

BANGLADESH: POST CONFLICT REHABILITATION

20 May 1998

appeal no. 09/98

situation report no. 1

period covered: 24 March - 30 April 1998

Although the food distributions and community development that this appeal seeks to fund can make a significant contribution to the peace process in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, a very low response is holding up the operation. Funding received so far is only enough to finance the first round of distributions. Meanwhile, a BDRCS/Federation survey has identified other potential beneficiary groups.

The context

On 2 December 1997 the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) and the Parbattaya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) signed a Peace Agreement ending a 15 year armed conflict in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region. The Agreement was immediately followed by the repatriation, concluded in February this year, of the last 10,427 families (45,890 persons) from their refuge in India. Under the terms of the Agreement, all returning families received food, cash, building material and land from the GOB. In addition they were given a three-month supplementary food package by the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS).

At the request of the GOB, the BDRCS/Federation, in an operation supported by this appeal, will supply supplementary food to the 10,427 families for another 9 months, develop community service activities for an additional estimated 120,000 beneficiaries, and introduce disaster preparedness and health programmes benefiting a very large part of the total CHT population of one million people.

Latest events

On 12 April, the CHT Regional Council Bill and three other bills on the Local Government Councils of Rangamati, Khagrachhari and Bandarban in the CHT were put before the Bangladesh Parliament after being approved by the Cabinet on 30 March. The move met with a strong protest from the main opposition BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) and its allies who staged a walkout and called a half-day hartal (political strike) across the country on 15 April. Meanwhile, the leader of PCJSS sought an urgent meeting with the GOB to discuss what the PCJSS considered as incongruities in the bills to implementing the CHT Peace Agreement. After three days of intensive talks, the two sides reached a workable understanding on the four bills, which were placed before Parliament on 20 April, and the tribal leaders accepted the explanations of the GOB on the contents of the four bills.

In April UNDP, on behalf of the international donor community in Bangladesh, sent a five-person team on a three-week mission to the CHT to assess the short to long-term development requirements in support of the CHT Peace Accord. For the moment, all the parties involved in the CHT are waiting for the mission's findings and recommendations, which will help them co-ordinate further their support to programmes in the CHT.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Joint BDRCS-Federation Mission

From 21-24 April, the BDRCS Deputy Secretary General and Head of the Disaster Management Division, accompanied by the Federation Head of Delegation and the Relief Delegate, visited all three districts in the CHT region, holding meetings with the local government and Red Crescent leaders on the organisation of the forthcoming distributions and the current security situation in the region.

One of their main findings was that, apart from the refugees/returnees covered by the appeal, there are two other groups of people in the region who might also become recipients of supplementary food relief: the 1,946 demobilised former members of the Shanti Bahini (the armed wing of the PCJSS) and internally displaced persons (IDP), whose total number was not available at the time of the mission. BDRCS was recently requested by the GOB to include the 1,946 persons in the supplementary food distributions. Given the current political situation in the CHT, the BDRCS and the Federation will further co-ordinate with the GOB and other organisations (including the UN agencies) on how to address this problem. The fate of these groups is a significant factor in the peace process in the CHT.

Procurement

According to the agreement with the BDRCS, the Federation Delegation is responsible for all the procurement relating to this operation. The bidding process was completed some three weeks ago, but the purchase of relief items could not be pursued immediately because of the low response to the appeal. At the time of writing, the Federation has received pledges of only CHF 282,352 -- just sufficient to procure food (dal, oil and salt) for the first three-month distributions. Procurement has begun and distribution is expected to commence within ten days.

Outstanding needs

Immediate needs

Funds are urgently required to ensure that

- the three phase distribution plan of 28,785 food packages will be carried out as projected in the appeal.

- implementation of the Branch institutional development and community development programmes begins as outlined in the appeal for an estimated 120,000 beneficiaries in the CHT region.

Anticipated later needs

If agreed, and provided that additional resources are made available, the BDRCS/Federation may complement the GOB's efforts to help the demobilised soldiers and the IDPs by including them in its future food distributions.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The BDRCS/Federation has been maintaining close contacts with the GOB, UN agencies and other organisations in Bangladesh concerning the implementation of the Federation appeal, which has been very positively received within Bangladesh.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

This operation can make a significant contribution to the whole peace process currently under way in the CHT region. But peace will last and prevail only when the needs of all the main elements have been properly handled and addressed. The full understanding and backing of the donor community is essential if this objective is to be achieved. The Federation, therefore, urges its donors to give their maximum support to this appeal.

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