

BANGLADESH: POST CONFLICT REHABILITATION, DISASTER RESPONSE AND PREPAREDNESS, AND CAPACITY BUILDING

17 November 1999

appeal no. 01.30/99

situation report no. 1

period covered: 1 January - 30 June 1999

The first six months of 1999 were encouraging with many of the planned programmes implemented and functioning effectively, and indications that the overall capacity of the Bangladesh Red Cross Society (BDRCS) is increasing. With new management in place, there is cautious optimism that a period of stability and productivity is possible. Priorities for the remainder of the year are to solidify the advances made in the first six months, to focus on institutional and resource development opportunities, and to effectively communicate the achievements to donors.

The context

A rare six-month period without major disasters in Bangladesh provided a conducive environment, enabling important activities such as the harvest of the rice and wheat crops to proceed without impediment. For the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS), this augurs well for a period of stability with a new management board in place, and improved progress expected in the planned programme areas of Disaster Preparedness, Institutional Development, and Health for the remainder of 1999.

Latest events

Within the national context, the first half of the year was characterised by no major natural disasters. The winter was not very cold and the April-May season of low pressure in the Bay of Bengal passed with no marked depressions, and hence no cyclones. A relative drought condition prevailed in most parts of the country which ultimately proved to be a blessing in disguise as it contributed to bumper yields of wheat and rice. A record harvest of 15 million MT of 'Boro' rice was harvested during this

season (January to April) compared to 8.13 million MT in 1998 and 7.5 million MT in 1997. Production of other cereals rose to 19.16 million MT from the 17.3 million MT of 1998. However, production of jute, the major cash crop of the country, declined from 5.82 million bales to 4.47 million bales due mainly to the floods of 1998.

Thanks to the bumper crops of Boro rice and other cereals, and an effective macro-economic policy, the GDP growth rate stood at over 5% in June despite the adverse effects of the 1998 floods. The rate of inflation rose to 8.8% in June 1999, compared to 6.6% in 1998.

The security situation in the country however has deteriorated with an increasing incidence of crime. A general amnesty had been declared for the terrorist groups operating under the banners of various communist parties, and several hundreds have surrendered with their arms.

Related to the BDRCS, a new Board of Management was elected at a general meeting held on 22 June, resolving the governance crisis that began in March. Meanwhile, the term of the Chairman expired on 31 July. The Secretary General of the Society retired on 31 May and the Deputy Secretary General is currently the acting Secretary General.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Myanmar Refugee Relief Operation (MRRO) w

This operation faced an acute funding crisis following the discontinuation of funding from the British Red Cross in January. The crisis was overcome with support provided by the Federation and special grants from the Swedish and German Red Cross Societies lasting up to June, 1999. The programme is currently not supported by any donor funding. The UNHCR's deadline for withdrawal from the Myanmar Refugee Operations ended on 6 June. However, in the light of humanitarian issues, UNHCR has extended the period and has been seeking funds to operate for a further six months.

Only 32 families (184 persons) were repatriated during the first half of 1999. The number of refugees in two camps stood at 22,497 (or 3,748 families). Some 1,665.9 MT of rice, 88.6 MT of dal, 57.5 MT of oil, 28.7 MT each of sugar, salt, and spices, 37.5 MT of baby food, 173.6 MT of compressed rice husk, 93,827 bars of soap, 22,863 litres of kerosene oil and 42,629 garments were distributed during the January to June, 1999 period.

Post Conflict Rehabilitation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts w

The Government policy drafted in January covering NGO activities in the Chittagong Hill Tract (CHT) has yet to be implemented, thus leaving the BDRCS/Federation as the only active non-governmental humanitarian aid agency in the area. In March 1999, 110,136 kgs of lentils, 55,068 ltrs of cooking oil, and 55,068 kgs of salt were procured by the Federation through open tenders.

During the first quarter, relief was provided to about 2,000 demobilised Shanti Bahini in accord with the 1997 peace agreement. Regular relief (supplementary food rations) was distributed to 9,178 returnee families during May and June. However, development programmes could not be launched during this period as the Plan of Action had not been finally approved. Some preparatory work, including the posting of field officers, has been done by the BDRCS. The Branch units, especially the Khagrachori unit, was actively involved in the relief operations that used Khagrachori as a base for operations. Close liaison was maintained with the local administration.

The Federation initiative, Local Capacities for Peace Project (LCPP), was implemented in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Tajikistan for a period of two years (1999-2000) with a view to institutionalising the post-conflict relief and rehabilitation experiences of the Federation, which is currently assisting 22 National Societies in this field. The programme was launched in Bangladesh after the visit of the

LCPP coordinator and a consultant to Dhaka in March 1999. Orientation seminars were held at the BDRCS, as were field visits to the CHT.

Community Based Disaster Preparedness (CBDP) Programme w

The CBDP Programme aims at promoting a more decentralised, flexible and cost-effective approach to disaster response through grassroots-level community participation. This programme will be adopted in 38 disaster-prone districts of the country by the year 2000, benefiting over 1.9 million vulnerable people. It was initially launched in 13 disaster-prone districts in April 1997 and was expanded to five more in 1998.

The British Red Cross has come forward with substantial pledges of cash and technical assistance to the CBDP for at least three years, supported by the Department of International Development.

Major work carried out:

- Organisational work has been initiated in the five new districts included in the programme. Regular activities such as basic training, Community-Based First Aid (CBFA), skill development training, Training of Trainers (ToT), latrine component making and distribution in several districts, a membership drive and income generation were carried out. As part of Institutional Development (ID), some motorcycles and cycles have been provided to unit officers. Relief gear such as helmets, gum-boots, life jackets etc. were procured and distributed.
- A two-day orientation workshop on Community Based Disaster Preparedness and Unit Development was organised in Dhaka on 12 and 13 March, 1999. The orientation course was followed by a three-day CBDP Basic Training Course for the 18 districts.
- Three-day Skill Development Training courses for making slab latrines by volunteers were completed in selected villages of the Bagerhat and Noakhali units.
- A three-day Community Based First Aid (CBFA) training course was organised in Dhaka from 23 to 25 May for all 18 CBDP units.
- The CBFA course was followed by a five-day Training of Trainers (ToT) Course for the 18 districts.
- A Disaster Emergency Fund was created at the Bagerhat and Noakhali units during the reporting period. As usual, matching funds have been sent to these units.
- Membership Drive and Fund Raising: In the on-going membership drive, 107 new life members were recruited in the first quarter.
- Latrine component making and distribution took place and demonstrations on latrine installation were conducted at community level. Some 700 latrine component sets were distributed to beneficiaries during the first quarter.
- Some 200 sets of sanitary latrines were produced and 100 more sets were installed in homes at project villages during the second quarter. All latrines have been installed above flood levels. Each family will be provided with a latrine for a token fee.
- Shelter Maintenance and Management (SMM): The Shelter Management Committees (SMCs) have been formed at 12 shelters out of the 32 in the Borguna region. Training for ten SMC members in the Noakhali region was organised and implemented during the second quarter.
- CBDP officers from the BDRCS and the Federation attended a day-long workshop on Shelter Management organised by a Swiss NGO (DASCOH), and sponsored by the Swiss Red Cross in June.
- Eleven motorcycles and 20 bicycles were procured in February and March for Unit Officers and staff. Equipment, including gum-boots, life jackets, first aid kits, and emergency gear was procured for volunteers during the first quarter.

- Formation of CBDP Squads is now underway in the five new units of Sunamganj, Sylhet, Shariatpur, Munshiganj and Kushtia.
- As part of their drive to achieve self-reliance, all 13 first-phase units have embarked upon income generation activities. These include rental of surplus owned space, and the undertaking of income-generating activities at community, group and individual levels. The Bogra and Bagerhat units have set up Computer Training Centres. The Bogra unit is also initiating a poultry farm project and the Jamalpur unit is currently constructing two more rooms for rental purposes.
- World Disaster Preparedness Day was observed on 6 April, with rallies and seminars organised for the occasion.
- World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day/Millennium Year Day was observed on 8 May, with the activities receiving wide media coverage. Also, CBDP squad members took part in the nationwide Tree Plantation Week (15 to 21 June) in their respective areas.

Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP) w

At present, the CPP covers 11 districts, 30 thanas, 260 unions and 2733 units. The network of over 33,000 trained volunteers, supervised by 30 thana-based full-time Assistant/Junior Directors, has a proven track-record of successful rescue and relief operations. The CPP radio communications system, the largest in Asia, provides the only reliable means of communications for the entire coastal belt with its population of about 10 million. The Federation's support of a CP delegate was withdrawn in 1997 in view of increased BDRCS capacity but occasional support is being provided through the Delegation.

Although at least two depressions were observed during the reporting period, none developed into a cyclone. The government grant to the programme during 1999 is expected to be Tk. 10,100,000.00 (315,000 CHF) mostly covering establishment charges for the programme.

Major RC/RC Activities

Regular activities such as training, equipment maintenance and awareness campaigns under this programme continued, although a shortage of funds curtailed the level of support. In addition:

- *Awareness Campaigns:* A total of eight field demonstrations (dry rehearsals for cyclone preparedness) were arranged in different thanas and were witnessed by about 40,000 persons.
- *Organisational:* Special union committee meetings were organised in 260 unions during the first and second quarters.
- *Training:* An orientation course was organised for religious leaders, students and fishermen during the second quarter at thana headquarters. A total of 2,070 Imams, 4,000 fishermen and 60 school students attended the course in batches.
- *Construction Work:* Construction of the 25` x 85` semi-pucca building Zonal Office at Barisal was completed in June. The CPP office in Sudharam was also completed in May.
- *Repair and maintenance:* various equipment, including wireless sets and warning apparatus, has been repaired at the BDRCS workshop in Dhaka. In Barisal and Chittagong, two teams of radio technicians visited 50 % of the field stations.
- *Procurement and distribution:* 13,269 large- and 14,016 medium-size dry cell batteries were distributed amongst volunteers during the first quarter. No distributions were made in the second quarter.

Institutional Development Programme

Background

In line with the recommendations of Federation-appointed consultants Arthur D. Little, several institution-building activities were undertaken by the Society from 1997 under a five-year Rolling Plan of Action (1997-2001). The original Plan of Action included modernisation of governance and functions, branch capacity building and support to the Community Based Disaster Preparedness Programme and the Cyclone Preparedness Programme, and the initiation of a Community Services Programme (CSP) for vulnerable communities.

Under the ID programme, the BDRCS underwent a thorough reorganisation of its structure resulting in the creation of five new divisions and several new departments, and the integration of some others. Several regular activities were planned under the ID Programme including organisation/management training, provision/expansion of facilities, holding of workshops and seminars, preparation of manuals/handbooks aimed at Human Resource Development, and capacity building. ID was initiated separately for National Headquarters and units. The 15 units included CSP components in their operations involving, amongst other things, income generation projects, tubewell installation and the provision of sanitary latrines.

Major ID activities during the reporting period include:

- Extension and renovation of a BDRCS training room with a seating capacity of some 40 persons.
- Provision of Training to employees of other NGOs and to 77 members of the Bangladesh National Cadet Core (BNCC).
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Health Programme w

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Major Events

An English-language daily published a lead story under the title 'Lack of Blood Policy - Nation Inching to Catastrophe' on 14 May, 1999. The story mentioned the BDRCS appeal for immediately adopting and announcing a National Blood Policy, to save the nation from an impending HIV/AIDS catastrophe. It mentioned that there are about 250 blood centres/banks in the country. Except for the BDRCS Blood Centre and a few others, most centres collect and preserve blood inadequately. During a meeting with the Minister of Health on 9 June, the Federation's reiterated its willingness to provide expert help to the government of Bangladesh for formulating a National Blood Policy.

Red Crescent Activities

Since November 1998, BDRCS blood centres have started screening all blood for HIV, syphilis, and other illnesses with the introduction of new testing procedures and support from the Italian Red Cross. The blood-related activities of the centre during the first half of 1999 included holding about 80 motivational sessions, the collection of over 4,000 bags of blood, the supply of about 3,000 blood components and about a thousand cases of blood transfusions. Except for the motivational sessions, most of the achievements during the second quarter fell short of target.

Income during the second quarter stood at Tk. 879,000 (27,469 CHF). Procurement of necessary furniture and fixtures for the Jessore Blood Centre was made during the second quarter. Requisite

staff and technicians for the two blood centres have also been recruited. One 16-parameter haematology analyser has been procured for the Dhaka centre. Training has been provided, for fees, to three government medical officers and 37 lab technicians.

Outstanding needs

Except for the Health Programme, donor response to the 1999 Appeal has generally been positive and most planned activities were undertaken. However some programmes were not able to be fully implemented due to insufficient funding.

BDRCS programmes also suffered due to a prolonged governance crisis, and the orientation of the new Board is urgently required. Some key positions, including those of Chairman, Secretary General, Deputy Secretary General and Chief Finance Officer, have been vacant for quite some time, and these should be filled without delay to relieve the Managing Board from excessive and unwarranted involvement in management.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The excellent disaster response from the BDRCS and Federation to the 1998 floods has raised their profiles considerably through intensive media coverage and information-sharing with diplomatic missions, UN agencies and NGOs. As a continuation of this, in June the Federation's DP delegate accompanied a British TV team filming floods in Bangladesh for Channel 4 and the Discovery Channel.

The BDRCS/Federation has been very active in maintaining relations with Diplomatic Missions, ECHO, the EU and major NGOs. The BDRCS and the Federation were invited to make a presentation before the EU Head of Mission who visited the CHT from 6 to 9 February this year. The DP delegate made a presentation, assisted by the local unit officer, which was later termed as 'a fairly upbeat assessment' in the report of the British High Commissioner. On 24 February, the DP delegate attended a UNDP meeting of donors interested in CHT development, convened by the British High Commission in a follow-up to the visit by the EU Head of Mission.

On 16 and 17 June, BDRCS and Federation representatives actively participated in a two-day National Seminar on Disaster Preparedness sponsored by USAID and CARE. The topic was 'Lessons Learned from the 1998 Floods.'

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

Despite a difficult governance environment, it has been encouraging to see most programmes functioning in a satisfactory fashion while the overall capacity of the BDRCS increases countrywide. The Federation Delegation is approaching the next six months with an increasing degree of optimism. It is hoped the positions of Chairman and Secretary General will be confirmed soon, bringing a new period of stability to the BDRCS.

Priorities for the upcoming six months are, firstly, to ensure the new Board receives an intensive induction programme, and secondly to increase support to the BDRCS for its fund-raising activities with particular emphasis on its property development initiative. During this period the BDRCS will need additional support from the Delegation and PNSs until the new fund-raising activities begin to generate real returns for the Society. The next six months will be a busy period, focused on making

difficult decisions and implementing those already made. The Federation will, as usual, put its full support behind the BDRCS in the hope it can enter the new millennium as a much more effective National Society.

Peter Rees
Director
Operations Funding and Reporting Department

Hiroshi Higashiura
Director
Asia and Pacific Department

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BDRCS programmes also suffered due to a prolonged governance crisis, and the orientation of the new Board is urgently required. Some key positions, including those of Chairman, Secretary General, Deputy Secretary General and Chief Finance Officer, have been vacant for quite some time, and these should be filled without delay to relieve the Managing Board from excessive and unwarranted involvement in management.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The excellent disaster response from the BDRCS and Federation to the 1998 floods has raised their profiles considerably through intensive media coverage and information-sharing with diplomatic missions, UN agencies and NGOs. As a continuation of this, in June the Federation's DP delegate accompanied a British TV team filming floods in Bangladesh for Channel 4 and the Discovery Channel.

The BDRCS/Federation has been very active in maintaining relations with Diplomatic Missions, ECHO, the EU and major NGOs. The BDRCS and the Federation were invited to make a presentation before the EU Head of Mission who visited the CHT from 6 to 9 February this year. The DP delegate made a presentation, assisted by the local unit officer, which was later termed as 'a fairly upbeat assessment' in the report of the British High Commissioner. On 24 February, the DP delegate attended a UNDP meeting of donors interested in CHT development, convened by the British High Commission in a follow-up to the visit by the EU Head of Mission.

On 16 and 17 June, BDRCS and Federation representatives actively participated in a two-day National Seminar on Disaster Preparedness sponsored by USAID and CARE. The topic was 'Lessons Learned from the 1998 Floods.'

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

Despite a difficult governance environment, it has been encouraging to see most programmes functioning in a satisfactory fashion while the overall capacity of the BDRCS increases countrywide. The Federation Delegation is approaching the next six months with an increasing degree of optimism. It is hoped the positions of Chairman and Secretary General will be confirmed soon, bringing a new period of stability to the BDRCS.

Priorities for the upcoming six months are, firstly, to ensure the new Board receives an intensive induction programme, and secondly to increase support to the BDRCS for its fund-raising activities with particular emphasis on its property development initiative. During this period the BDRCS will need additional support from the Delegation and PNSs until the new fund-raising activities begin to generate real returns for the Society. The next six months will be a busy period, focused on making

difficult decisions and implementing those already made. The Federation will, as usual, put its full support behind the BDRCS in the hope it can enter the new millennium as a much more effective National Society.

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