

BANGLADESH: POST CONFLICT REHABILITATION

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period covered: September - December 1998

The food assistance programme delivered by the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society and the Federation during 1998 provided a sound basis for the successful implementation of the peace agreement between the Government of Pakistan and the people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Not only did the food assistance prove effectively distributed and managed, but the operation provided important lessons for future capacity building activities in post-conflict areas.

The context

Following the signing of a Peace Treaty in December 1997 between the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) and *Parbatya Chattagram Janna Sanghati Samiti* (PCJSS), the organisation of the tribal people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), the repatriation of the remaining 9,178 refugee families from India was concluded in February 1998. Under the Agreement, all returning families received food, cash, building materials and land from the GoB. In addition they were given a three months supplementary food package by the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS).

At the request of the GoB, the BDRCS/Federation undertook to continue the food distributions for another nine months, developing a Plan of Action to: supply supplementary food for that period, develop the institutional capacity of BDRCS's three CHT branches, develop community service activities for an additional estimated 120,000 beneficiaries and introduce disaster preparedness and health programmes benefiting a large part of the total CHT population of one million people. The Federation and BDRCS work in close cooperation with the ICRC, which supports the dissemination and tracing component of the programme.

Following a Federation appeal, launched on March 23, 1998 in support of the programme described above, a food relief operation, providing three months rations for each family, was begun in June 1998.

Latest events

December 2, 1998 was celebrated as the first anniversary of the CHT Peace Accord. During this 12 month period members of the armed faction (Shanti Bahini) received a cash amount of BDT 50,000 (equivalent to CHF 1,395). In addition, approximately one thousand refugee families have been receiving food rations, although this was not in the original agreement. Seven hundred members of the defunct Shanti Bahini have been absorbed in the police force. Of 52 former government employees, 46 have been reinstated in their previous jobs and the remaining six are expected to receive pensions. Of the 20 temporary army camps, 10 have been dismantled, and ten are in the process of being dismantled. The PCJSS has submitted a list of 19 prisoners, seven of whom have been released.

A provisional Regional Council has been formed, but elections have not yet been held. The proposed Land Commission will be functional when the the Regional Council is activated with 22 elected members.

The Task Force on Refugee Affairs decided to consider persons displaced between 15 August, 1975 and 10 August, 1992 as internally displaced, entitling them to certain benefits. A list of displaced persons, which was to have been completed by 15 October, is still awaited.

The GoB has announced that three district courts, headed by district judges, will soon be set up in CHT districts, thus ending the practice of district administrators functioning as ex-officio judges.

On 26 December, three small organisations opposed to the Peace Treaty formed a coalition and launched a new political platform, the United Peoples Democratic Front (UPDF).

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Procurement w

The Federation procured 156,948 kg's of lentils, 78,474 litres of cooking oil, and 78,474 kg's of salt through open tenders. The goods were delivered to the Chittagong warehouse of the BDRCS between 1 and 10 October.

Distribution w

BDRCS concluded the distribution of the third instalment of supplementary food rations to the 9,178 families in Rangamati and Khagrachari districts of CHT on 19 December. Each family was given a three-months package consisting of 12 kg's of dal (pulses), 6 kg's of salt, and 6 litres of cooking oil. The families represent 49,433 beneficiaries. The distribution started on 7 November. Only 22 families were unable to collect their rations.

Rations will also be distributed to 1,949 Shanti Bahini (former armed cadres of PCJSS). It has been agreed that supplies will be distributed by PCJSS representatives for each sub-district, in the presence of BDRCS officers. These distributions are expected to commence soon. The entire distribution programme is expected to be completed in March.

The following table shows the recent distribution in detail.

Sl. No.	Thana	Listed Families	Families Receiving	Number of Beneficiaries	Absentees
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2.	Diginala	2,481	2,480	14,038	1
3.	Panchari	3,126	3,122	17,086	4
4.	Matiranga	1,310	1,307	7,005	3
5.	Ramgarh	960	960	4,652	nil
6.	Manikchari	244	244	1,092	nil
7.	Mahalchari	16	12	60	4
8.	Laxmichari	5	5	22	nil
9.	Baghaichari (Rangamati District)	10	10	45	nil
10	Rangamati Sadar	4	4	16	nil
11	Longadu	10	nil	nil	10
12	Kawkhali	1	1	3	nil
13	Naniarchar	2	2	4	nil
	Total	9,178	9,156	49,433	22

Monitoring w

A joint monitoring mission comprised of the Federation Relief Delegate and DP Programme Officer and a Deputy Director of BDRCS visited the CHT on 16-19 November, 1998. The local unit of the BDRCS was found to be actively involved in well organized distributions, and no complaints were heard by the team from the beneficiaries about the quantity or quality of the items distributed.

The Deputy Secretary General of BDRCS and the DP delegate went on a two day mission to the CHT on 9-10 December 1998. They also noted the efficient distribution by the BDRCS officers and volunteers.

In the absence of a Relief Delegate, the CHT programme is currently being monitored by the DP Delegate, the short-term Relief Delegate and the respective programme officers.

Outstanding needs

A detailed Plan of Action (PoA) for the 1999 development component of the operation and a preliminary PoA for 1999-2001 will soon be finalised by BDRCS and presented to the Federation and to the embassies of the supporting PNS's in Dhaka. This is an important step towards securing necessary long-term commitments to the programme.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The BDRCS/Federation maintains close contacts with the relevant authorities of the GoB, UN agencies, foreign missions/embassies and other organisations in Bangladesh concerning the planning and implementation of both relief and development activities in the CHT.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The first anniversary of the Peace Agreement heralded brighter prospects for continued peace and development in the area. Both the PCJSS and the GoB have been hesitant to allow the large Bangladeshi NGO's to work in the CHT before an elected regional Council is in place. The BDRCS/Federation is the only partner for the provision of food rations, and both the PCJSS and GoB recognise the positive work of the National Society and expect it to fulfill an important role in the coming years. The successful accomplishment of the relief operations over the past several years and during 1998 in the CHT have earned respect for the Society from the tribal beneficiaries, the government and donors.

Implementation of the BDRCS/Federation Development Programme in the CHT should bring significant improvements in community services, thus contributing to peace and stability in the area. This part of the operation could serve as an example for action in other post-conflict areas where the Movement is active. The CHT operation will therefore form part of the Federation initiative, "Local Capacities for Peace", which will also be implemented in Tajikistan and Ethiopia.

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