahedan is used only by one truck with a larger capacity (30,000 litres). In Zabul one well is used and provides all the water required.)
- continuously provided information to private water distributors about the project;
- identified, constructed and set up 12 water distribution points (fixed tanks) in Zahedan (nine with a capacity of 20,000 l, one with a capacity of 15,000 l and two with a capacity of 5,000 l);
- identified, constructed and set up seven water distribution points (fixed tanks) in Zabul (four with a capacity of 20,000 l and three with a capacity of 5,000 l)

It has also acquired four new trucks with 5,000-litre capacity for the programme; two trucks with 15,000 l capacity and one truck with 30,000 l capacity, leased for the programme from other branches of the national society. Seven trucks with 15,000 l capacity were also leased for the programme from other branches of the IRCS (three of which are in operation in Zabul).

In addition, 10 new tractors purchased for the programme are towing water tanks with a capacity of 5,000 litres each, distributing water directly to the beneficiaries. They serve areas with narrow alleys, where trucks have difficulty getting through.

On a daily basis (except Fridays) the total quantity distributed is at least 400,000 litres. The entire fleet makes on average two trips daily and the distributions thus reach at least 20,000 families per day. In the "non camp settlement" in Zahedan most of the beneficiaries can access saline water which can be used for cleaning and washing; hence the freshwater is used mainly for consumption.

The water distribution has been meeting the targeted number of beneficiaries for a couple of months already because a larger number of vehicles than originally planned was put into operation during the "dry" period. Unfortunately it has not been possible to undertake five distributions per day during the summer season, because of the time needed to queue for water and to transport and distribute to the fixed tanks (or direct to beneficiaries): this takes some four hours per trip in Zahedan. The capacity will be increased when new vehicles and pumps are delivered. Delivery of the remaining six trucks should take place shortly.

Generally the delivery of capital equipment, i.e. trucks, tractors, and tankers from Tehran, has been slow, mostly because production of the tankers was carried out in IRCS workshops which could offer favourable tariffs but low capacity. Other difficulties which have hampered the programme

implementation were the late arrival of funds and delays in the employment of a reporting/monitoring delegate, which took place in January 2001. Furthermore, at local level, resources for the effective management of an operation of this scale were limited. Since March a local coordinator has been employed in Zahedan. A local monitor was hired to test the pH level and the amount of chlorine in the water in each vehicle. A mobile monitor on a motorbike was also employed since April, surveying all the vehicles and the distribution points.

The late start of water distribution in Zabul was due to failed promises given to the national society regarding distribution by the Zabul water department. In February, the decision was taken to implement the initial plan; seven distribution points are now in operation and another two have been identified.

During April and May, 20-litre plastic jerrycans were distributed to beneficiaries in Karimabad and Shirabad, selected by the elders as being the most vulnerable in the area. So far, 4,983 jerrycans have been distributed. A similar distribution will be done soon in Zabul.

Now that guards live close to the distribution places, the problems occurring in the past, namely the destruction caused by dismantling of the taps and destroying the pipes on the fixed water tanks in Zahedan, has stopped. The harassment of the truck drivers by private water distributors, who previously were the only providers of fresh water to the beneficiaries, has virtually ended.

Currently, the main difficulty is the limited water supply. This creates long queuing times for all the vehicles. The wells are yielding only a fraction (25 per cent) of what can be achieved in late winter and spring. To reduce the queuing time, three different wells (two not public) are being used. During the summer, however, each vehicle is authorized to be loaded only once. A new agreement will be signed, giving the IRCS the privilege of filling the vehicles' tanks twice. In Zabul two different wells are being used, mainly due to the great distance between the distribution points and some of the furthest villages.

The purchase price of well water has lately increased sharply, from 3 IRR to 5 IRR per litre (about 6.25 USD per 10,000 l.). The original plan, to obtain ten 20,000-litre trucks, was changed to four trucks with a capacity of 5,000 l and nine with a capacity of 15,000 l. The change is partly for practical reasons, and also takes into account the cost savings achieved by production in the workshops of the IRCS.

Delayed transfers of funds, internationally from Geneva to Iran, from Tehran to the Zahedan branch and from the branch office to Zabul, were a major obstacle causing late payment of staff salaries and delays in the delivery of the six remaining trucks, still awaited from the manufacturer.

Solid Waste Disposal •

A major clean up started in November in both Karimabad and Shirabad in Zahedan. (The areas in Zabul are not included in the programme as the villages do not have a large scale problem).

Ten Afghan community workers were employed in January. By mid-February the number had increased to 22, including two drivers. The team is removing solid waste, which is transported by two tractors and trailers to allocated garbage pits outside the camp areas. The tractor and trailers are new and purchased specially for the programme.

The main areas cleaned up by the workers are near to water distribution points. This responsibility will shortly be shifted to the beneficiaries, while the team of workers will clean up other areas. Drainage channels have been constructed at the distribution points and gravel has been put on the ground in order to prevent the soil from becoming waterlogged.

Preventive Health Care (PHC) •

The programme was started by the beginning of March. The national society has made an agreement with the educational section of the public health department in Zahedan. In the first phase, the health department prepared the required printed materials and simultaneously trained and educated the "home

visitors”, who since May have been visiting all the homes of the selected beneficiaries in Karimabad and Shirabad “non-camp refugee-settlements”. During the PHC information effort, hygiene items such as soap are being distributed to the beneficiaries. Each family receives between five and seven bars during the first distribution round. The most vulnerable in the area are being identified during the home visits, and hygiene kits will be distributed to them. In total, 55 home visitors are involved in the campaign. This second phase is scheduled for completion by the end of July. Similar activity on a reduced scale -- with 10 to 12 visitors -- is then planned until the end of 2001.

Outstanding Needs

The appeal is fully covered and there are no outstanding needs.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

Regular meetings are held with UN agencies including the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) which has a sub-office in Zahedan. During March UNHCR and the IRCS signed a memorandum of understanding in order to be in a position to respond to a an influx of refugees from Afghanistan to the regions of Sistan and Baluchistan. Assessments were carried out by the UNHCR, the national society and the Federation delegate of influxes of Afghan refugees into the province, either over the Afghanistan border (which is guarded by military forces) or via the Pakistan border. Up to 700 Afghan refugees daily are estimated to be entering Iran.

Regular meetings were held with some of the donor embassies. Two assessments were done during the period. At the end of June a Federation consultant also made an evaluation of the programme and recommended its continuation and its expansion into the northern province of Khorasan.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The operation, after initial delays, is gaining momentum and all the involved departments at IRCS (both centrally and locally) are doing their utmost to make up for time lost. The quantity of water distributed has gradually increased as newly purchased and leased vehicles plus water-pumps have been put into operation. Considerable savings were made by producing all the water tanks (fixed and mobile) in IRCS workshops, enabling more vehicles to be purchased and covering the lease of vehicles to compensate for the late delivery of the trucks. Although the programme was initially planned to end in September 2001, funds will be sufficient to cover running costs for at least another six months.

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