

PROGRAMME UPDATE



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

MYANMAR

13 May 2003

Appeal No. 01.63/2003

Appeal Target: CHF 1,536,834

Programme Update No. 1; Period covered: January to March, 2003

The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 180 countries. For more information: www.ifrc.org

In Brief

Appeal coverage: 26.5%; for details please refer to the Contributions List for this appeal available on the Federation's website.

Outstanding needs: CHF 1,129,665

Related Emergency or Annual Appeals: N/A

Programme Summary: The economic situation in Myanmar continues to deteriorate with the result that an increasing number of people are forced to live on or below the poverty line. National health facilities are stretched, and many remote villages cannot access their services. Communities already living at their limit are not able to cope when fire and floods destroy their homes and livelihoods. Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) is committed to changing its structure, systems and image within the country to better serve the most vulnerable communities. To this end, it is increasing its community-based training, undertaking a major branch survey, and preparing a far-sighted but realistic strategic plan (2004-2008). With a limited number of donors, the financial position of MRCS and its capacity to implement major programmes in health and disaster management is precarious. The national society and Federation delegation have recently had to drastically scale back on 2003 plans, maintaining only the most vital components of programmes and community-based training. Fundraising for Myanmar is therefore one aspect of the delegation's work.

Operational developments

During the first three months of 2003, the economic situation in Myanmar further deteriorated and the percentage of people now living on or below the poverty line continues to increase. At the end of February, cash shortages, due to a crisis of confidence in a few private banks, led to a rapid decline in the rate of the foreign exchange currency (FEC) against the kyat - from kyat 1000 to kyat 750 to the FEC. There has also been a similar decline in the value of the US dollar against the kyat. Since then the exchange rate has been held at a low level, although it is believed to be unrealistic and unsustainable. For some weeks, it was impossible to withdraw more than kyat 50,000 (approximately US\$65) from banks, including the Government banks. There are some indications that the Government may nationalize banks in the near future and this would mean even tighter controls on all banking transactions. As an immediate consequence, food prices are increasing, and people are finding it increasingly difficult to buy even basic goods.

The national reconciliation process continues at a slow pace, and hopes for more steady progress after the release from house arrest of the leader of the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) early 2002 have not materialized. The UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Myanmar made a scheduled visit to the country in February, but cut it short after a bugging device was found in the room in which he was interviewing prisoners. The Government has since apologized and made assurances that this will not happen again. Nevertheless, the UN Special Rapporteur has reiterated his earlier suggestion that the world community should not wait to engage until the political situation evolves, as he believes the sooner the assistance, the smoother will be the changes in Myanmar. He has stressed that *“the policy option now should be engagement not isolation.”*

Within the political/economic sphere, there still remains a high degree of suspicion and cynicism from the international community towards Myanmar, from governments as well as actual and potential donors, resulting in reduced funding in many areas and some NGOs laying off staff. In recognition of this, and after discussions with the UN Special Rapporteur and the UN Myanmar Country Representative, the Government has recently agreed to assign a focal point for INGO affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to facilitate issues related to their operations and programmes. Now, all international organizations, as well as Governments are awaiting the Special UN Report on Myanmar which was scheduled for publication and distribution in March, but has not yet been made available.

It is of note that in February, the Government accepted a ten-day visit of Amnesty International, and their reports are also eagerly awaited. The ICRC continues to strengthen its position within the country, now having access to nearly all regions, and maintains a good working relationship with the Government, as well as having regular meetings with the leader of the NLD. This increased access and credibility is improving the overall understanding of the Red Cross in Myanmar. It is also having a positive impact on the image of the national society, and perhaps equally on the recognition on the role and work of the Federation delegation.

Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) continued to give priority to the completion of phase one of the branch survey, the strategic planning process, establishing a greater delineation and further clarity in terms of roles and responsibilities for governance and management, and the re-organization of national headquarters so that it can better guide and serve branches.

In the first quarter of 2003, the Federation delegation welcomed the arrival of a second health delegate (from Australian Red Cross) and three new locally employed staff – branch development officer, disaster preparedness officer and office manager, and began streamlining office procedures.

Health and care

The programme is now being recognized as one of the twin pillars on which the image and credibility of MRCS is being built. Together with disaster management, the effectiveness and sustainability of the programme is beginning to make the Red Cross better known and more respected within the country. Focus this year is on community based first aid, and training courses in the branches are now well underway. However, with a clearer health plan and an established health division, demands on staff are now intensified both from outside and within MRCS. The society is willing to change and develop, but the resources, both human and material, are not yet readily available to match needs

Goal: There is real and sustainable improvement in the health of the most vulnerable in Myanmar.

Objective: MRCS's health and care capacity is enhanced through the increased involvement of communities in preventative and health education programmes.

Expected Results:

1. Increased capacity of MRCS at headquarters and branch levels for effective design, implementation and management of relevant health and care programmes.
2. Improved and expanded first aid training and service delivery programme focusing on community needs and targeting the most vulnerable populations.
3. Improved hygiene and sanitation practices in the communities.
4. Increased awareness of HIV/AIDS and reduced discrimination and stigmatization of PLWHA

Progress/Achievements

The health team, comprising the MRCS executive committee special advisor on health, MRCS head and staff of the health and training division, and the two Federation health delegates meet on a weekly basis and are now in a stronger position to implement the MRCS health strategy 2002-2006. The strategy has now been translated into Myanmar and 500 copies printed.

Project One: Capacity building of the MRCS health division

Planning already underway in the health division was further consolidated at the MRCS second strategic planning meeting in February, with the elaboration of a clear plan for 2003. This incorporates the work of partner organisations that fund MRCS programmes, the proposed schedule of training in health-related issues, and all aspects of MRCS health programmes. Health division staff took part in performance development review (PDR) training together with other MRCS divisions and the Federation delegation.

The head of division participated in the second Regional Blood Recruitment Task Force meeting in Singapore together with a doctor from the National Blood Bank. A plan is underway for MRCS to develop a voluntary, non-remunerated blood donor recruitment programme with the Blood Bank. In this respect it is important to note that in January 2003, Myanmar passed a new national law on the use of blood products and blood transfusions.

Project Two: First aid and community-based first aid (CBFA)

With a clear focus for this year on CBFA, the need for more training materials became apparent and consequently MRCS has printed 510 trainer's manuals and 3,500 volunteer manuals. Training of trainers (ToT) courses started in March, with an initial batch of 30 volunteers trained. Some 240 trainers will attend these courses throughout the year in eight states/divisions. Multiplier courses will be planned after further discussion with branches and trained volunteers, and their implementation will also depend on funding available.

Discussions are well underway between the health and disaster management divisions of MRCS with support from the Federation delegation with regard to an integrated approach to community based training – providing training elements in both first aid and disaster preparedness to volunteers. This concept will be trialed in the coming months in two regions - Kengtung (with a focus on first aid training) and Ayeyarwady (with a focus on disaster preparedness), and expanded into Rakhine state later in the year.

Project Three: Health education

The MRCS health education programme continues both at branch level and in schools, and in cooperation with other organisations. The major focus has been on basic health messages, using peer education as the key methodology.

Project Four: HIV/AIDS and reproductive health

With financial support from Australian Red Cross, a comic book on HIV/AIDS has been published and distributed through the branches of MRCS. Part information, part story in comic strip form, the publication meets a real need within Myanmar where information has been relatively constrained and many ‘myths’ about methods of transmission and risks remain the norm.

The preparatory phase of the community-based HIV/AIDS project in Kengtung started in March with a series of advocacy meetings with local authorities and other stakeholders and the recruitment and training of four local staff. MRCS and the Federation visited six villages, which will be part of the project, and held discussions with village leaders and local authorities to ensure good understanding of the project from the outset. The project will be supported for the coming three years, and will stand as an excellent pilot project for capacity building and HIV/AIDS training. Lessons learnt from this project will hopefully be replicated in other states/divisions.

The president of MRCS is also deputy chairperson of the country coordinating mechanism (CCM) of the Global Fund for HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM). Either he or the head of health division take part in meetings, recognising that the MRCS has a role in the country plan particularly related to health education.

Impact

With a strengthened health division and two health delegates, and a clear plan for 2003, there is a growing confidence in MRCS that the society’s health programme can become more effective and more ‘in-tune’ with the needs of the community. New organizations are coming forward indicating their interest in working with MRCS as an operating partner and, if managed correctly, can further strengthen the MRCS capacity and visibility.

Constraints

Considerable constraints have been put on health activities because of the low level of funding for the 2003 Appeal, and in the budget review process in March many planned activities were cut from the programme. One consequence of the cutback in funds is that the recruitment of additional professional staff for the health and training divisions has had to be postponed. This is severely limiting the overall capacity of the both divisions

Coordination

Considerable efforts have been made by MRCS and the Federation delegation to meet with all interested partners in the health field, and to look at joint interests and proposals wherever possible. Particular note should be made of on-going liaison with ICRC and their funding of some ToT courses and discussions in Yangon, Taunggi and Kengtung regarding possible future collaboration on health and hygiene, and water and sanitation projects. The Federation and MRCS also held frequent discussions with the World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNICEF on matters of common interest, and a new partnership is now emerging with Malteser (German NGO) with regard to health education and the control of malaria.

Disaster Management

The Myanmar Red Cross recognizes its mandate to carry out a more active role in the emerging national disaster management system. It is committed to maintaining a steady momentum for organisational change in the disaster management (DM) division of national headquarters and branches, strengthening the disaster response mechanism, and developing the community-based approach for disaster risk reduction.

Goal: The risk of disasters is reduced and the resilience of the most vulnerable people in Myanmar is enhanced.

Objective: MRCS's capacity in disaster management is strengthened, based on its network of volunteers and branch structures and in strategic partnerships with the government authorities and other agencies.

Expected Results:

1. MRCS is acknowledged as a leading organisation in disaster management with a recognised role in national coordination systems.
2. MRCS has an adequate response mechanism in place to fulfill its mandate in assisting the most vulnerable people in time of disasters in an efficient and swift manner.
3. MRCS can take full advantage of its nation-wide grassroots structures to promote community resilience to disasters.

Progress / Achievements:

A solid working relationship is emerging in the disaster management team, with a clear plan for the year now established and a consistent approach to policy, planning and training. The team comprises the senior advisor of the executive committee, the head and support staff of the disaster management division, and the Federation disaster preparedness delegate and officer. A Myanmar national was appointed in February to the new position of disaster preparedness officer in the delegation.

Project One: Capacity building towards a 'well-prepared national society'

The MRCS programme officer for DM (appointed December 2002) benefited from a month-long on-the-job training with Vietnamese and Indonesian Red Cross counterparts and the Federation delegations in those countries. With no prior experience in the disaster field, training provided an excellent learning experience, particularly activities related to national response teams.

Once the overall structure of national headquarters has been finalised, the ICRC-supported tracing programme will be relocated under the disaster management division. This is in line with the move to bring all outside-funded programmes more directly into the MRCS management structure, following discussions between MRCS, ICRC and the Federation delegation. Discussions are also ongoing regarding disaster management training programmes.

Project Two: Strengthening national disaster response mechanism

A first meeting with other INGOs was organised by the delegation in late January with a view to better information sharing and stronger coordination in joint and cooperative efforts in the event of major disaster. Discussion also covered how to work more effectively with the Myanmar authorities, in particular with the relief and resettlement committee. The Federation delegation plans to raise this issue with the appropriate ministries in the coming months.

Replenishment stocks for all 17 state and division warehouses have been purchased and packaged by MRCS and are awaiting distribution. MRCS has revised the formats and procedures for stock management and distributed them to states/division branches.

Project Three: Participatory learning and action for resilient communities

Two volunteers were recruited in January as field officers responsible for the day-to-day management of community-based disaster preparedness projects in the Ayeyarwady division and to facilitate local liaison between township branches, villagers and national headquarters. In February, MRCS and the Federation visited the division, meeting with local counterparts and identifying the need for intensive guidance to build local capacity in project management.

Staff from the disaster management and health divisions held a series of meetings with Federation counterparts to discuss integration of community-based first aid (CBFA) training and community-based disaster preparedness (CBDP) activities. It was agreed that this concept be piloted through the ongoing CBDP activities in Ayeyarwady division and the new CBFA activities in Kengtung. If successful, this integrated approach could be expanded to other regions at a later date.

Impact

There is a growing interest and demand for training and information on disaster management programmes from the branches, and at the national level, there is increased respect for the capacity and outreach of the MRCS.

Constraints

Overall financial support for this programme has had to be substantially reduced from that proposed in the Appeal, but efforts are being made to augment funding at a regional level.

Coordination

It is unfortunate that Federation head of delegation has not yet had the opportunity to meet with the Ministries of Health and Home Affairs to take up issues of INGO coordination and information flow in disaster response. MRCS has agreed to facilitate these meetings, possibly in the second quarter of the year.

Humanitarian Values

The communications division of MRCS is working to expand the public's knowledge of MRCS and to this end has ensured increased media coverage, making good use of interviews and information about meetings, training courses and service programmes through national newspapers and television. There is a commitment to increasing the communications with branches across the country and publishing stories about programmes and 'outstanding volunteers'. A number of Federation and ICRC videos have been translated into Myanmar so that they can be shown on national TV.

Goal: There is increased awareness and application of humanitarian values, the fundamental principles and key national and global advocacy themes in Myanmar.

Objective: The awareness of humanitarian values in Myanmar, and the role and responsibility of the MRCS is enhanced.

Expected Results:

The capacity of MRCS to disseminate and publicise the role of the Red Cross Red Crescent has been developed.

Progress/Achievements

A much-improved newsletter is now being produced monthly and circulated to all branches, and work is well underway for a quarterly publication and the annual report in English. A number of key MRCS publications are being updated and reprinted for wide distribution and work is underway on a new brochure on MRCS activities. To raise awareness of the Red Cross among young people, a number of Red Cross songs are being re-recorded by local artists and will be launched later this year.

The move to change the uniforms of MRCS volunteers has been agreed. This seemingly insignificant act is nevertheless important for the image and identity of MRCS, which has long been criticised for looking too army-like in its attire, clearly a legacy of its past.

Impact

Increased interest of the general public in Red Cross activities has been noted, and recently certain government authorities have requested further information on Red Cross activities, plans and standard operating procedures.

Constraints

Resources available to the communications department are still rather limited, and a recently pared back budget is challenging the output of division staff.

Coordination

The MRCS communications division requested and received assistance from the regional delegation for the preparation of materials for World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day. Preparations for this event have begun.

Organisational Development

MRCS is presently going through a critical transition phase. In particular, the society leadership is giving priority to branch development and volunteer management, the revision of the society's legal base, stronger financial management capacity and sustainability, strengthening national headquarters resources and training in programme management skills. Particular emphasis is currently being put on the separation of governance and management and on establishing clearer roles and responsibilities.

Goal: The MRCS ability to address the humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable in Myanmar is strengthened.

Objective: MRCS has better foundation, capacity, and performance for running better volunteer based services and programmes more competently, and moves towards being a 'Well-functioning National Society'.

Expected Results:

1. MRCS becomes a more credible and legitimate organisation that can mobilise wider support at international, national and local levels.
2. MRCS becomes a more viable organisation that can continuously develop itself in a sustainable and accountable way.
3. MRCS becomes a more effective organisation that can make a difference in the lives of vulnerable people in the changing environment.

Progress/Achievements

The commitment of the executive committee and senior management to the strategic planning process is clearly demonstrated by their participation in meetings and increased understanding of their changing roles and levels of responsibility and authority. The second strategic planning meeting held in February,

focused on divisional plans for 2003. The third meeting was agreed for early April, to be facilitated by the regional organisational development delegate.

Project One: Re-establishing the national society's foundation

There has been further discussion within MRCS and with ICRC and the Federation delegation with regard to the national society legal basis and statutes. A task force has been established to further address this issue (see following section)

The first phase of the branch survey ended in March 2003, with responses collected from over 400, roughly 45 per cent, MRCS branches (three levels – states/division, district, township). The level of interest and degree of ownership in the process by MRCS leadership has visibly increased since the survey began last October. To assist with the collection of data, and discuss the strategic importance of the survey for the society as a whole, MRCS governance and management visited several branches and held discussions with local Red Cross leaders. This dialogue was seen as immensely beneficial for both the national staff and executive committee as well as for the local branches.

Project Two: Augmenting the national society's governance and management capacity

The decision to set up three task forces in the identified key areas of structures and administrative systems, legal foundation, and finance was agreed at the second strategic planning meeting. Each task force will bring together an experienced mix of executive and central committee members, senior management and ICRC and Federation delegates.

Reporting formats and performance appraisal procedures have been developed by MRCS management and approved by governance.

Project Three: Refocusing the national society's performance on the lives of vulnerable people

At the second MRCS strategic planning meeting, senior management identified the need for better programme management as a priority. Discussions between the division heads identified where they could benefit from support and where they can coordinate activities for best results. Particular attention is now being paid to consolidate community-based training, better communication and feedback from the branches, and community participation in needs assessment, in health and disaster management.

Impact

Although the development of a national society is by necessity a long and slow process, there are clear signs that MRCS is changing, that a strong and capable senior management is emerging and that there is a groundswell of renewed interest and challenges being directed at national headquarters from branches.

Constraints

Executive committee members are somewhat reluctant to hand over authority to the heads of division in certain areas of their work, considering that they are still new in the organisation and 'learning'. This is causing a level of frustration for senior management, making it difficult for them to achieve their goals.

Coordination

Regular meetings are held between the MRCS executive committee and senior management staff and Federation delegates, with participation of the ICRC cooperation delegate as required. These meetings are becoming a positive forum for discussion on matters of key importance for the national society as well as for more general planning and communication.

Federation Coordination

The Federation delegation continues to work constructively and openly with MRCS, building a strong working relationship and trust, but recognising the real challenges and constraints such a partnership entails. The delegation considers it must play the roles of both promoter and defender of the MRCS to the outside world, as well as being a constant support and constructive critic of the national society as appropriate and in the right manner. The president of the national society recently referred to the Federation delegation as the 'loudspeaker' of the Myanmar Red Cross.

Goal: Sustainable long-term development of the MRCS is achieved through facilitating strong and effective coordination between MRCS present and potential partners.

Objective: Solid coordination and collaborative practices are put in place, enabling all partners to assist MRCS to develop and implement their long-term development strategy.

Expected Results:

MRCS and its key partners (the Federation, ICRC, PNS and other organisations) recognise the vital importance of the CAS for the long term sustainable development of the Society, both as a flexible framework for enhanced coordination and programme management as well as a useful marketing tool.

Progress/Achievements

In February, MRCS and the Federation delegation hosted visits from the Finnish Red Cross and the Department of Humanitarian Aid of the Finnish Government, as well as the South East Asia desk officer of British Red Cross. The Finnish Red Cross, a key partner for MRCS in 2003, gave indications of a longer-term interest and support (three to five years) for the national society in the coming years. British Red Cross was particularly interested to learn of progress on the branch survey, for which they are providing support. While contributions for 2003 have been relatively limited, the British have given positive signs that if MRCS continues to consolidate recent progress, they will seriously consider more significant funding within the coming years.

The head of delegation facilitated the Japanese Red Cross Society (JRCS) basic training course for delegates in early March, and capitalised on the opportunity to meet the JRCS international department for discussions on their ongoing support to Myanmar Red Cross. As the national society's most long-standing donor, JRCS were particularly interested to learn of recent developments in the society's organisation and programmes, and discussed a number of specific funding issues for 2003. They remain committed to supporting the work of MRCS and the delegation.

Impact

There is clearly growing interest in the capacity and programmes of MRCS, both within the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement and from donors and governments alike. An informal information flow between the head of delegation and actual and potential partner national societies has clearly increased the level of understanding and interest in the work of the Red Cross in Myanmar.

Constraints

As already outlined, MRCS is presently working on and committed to developing a comprehensive strategic plan for 2004-2008. Within this process they are also aware of the need for a cooperation agreement strategy (CAS) - seen as an extension of the strategic plan - providing actual and potential donors a clear indication of external partnerships and support sought by MRCS. They are aware, however, that without a plan and CAS, it is more difficult to engage partners in their society's overall development and programmes. The strategic plan is slated for the end 2003, the CAS a few months later.

International Representation

The Federation is not well known in Myanmar, and even within the international community there is a high degree of misunderstanding about its role and activities. Efforts are now being made to clarify its position, activities, working methodology and responsibilities within Myanmar, particularly as regards the Myanmar Red Cross Society.

Goal: Knowledge and understanding of Red Cross Red Crescent principles and values, nationally and within the international community is increased.

Objective: MRCS and the Federation have leading roles and visibility in national and international fora, respectively.

Expected Results:

MRCS and the Federation are positioned to influence the humanitarian agenda in Myanmar and mobilise resources.

Progress/Achievements

The head of delegation began a series of meetings with foreign embassies in Myanmar, and general discussions were held with the ambassadors of Great Britain, Japan and Australia regarding the role of the Federation, the capacity and programmes of the MRCS, and potential areas of cooperation.

The Federation delegation participates in all UN and INGO meetings, including those with the Special UN Rapporteur on Human Rights and UN Special Envoy, and is able to present its position and observations on these occasions. More informal meetings are held between the delegation, MRCS and individual organisations and agencies, such as WHO and UNDP with regard to more specific issues.

The delegation and MRCS took the initiative in January to organise a meeting with interested INGOs to discuss the issue of the coordination of information and response in time of disaster. The group agreed that the delegation and MRCS were appropriately placed to continue leading discussions and eventually present some proposals to the appropriate Government ministries and authorities

Impact

There is a growing recognition of the Federation as a key player in Myanmar and its particular role in supporting the capacity building and the development of health and disaster management programmes throughout the country. There is also increased understanding of the different components of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and how and why they have differing roles, and how collectively they have the potential to make a considerable and very positive impact within Myanmar

Constraints

To date there is limited access to the Ministries of Health and Home Affairs, although the national society has stated its willingness to organise meetings and to ensure formal introductions are made. Preparation of key themes and discussion points is underway. One of the issues to be examined is that of establishing a status agreement or memorandum of understanding between the Government and the Federation.

Coordination

Regular meetings between ICRC and the Federation heads of delegation, and a stated desire on the part of both to cooperate and coordinate activities wherever possible, has ensured a well-established partnership. Particular focus is given to the shared commitment to assist MRCS become more independent, and better known for its range of programmes and role as the leading humanitarian organization in the country.

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