Programme Update

International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Myanmar

Appeal No. MAAMM002

31 August 2008

This report covers the period 1 January to 30 June 2008

A transportation handling exercise during a first aid training session held in March, in Sagaing division. ***(Photo: Myanmar Red Cross Society)***

In brief

Programme summary:
The devastation of cyclone Nargis which struck on 2 May 2008 has had a profound impact on Myanmar and its people. The national society responded immediately with volunteers rendering assistance wherever possible. The impact of the investment in staff and volunteers throughout the country, especially in community-based responses, was clearly demonstrated as the Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) deployed staff and volunteers from across the nation to assist in the response. The MRCS has emerged as one of the clear and reliable leaders in the national response, in its role as auxiliary to the humanitarian arm of the authorities. This update provides some details of what was achieved by the national society in the first four months of 2008, but should be read in conjunction with the cyclone Nargis operations updates.

Disaster management:
The most outstanding achievement has been the way the MRCS and its thousands of volunteers were able to respond to such a large-scale disaster by initially relying solely on previous training and their own capacity which has grown steadily over the years.

Health and care:
Health and care initiatives continue to remain a large and important component of MRCS activities to promote and improve conditions for vulnerable communities. Communicable diseases including dengue, malaria, diarrhoea and tuberculosis remain a persistent challenge within the country. The three key areas of activities identified in previous years continue to be the focus in 2008, namely: public health in emergencies, community-based health promotion and community-based first aid.

Organizational Development:
Major activities conducted during January to June 2008 include the completion of an initial step in a human

resource review process, preparations for discussions on the Seville Agreement and the MRCS's legal base, the development of MRCS financial regulations, and strengthening of the ongoing branch development activities through field visits and reviews. In addition, a review of the appeal plans for 2008 and the development of a cooperation agreement strategy (CAS) were initiated. These processes were interrupted due to the cyclone.

Since the launch of the cyclone Nargis operation in early May, organizational development resources at the MRCS have been directed towards providing support to the society's response plans.

The organizational development programme appeal plans are covered for 2008.

Humanitarian Values:
This MRCS programme continues to be supported by both the International Federation and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), with the focus on advocacy and promotion of the national society's humanitarian work, and the values and principles of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement. The work conducted by the communications division to achieve its stated objectives requires further investment, in building the capacity not only of headquarters staff but also the volunteers within MRCS branches across the country. The MRCS recognizes the necessity to further develop a positive image of the Red Cross among communities and stakeholders in order ''to enjoy the trust and confidence of all''.

Financial situation: The budget is currently under revision due to the impact of Cyclone Nargis.

Click here to go directly to the financial report.

Our partners: The MRCS has received valuable support from the following partner national societies: Finnish Red Cross, Swedish Red Cross, British Red Cross, Australian Red Cross, Japanese Red Cross, German Red Cross, Taiwan Red Cross Organization, Hong Kong branch of the Red Cross Society of China, Norwegian Red Cross, and French Red Cross. It also enjoys important partnerships with UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNFPA and the Burnett Institute. With reference to government authorities, the society has fostered close relationships with the ministry of health and the ministry of social welfare relief and resettlement.

Context

Cyclone Nargis struck Myanmar on May 2. It was a colossal natural disaster which has had profound impact on Myanmar and its people. It made landfall in the Ayeyarwady division, affecting more than 50 townships. Wind speeds of up to 200 km per hour and associated heavy rains were further compounded by a 3.6 metre storm surge. Up to June 2008, the official number of those killed stands at 84,537, with 53,856 missing. Assessment data indicates that out of the 7.35 million people living in the affected areas, 2.4 million were severely affected. A staggering 23,500 square kilometres of the delta have been devastated by the cyclone. This has had a severe impact on the economy and potential food security for the rest of the country.

The national society responded immediately, with volunteers rendering assistance wherever possible. The Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) also played a crucial role in accessing some of the most remote areas in the delta. From May to July, the vast majority of the national society's resources was diverted to assist those people left vulnerable by the cyclone. Project officers with responsibility for programmes in the northern part of the country were deployed to the delta or to support operations in the delta.

The existing managers and heads of division are taking on a greater workload and the secretariat is seeking to mobilize resources to support national society staff and volunteers, in their efforts to maintain the programming throughout the country while responding to this large-scale disaster.

The MRCS has emerged as one of the clear and reliable leaders in the national response in its role as auxiliary to the humanitarian arm of the authorities. It has also announced its intention to relocate its headquarters to the new capital of Nay Pyi Taw in the centre of Myanmar. As a new office building will soon be available, it is expected that some staff may make the move shortly. An MRCS office in Yangon will remain operational with the secretariat. The International Federation's country office and two bilateral national societies are not permitted to relocate to the capital for at least another year. The challenge of supporting the MRCS "from a distance"' is currently under consideration and requires strategic thinking from all stakeholders.

This update provides some details of what was achieved by the national society in the first four months of 2008, but should also be read in conjunction with the Cyclone Nargis operations updates.

Progress towards outcomes

Disaster management

Before the cyclone struck, the MRCS had conducted a survey of several of its smaller warehouses around the country with support from the International Federation's secretariat and UNICEF. Just days before the cyclone, the International Federation, MRCS and UNICEF finalized the draft of an agreement to pre-position some relief items in MRCS warehouses, with a focus on supporting women and children left vulnerable due to natural disasters.

Following the cyclone, the French Red Cross also offered support regarding disaster risk reduction activities, initially in support of the branches along the disaster-prone coast but with a view to a longer-term perspective to partner the MRCS.

After many years of service, the head of the MRCS disaster management division retired in June 2008. He has made himself available as a volunteer to provide support as required, especially in light of the current challenges. The new head of division comes with a great deal of experience.

Overview

From the beginning of the year, the society's executive committee worked with the disaster management division in response to requests from MRCS branches for equipment and basic infrastructure to respond to disasters. This resulted in the procurement of an initial fleet of nine boats for disaster response in communities along Myanmar's coastline, as well as in areas further inland but also subject to frequent flooding. To supplement the hardware, the division coordinated with other colleagues in MRCS to provide training in water safety.

At the MRCS disaster management review workshop from 31 March to 2 April, branches highlighted the necessity to keep the volunteers safe when they are engaged in disaster response. Following this, the MRCS ensured that all boats were equipped with life jackets and that additional life jackets were procured for states and divisions to assist with preparedness measures.

It was the intention of the International Federation and the MRCS to finalize the MRCS contingency planning that developed momentum in 2007. The support of national and government bodies in assisting the MRCS to establish a clear role and a clearer idea of expectations and responsibilities, during times of disasters was well underway even before cyclone Nargis. A follow-up consolidation workshop planned for August 2008, has necessarily been postponed due to everyone being required to be in response mode following the cyclone. The MRCS will negotiate a more appropriate date with the authorities and the ministry of social welfare relief and resettlement. However, previous work in this area has definitely assisted in the response to Nargis, as many previous MRCS workshop participants are now working side-by-side in the reality of disaster response.

In the first few months of 2008, the MRCS procured and pre-positioned non-food relief items. This included clothing, kitchen sets, long-life mosquito nets and some hygiene material. These items were stored in the Yangon warehouse, and were also distributed around the country in preparation for the anticipated annual monsoon flooding. Some of these items later became part of the relief goods sent out initially to the cyclone-affected areas.

The society was also able to provide pre-positioned tarpaulins in Labutta to the local hospital following the loss of its roof after the cyclone and this allowed the hospital to remain operational.

As has been reported in the operations updates on cyclone Nargis, the support provided by regional disaster response teams (RDRT) in the Southeast Asia region has been a model for future collaboration with Southeast Asian national societies. It was a two-way learning process with RDRT delegates from disaster-prone countries generously sharing their knowledge and expertise with the MRCS, which in turn was also able to highlight some of the issues related to the forwarding of unsolicited relief items.

Partnerships

Some MRCS branches in the Ayeyarwady division had begun working with the French Red Cross in disaster risk reduction (DRR) prior to the cyclone. Following Nargis, the MRCS has agreed to work with the French Red Cross along the disaster-prone coast to develop DRR programming.

Various smaller MRCS warehouses around the country have been surveyed with the assistance of multilateral support provided through national societies such as the Swedish Red Cross, Norwegian Red Cross and Taiwan Red Cross Organization. Through discussions between the MRCS, UNICEF and the International Federation, small-scale renovations are taking place and UNICEF will assist by providing relief supplies with appropriate items for supporting women and children left vulnerable by disasters. These will be pre-positioned in certain parts of the country using some spare MRCS warehousing space and allowing for small-scale income generation through a modest rental agreement.

Outcomes/Expected results

Programme component: Disaster response

- Reduced impact of major hazards (cyclones, flash floods, landslides, fire) across Myanmar through timely emergency response measures.

Programme component: Disaster preparedness

- Improved MRCS emergency response capacity through strengthened institutional mechanisms, and national disaster preparedness and response mechanisms.
- Improved MRCS capacity to raise community awareness of hazards so that they respond effectively during times of disaster.
- Improved MRCS emergency response capacity through pre-positioned relief stocks in strategically located warehouses and strengthened logistics capacity.

Programme component: Disaster risk reduction

- Strengthened capacity of the MRCS to support disaster-prone communities and reduce vulnerability through timely information and preparedness measures.

Achievements

Clearly, the most outstanding achievement has been the way the MRCS and its thousands of volunteers were able to respond to such a large-scale disaster by initially relying on their previous training and the development of their own capacity over the years. Later, this was supplemented by the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement's additional support in setting up logistics pipelines and providing much-needed high volume relief items. The perception of the MRCS as a key leader in the national response, in its capacity as auxiliary to the humanitarian arm of the authorities, has been elevated beyond expectation. The support of the International Federation and the many national societies who offered assistance has been well-documented and acknowledged by the authorities, the UN system and the international humanitarian community. The volunteers of the MRCS have emerged as ''humanitarian heroes''. Agreements have been developed with several partners for longer-term support.

Constraints or Challenges

Although the national society is prepared to respond to disasters of a certain scale, the country was not prepared for the scale of the destruction in the wake of Nargis. The society's attempts to respond were especially challenging due to the lack of infrastructure and the fact that experts from outside the country were not permitted to travel to the delta. This required a great deal of strategic planning amid the frustration associated with the lack of access to resources that were immediately available and yet, could not be deployed.

The retirement of the head of the disaster management division in June has meant a degree of loss of the institutional memory, even though he is making himself available whenever requested.

During the disaster management review that was conducted by the MRCS headquarters for their branches in the states and divisions, the branch leaders requested that further DART (disaster assessment response team) training be suspended, pending a review of the DART curriculum. The facilitation and content of these training sessions was seen as requiring a general evaluation and overhaul. The International Federation will support the follow-up to this request under the planned broader review of the impact of Disaster Management implemented by the MRCS.

Work in the rest of the country has effectively been put on hold as all resources are focused on the Nargis relief and recovery operation. The second half of the year will see a move towards 'normalising' support in the areas where the MRCS was previously developing programmes. This will be integrated with all responses in the delta.

Health and care

Programme component: Public health in emergencies (PHiE)

Outcomes/Expected results

- Vulnerable communities are prepared for potential epidemics through surveillance, prevention and control measures, supported by the branches.
- Effective and coordinated emergency health care response of the MRCS is strengthened and integrated.
- Timely basic emergency health care support for affected communities, facilitated through MRCS branches.

A community-based first aid training-of-trainers course in session. ***(Photo: Myanmar Red Cross Society)***

Achievements

- Avian influenza preparedness and response:

The MRCS has begun the process of preparing for the possibility of further outbreaks of avian influenza and are now planning ways in which branches may be able to assist in the joint effort to respond to a human influenza pandemic. The MRCS is working in close collaboration with the ministry of health on this issue.

A communications training workshop with volunteer leaders from seven townships (Hpa-an, Hlaing Bwe, Hpapon, Kawkayeik, Thandaung, Kyainseikkyi and Myawaddy) was organized with MRCS staff in Hpa-an, in Kayin State, from 22 to 24 March. Following this, hand-washing posters were distributed via the branches to primary schools – the focus was on the promotion of effective hand washing and other means of preventing the spread of human influenza among primary school children.

In March, the MRCS public health in emergencies programme officer attended a regional workshop in Bangkok, organized by the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (APDC). The purpose of the workshop was to look at ways of strengthening community-based approaches towards the management of avian and human influenza in Asia, and the expected output was to develop a community tool kit for avian and human influenza management in Asia, based on the experiences of participants. A total of 105 participants representing government organizations as well as non-government organizations from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar, Indonesia and the Philippines participated in the workshop.

Ayeyarwady was previously the target for intervention under the 2008-2009 Appeal. However, as this delta region was severely affected by cyclone Nargis, the activities will now, in terms of funding and coordination, be covered by Nargis relief and recovery operation funding.

The Japanese Red Cross support for community-based first aid (CBFA) and first aid, over a three-year period that assists the MRCS beyond the Nargis operation area, is a key achievement.

Community-based health programmes

Programme component: HIV and AIDS

Outcomes/Expected results

- Improved knowledge, attitude and practice concerning HIV infection amongst key population groups such as young women and men, and mobile populations.
- Reported improved quality of life for people living with HIV through MRCS-managed care, support and treatment services.
- Reported improved community acceptance of people living with HIV and their families.
- Measurable improvement in the capacity of Red Cross volunteers, community members and support groups to implement effective and prioritized responses.

Achievements

Preventing the spread and reducing the impact of HIV remains a key area of work of the MRCS. Besides integrating HIV/AIDS into their community-based health projects, the MRCS also conducts HIV/AIDS specific projects which include the following:

- Mandalay community-based HIV/AIDS prevention, care and support

This project covers three townships in the Mandalay division (Aung Myay Thazan, Mahar Aung Myay and Pyi Gyi Tagon) and has two specific target groups – youth aged between 14 and 25, and people living with HIV and their families. A total of 360 peer educators have been trained and have in turn, conducted education sessions reaching 818 youth (458 men/360 women). Among the youth trained, 215 are now life members of the Red Cross.

In collaboration with the national AIDS programme, 26 Red Cross volunteers and 14 people living with HIV, attended a training session on home-based care and counselling.

- Outreach programme for the prevention of HIV/AIDS

This programme has provided essential information about HIV/AIDS to 2,490 bus and truck drivers and their assistants at busy bus and truck terminals in Mandalay and Lashio town in the Northern Shan State. During the HIV education sessions, 11,500 condoms were distributed along with over 3,000 towels and caps bearing messages about HIV. It is also worth noting that 35 people were referred by Red Cross volunteers to health facilities for voluntary counselling and testing for HIV.

Programme component: Malaria

Outcomes/Expected results

- Misconceptions about malaria are reduced among targeted communities.
- 100 per cent utilization of impregnated treated nets (ITN) in targeted communities.
- Red Cross volunteers effectively manage malaria prevention activities with community participation.

Achievements

In 2007, nine Red Cross branches (Moekaung, Htantlan, Madayar, Zeegone, Minbu, Thibaw, Minesat, Hpa-an, and Kyaikmayaw) identified malaria as one of the major health risks in their townships and as such, requested a project to tackle this problem. A commitment was made to assist 202 villages (about 15,000 households among a population of 85,000 people) to reduce the incidence of malaria. A total of 27 MRCS volunteers from these branches participated in an initial training session, after which they completed data collection and needs assessments, in order to better understand their respective community's awareness of malaria and appropriate preventative measures.

It was hoped that in 2008, the project will develop to include community mobilization regarding malaria control and prevention, involving community health talks, focus group discussions and house-to-house visits. There were also plans to distribute mosquito nets and information, education and communication (IEC) materials. Unfortunately, this progress has not been achieved, partly because of the occurrence of cyclone Nargis which resulted in the project officer being diverted to the Nargis operation and the mosquito nets destined for this project being distributed to families who had lost everything from the cyclone's impact. Procurement of additional long-life nets is in process.

The MRCS is now considering the future of this particular project, taking into account the important potential benefit to the communities and the present human resource limitations within the MRCS. Staff members are slowly returning to their regular positions as the recruitment for more staff is being made.

Programme component: Tuberculosis (TB)

Outcomes/Expected results

- Increased numbers of people suspected of being infected with TB are referred to a health facility in a timely period.
- Decreased number of treatment defaulters resulting in increased TB treatment completion.
- Increased community awareness related to TB.

Achievements

In the Yangon division, there is low performance in relation to patient compliance in regard to completing the full tuberculosis (TB) treatment course. Red Cross volunteers are therefore providing support and education on TB in six townships (Tharkayta, Mayangone, Hlaing, Dalla, Twantay and Thingangyun).

To date, volunteers have provided important information about TB to 6,260 people, including people not presently infected with TB. Of these, 15 defaulters were identified and referred to an appropriate health facility and 139

people with TB symptoms were referred for testing. Red Cross volunteers have also provided support to the ministry of health by assisting with the monitoring and follow-up for 2,073 people being treated for TB - this includes supporting 10 per cent of this number with direct observation treatment service (DOTS).

Red Cross volunteers have also provided care kits to people with TB. This year, a total of 540 kits were distributed, with about 300 of these distributed shortly after cyclone Nargis.

Following the cyclone, Red Cross volunteers from the Yangon and Ayeyarwady divisions were trained in community-based health and first aid, including blood donor recruitment and TB.

Related programme: Community-based health development – Magway

Achievements

This integrated branch and community-based health development project has been carried out in 20 villages from the townships of Natmauk and Pwint Phyu, in the Magway division. The project has focused on developing the capacity of 300 Red Cross volunteers and community members in community-based first aid. The topics covered include the major health concerns raised by the communities, malaria, snake bites, acute respiratory infection, TB and diseases or illnesses related to poor water and sanitation infrastructure. The project also includes HIV peer education.

This project has been well accepted by the communities, as well as local authorities and township medical officers. Communities have participated in several 'commemorative' days including TB, First Aid and Red Cross Day. Community members are also reported as being able to correctly identify the mode of transmission and prevention measures in regard to diarrhoea, malaria, respiratory tract infections, snake bites and HIV. In addition, community members have been trained in first aid, and communities have been provided with basic first aid materials. As part of the HIV/AIDS awareness sessions conducted, condoms have been distributed in the belief that this will allow participants to become familiar with using condoms and be encouraged to purchase their own for future use.

The need for safe water and improved sanitation was identified as a critical health and social issue in 2007 and therefore, the project aims to provide household latrines for 300 families during the second half of 2008, with a further 300 in 2009.

The project is also planning to provide 1,250 long-life treated mosquito nets to each household in 2008, and the same number in 2009. This work has been strongly supported by the Finnish Red Cross.

Related programme: Community-based health development – Keng Tung

Achievements

This five-year project funded by the Australian Red Cross is reaching its conclusion with an exit strategy being developed by the MRCS health division. It has been addressing the basic health needs and concerns of 30 rural villages and five urban wards in the Keng Tung township.

The project continues to address many similar issues to that of the Magway community-based health project *(mentioned earlier)*. MRCS has drawn from the lessons learnt in Keng Tung to develop the programme in Magway and also other community health programming in Mandalay and Sagaing that has benefited form the support of the Danish Red Cross.

This area supports 128 Red Cross peer educators who provide advice and education to taxi drivers, construction workers, labourers and community members on HIV/AIDS - more than 3,000 people have received information from these peer educators. More than 15,000 condoms have also been distributed and 20 condom boxes placed in guest houses, hotels, bus terminals, beauty parlours and taxi ranks.

Additionally, Red Cross volunteers have conducted health and hygiene talks for more than 2,000 men and women. Topics covered included HIV, tuberculosis (TB), malaria, diarrhoea, and hygiene and sanitation. First aid kits have been distributed to all the rural villages and 60 'care packs' were provided to 12 women living with HIV.

Programme component: Voluntary non-remunerated blood donor recruitment

Outcomes/Expected results

- Increase in voluntary non-remunerated blood donors recruited and retained.
- Reduction in transfusion-transmissible infections identified in donated blood organized by the MRCS.
- Expanded MRCS participation in voluntary blood donor recruitment.

Achievements
The MRCS continues in its efforts to promote voluntary non-remunerated blood donations. This year, the MRCS participated in a number of events including quiz competitions, blood donation ceremonies at the Eastern & Western University and World Blood Donor Day at Dagon University in Yangon, during which 700 students donated blood.

To support this programme, the MRCS has trained 136 Red Cross volunteers in voluntary blood donor recruitment - these volunteers help with registering donors, providing information, education and communication materials, and reporting on activities.

A blood recruitment drive held in conjunction with World Blood Donor Day. ***(Photo: Myanmar Red Cross Society)***

Programme component: Amputee referral and outreach prosthetic programme (OPP)
Outcomes/Expected results

- At least 1,000 amputees are referred and supported by trained Red Cross volunteers.
- At least 20 Red Cross volunteers from nine prioritized states and divisions receive support to complete OPP referral.

Achievements
This project is supported by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in nine states/divisions throughout Myanmar.

Programme component: Water and sanitation
Outcomes/Expected results

- Access to safe water and sanitation facilities is increased in identified vulnerable communities.
- Effective hygiene practices are completed in identified populations.

Achievements
Water and sanitation, although integrated into various community-based health initiatives, remains limited in reference to the extent of physical infrastructure provided. It is hoped that water and sanitation will remain an ever increasing focus of the MRCS. Discussions have been taking place to explore ways in which the MRCS can benefit from the extensive experiences of the Nargis operation in relation to water and sanitation.

Programme component: First aid and safety
Outcomes/Expected results

- Trained volunteers continually assess communities' needs and adapt support accordingly.
- Red Cross volunteers' community-based first aid (CBFA) knowledge remains current and Red Cross volunteer interest is maintained to continue supporting their communities.
- Red Cross volunteers collaborate with communities in preparation for managing disasters and emergency responses.

Achievements
From January to April, the Training division of the MRCS conducted four community-based first aid training of trainers courses in three states/divisions of Myanmar (i.e. Shan East State, Shan North State and the Sagaing division). A total of 134 people benefited from this training. The training division also carried out commercial first aid training sessions, reaching a total of 135 participants.

An external consultant was appointed to conduct a community-based first aid programme review which commenced in this reporting period, with the intention of reaching three target areas. Unfortunately, due to cyclone Nargis, only two areas have been reached - Keng Tung township in Shan East State and Labutta township in the Ayeyarwady division. The third area will be Magway.

Community-based first aid (CBFA) and basic first aid (BFA) multiplier training sessions were also conducted throughout 16 states and divisions of Myanmar, with a total of 3,392 people trained in CBFA and a further 4,601 in BFA during these six months.

From early May to the end of June, the Training Division has been involved in the Nargis relief operation in the affected areas of the Yangon and Ayeyarwady Divisions. Public Health in Emergencies training sessions have been conducted for township Red Cross volunteers from these areas, to help prevent diseases and create a safer environment for the affected population.

Related programme: Capacity building in health

Achievements

Following the recommendations of the 2006 partnership meeting and a three-day internal health review which took place in the fourth quarter of 2007, discussions were held on ways in which implementing partners and supporters can seek to consolidate and strengthen the health division's efforts. These included reducing the administrative load and moving towards a more streamlined programme approach.

The health and training divisions have now been combined and, remain committed towards exploring ways to move towards a programme approach. A workshop is being planned for October, to re-open discussions.

Constraints or Challenges

The national society is under a great deal of pressure at this time, not least due to the efforts needed to scale-up in response to the Nargis operation. These efforts include the deployment of many MRCS staff to the operation, thus temporarily but necessarily, suspending their normal activities within the MRCS. As a result, several projects planned for 2008 have experienced understandable delays with activities being postponed or cancelled.

Organizational development

Programme component: Branch capacity building

Outcomes/Expected results

The capacity of MRCS branches is strengthened to take a leadership role in implementing humanitarian activities, in addressing the needs of local communities in accordance with the principles and values of the Movement.

Achievements

There have been mixed results from the branch development programme initiated in 17 pilot townships, in 2005. The construction of five branch buildings in Zeegone, Loikaw, Kyaikmayaw, Hpaan and Moekaung is expected to be completed before the end of the year. The support from branch coordinators in different states or divisions has been varied.

In December 2007, branch coordinators met at the headquarters to discuss the progress and challenges of branch development and malaria programmes initiated in nine townships in 2007. At this meeting, the roles of the different headquarters divisions in branch development were discussed and since then, the health programme has been monitoring the implementation of the malaria project. The meeting also featured a review and update of the reporting formats and procedures used by the branch coordinators, and discussions on issues related to volunteers and local fundraising. The follow-up to this gathering of branch coordinators was planned for May 2008 but had to be postponed due to cyclone Nargis.

Three field visits were planned together with the International Federation's organizational development delegate in order to monitor the progress of the branch development programme. One visit covered three states or divisions, five townships and 11 villages, including five malaria project villages. The visit highlighted a need to strengthen organizational and financial systems, and procedures at branch levels to support a decentralization process. A need for MRCS headquarters to develop an integrated approach towards branch development in coordination with other programme divisions was also highlighted. The other two visits could not be conducted. However, a field visit plan for the rest of 2008 has been drawn up.

A review of the MRCS branch development programme and activities by an external consultant will be one of the key activities undertaken this year for this expected result. Support from the regional office in Bangkok will be sought to guide this process.

Programme component: National headquarters capacity building

Outcomes/Expected results

The MRCS national headquarters' capacity is strengthened to assist branches in delivering community-based services efficiently and effectively, to meet the needs of the most vulnerable in Myanmar.

Achievements

A review of the MRCS human resources unit was initiated in November 2007 and the first phase completed in April 2008. The review conducted by an external local consultant, was conducted through interviews and consultations with various stakeholders as well as field visits. The review looked at the staffing structure at the headquarters, staff management issues and the society's decentralization plans. Recommendations from this review were discussed with the in-country partner national societies, with the aim of planning for the next phase which involves the implementation of the recommendations.

As a follow-up to the in-service session on the International Federation's integrity policy conducted in 2007, a session on the Seville Agreement and the MRCS Legal Base, jointly facilitated by the ICRC and the International Federation, was planned for early February. However, as key people from the MRCS including the president, were unavailable during this time, the proposed session was postponed to the second half of 2008. In order to prepare for this, one senior-level internal discussion of the MRCS executive committee, ICRC and the International Federation, was held in March, with the focus on the roles and responsibilities of Movement partners. The MRCS continues the review of its statutes - a third version of a working draft of the revised statutes is currently under internal discussion among the national executive committee. The International Federation's regional and zone offices, as well as the secretariat in Geneva, are providing technical support to facilitate the process.

Discussions were also initiated to review the MRCS appeal plans for 2008 and 2009, and to assist the MRCS in prioritizing action for the coming years. One of the primary aims of these discussions was to support the MRCS in identifying areas of intervention and focus on impact through an integrated approach.

Most of the discussions initiated during this period, however, could not be concluded due to the cyclone that hit the country and the ensuing relief and recovery operations.

Programme component: Youth development

Outcomes/Expected results

Greater numbers of young women and men participate in MRCS activities as beneficiaries, service providers, and partners in management and evaluation.

Achievements

The MRCS highlighted the importance of youth participation in its programmes in February by inviting youth representatives to participate in its central council meeting and general assembly held in February/March. Although the participants only had observer status, the event represented the first time that the youth had been invited to these meetings and was therefore, considered to be a significant step forward in MRCS youth development.

In March 2008, three advocacy sessions attended by 40 representatives from 20 universities were conducted in the Mandalay division. The sessions were supported by an address by the MRCS president.

In the same month, advocacy sessions were also conducted in three universities in Lashio, northern Shan state, and seven universities in southern Shan state. In addition, three universities and three colleges in Kachin state and East Bago division were supported in establishing university Red Cross teams. A total of 187 students also participated in the different advocacy meetings which also included sessions on the Red Cross principles and values.

The youth and volunteer coordinator represented the MRCS at the organizational development forum held in Manila, Philippines, in February.

Key activities planned for September to December are one national-level advocacy workshop, a youth leadership training session, and one advocacy workshop in the Sagaing Division.

Programme component: Volunteer development

Outcomes/Expected results

Volunteer management efforts are strengthened through systematically evaluated processes.

Achievements

Major activities included the development of a volunteer movement diary for branches to record and support volunteer work. A total of 400 diaries were distributed to the different branches. Branches are also being encouraged to register all volunteers in an effort to improve volunteer management. This was emphasized at the 62nd central council meeting held in February 2008. The updated figures from the branches are pending.

The volunteer policy developed in 2006 and distributed by the headquarters in 2007, is currently being discussed at the branch levels. The branch coordinators and grade 1 officers have been given the responsibility to conduct discussions and dissemination activities in various townships. Feedback on this is pending.

In April, 17 states and divisions reported that a total of 349 volunteers actively participated in various Red Cross programmes and activities, rendering assistance to about 15,811 beneficiaries. The assistance included relief after fires and disasters, emergency first aid, health and care, and community development work.

Preparations are underway to conduct a review of the overall MRCS volunteer programme with reflections on volunteer mobilization and support for volunteers during the Nargis operation, before the end of the year.

Red Cross volunteers meet with villagers in Lashio during a first aid awareness campaign. ***(Photo: Myanmar Red Cross Society)***

Programme component: Finance and resource development

Outcomes/Expected results

MRCS headquarters and branches have well-developed financial management procedures that are routinely followed to promote self-reliance and sustainability, as well as assistance from potential donors.

Achievements

The MRCS head of finance, participated in the Southeast Asian regional finance directors' forum in Singapore, hosted by the Singapore Red Cross Society and facilitated by the International Federation's Bangkok regional office. This meeting provided an opportunity to discuss issues related to finance development, and accounting software in use at different national societies, among others.

The updated financial regulations for the MRCS developed with the support of the regional office was fine-tuned in February, then endorsed by the executive committee and approved by the central council in February/March. The next stage comprising the development of a long-term finance development plan for the MRCS and which will include the strengthening of branch financial management, is under discussion.

The cyclone operation has provided the MRCS with an opportunity to test these regulations by implementing them at hub offices set up in selected townships for the cyclone Nargis operation. Guidelines for the hubs were developed with the support of the regional finance development delegate. The aim is to integrate the guidelines into branch finance procedures in the long term.

Constraints or Challenges

A key MRCS coordinator left the MRCS in February to pursue higher studies overseas and this was followed by the resignation of the society's branch development officer. These events had an adverse impact on the programme as it reduced the development and coordination unit to two staff members. The process of recruiting replacements was initiated in July this year.

Humanitarian values

Programme component: Communications development

Outcomes/Expected results

Develop the communications capacity of the national headquarters and selected branches, and create strong internal and external linkages, particularly during emergencies, to deliver timely support to the vulnerable, and maintain a high public profile and positive image for the MRCS.

Achievements

The communications division has been in discussion with the International Federation's country office on the development of a communications development plan for the MRCS. A server was procured and work on the MRCS

website has been progressing. One of the aims of the MRCS is to strengthen its communication linkages with its various branches, the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement partners, and other internal and external stakeholders. Following the cyclone response, training plans for communication focal points in states and divisions were reviewed and a proposal made on the need for an information management team at the headquarters.

In June, the MRCS procured and installed a Broadband WiMAX connection which gives better speed and allows more users to access the Internet. The Intranet has also been installed at the headquarters.

Programme component: Dissemination

Outcomes/Expected results

Through its ongoing communications and promotion of key national and global advocacy programmes, the MRCS promotes humanitarian programming, incorporating Movement principles and values in Myanmar.

Achievements

A major role for the communication division is to provide and promote the exchange of information from the headquarters to the branches, as well as the exchange between branches and among MRCS members, such as those in schools. During the reporting period, Red Cross Red Crescent Movement principles and values were promoted through training support provided to about 1,983 school Red Cross members. The members included 63 teachers, about 50 retired military officers in the veterans' association and about 400 community members in Tamwe township in Yangon, and Mong Sat township in Shan East state. The sessions covered the Movement history, principles and values, emblem and International Humanitarian Law, as well as planning for the future.

Two exhibitions were organized during the months of February and March at Nay Pyi Taw, the capital of Myanmar. The first comprised an exhibition within the Armed Forces Day Exhibition 2008. Here, the MRCS displayed photos of Red Cross activities and posters on the Movement's principles and emblem. The society also provided information on the MRCS vision and mission.

The second exhibition was held in commemoration of the 62nd MRCS central council meeting and 9th general assembly from 28 February to 1 March. Here, the MRCS displayed activities conducted for five programme areas according to its strategic plan: organizational development, health and care, disaster management, humanitarian values and financial resource development. Audiences included high-level authorities, the minister and deputy minister for health, central council members, general assembly members, and volunteers. Invited delegates from the ICRC, the International Federation, Danish Red Cross and French Red Cross also viewed this exhibition.

The MRCS has also conducted awareness campaigns through the print and electronic media. In February and March, Red Cross spots and Red Cross songs were aired over Myanmar Radio and FM Radio, targeting about 70 per cent of the country's population. Three first aid television spots were aired over two national television channels. In addition, the MRCS received good coverage in the local print media during the general assembly, through interviews given by the president and the honorary secretary. One edition of the MRCS journal was also published, providing information internally within the MRCS.

Posters on Red Cross Red Crescent Fundamental Principles and the use of the emblem were printed and distributed to states and divisions. The posters were developed with the support of the ICRC.

Coordination between the MRCS, the International Federation and the ICRC on MRCS programmes on Red Cross principles and values continues. At least three formal meetings were held during the reporting period to coordinate support for the MRCS.

Working in partnership

The MRCS has continued to develop and strengthen its numerous partnerships. The multilateral and bilateral support that the national society received during the recent disaster response, provided an insight into the support available through the Movement. One such example is the Japanese Red Cross extension of its long-term, multilateral, country-wide support for community-based first aid and first aid.

During the first half of the year, national societies such as the Swedish Red Cross, Norwegian Red Cross, Japanese Red Cross and Taiwan Red Cross Organization continued to provide support for the MRCS in the delivery of long-term programmes. Following Nargis, the MRCS saw the potential for other national societies such as the American Red Cross, Austrian Red Cross and German Red Cross to develop alliances and mutually

productive long-term partnerships in disaster management. It is hoped that the increased interest in MRCS as a potential partner, will extend beyond the cyclone-affected areas and into other areas of the country that are in great need of humanitarian assistance. Valuable long-term bilateral support from the Danish Red Cross and French Red Cross also continues.

Contributing to longer-term impact

Plans for a major disaster management review to measure the impact of the disaster assessment response team (DART) programme, have been put on hold due to cyclone Nargis. However, this remains a priority. Several community-based health programmes are also under review, including the support offered through the Finnish Red Cross. Planned reviews of the community-based first aid (CBFA) and first aid (FA) programming will be completed between the end of the year and early 2009.

The review of the Nargis operation will also be able to provide additional learning for the Movement. Just as the lessons from the tsunami, the Pakistan earthquake and other big operations were able to provide some direction for the Nargis response, the MRCS will play a vital role in adding to the body of learning for future large-scale disasters in complex contexts.

Looking ahead

The Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) has undergone significant changes in the first half of the year. It is clear that in the eyes of many in the community, the authorities and the international humanitarian actors, there has been increased confidence in the capacity of the MRCS, as it has demonstrated its ability to reach and respond to those affected by the cyclone under extremely difficult circumstances. There has been unprecedented support for the MRCS in its relief and recovery work in the delta with improved communications and transportation.

The International Federation now plans to work with the MRCS and Movement partners to establish how the support and efforts in the delta can assist the MRCS in developing the national society's response to vulnerability in other areas of the country. The deployment of trained volunteers during the relief phase not only assisted the volunteers in the delta but also created an opportunity for a variety of volunteers from less-affected areas to participate in relief and recovery work. This will be developed further in the coming months and years, across all sectors including community-based health, community-based first aid, disaster risk reduction, and disaster preparedness and response.

How we work

The International Federation's activities are aligned with its Global Agenda, which sets out four broad goals to meet the Federation's mission to "improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity".

Global Agenda Goals:

- Reduce the numbers of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.
- Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.
- Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.
- Reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion and promote respect for diversity and human dignity.

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