

AFGHANISTAN: Humanitarian Assistance

14 April 2000

appeal no. 01.21/2000

situation report no. 2

period covered: 1 - 29 February

The Afghan Red Crescent Society's health clinics recorded 129,000 health services provided during January, while training of volunteers in first aid has so far reached 7% of the year's target. Training of Traditional Birth Attendants was completed in two regions. Programmes are expected to expand now that agreements have been reached in many areas of programme support and core structures.

The context

More than 20 years of conflict have ruined Afghanistan's economy and reduced the living conditions of most of its 20 million population to a bare subsistence level. As long as the conflict continues it is unlikely the socio-economic situation will improve, leaving most Afghans facing years of extreme vulnerability. The government administration and infrastructure and the health care and social welfare system have almost completely collapsed. Except in a few cities or urban areas, telephones, utilities, roads and other municipal services are almost non-existent.

The strength of the Movement – the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS), the ICRC and the Federation – has clearly been its ability to sustain, countrywide, a continuous presence and activities over the years. The ARCS, arguably the only indigenous, nationwide humanitarian organisation in the country, is struggling to maintain its ability to work with all ethnic groups and to reach women through its services. Operational in 30 of Afghanistan's 32 provinces, and with an extensive network of branches, it continues to reach more than three million beneficiaries a year, with Federation and ICRC support.

Latest events

The general climate of insecurity reported in January continued, with several bomb blasts in Kabul city. During a minor skirmish in the night of 3 February, near one of the Afghan Red Crescent Society's (ARCS) clinics Qalai Fatulah, Kabul, a hand grenade fell inside the clinic watchmen's room, but caused only material damage.

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There are reports warning of possible food shortages due to insufficient rains: special prayers were held in Kandahar for rains to avoid continuing drought in the area.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Health Programme •

General

Almost the entire month was spent on discussions with the ARCS on the programme agreement and budgets for the Primary Health Care Programme, including the maternal and child health care component (MCH). The key issues were expansion/re-allocation of clinics, provision of various types of training for ARCS clinic staff, recruitment of a female MCH supervisor and counterpart to the MCH delegate, staffing at the ARCS headquarters Health department, grading and classification of the different categories of health workers and allocation of running cost for clinics.

By the end of the month, agreement was reached on the following main points: the clinic located in the Kabul Marastoon compound and currently supported by the Federation, will be moved outside so it can serve a wider public. Future opening and (re-)location of other clinics will be in line with the recommendations of the 1999 Health Review. The MCH supervisor will be female as required by the ARCS itself. A standard grading for health staff will be proposed by the ARCS. Running costs for the clinics have been fixed and will be earmarked.

Health Clinics

Data received by the end of February -- from only 37 of the 47 clinics -- shows a total of 129,485 health services provided in January, with women and children under 14 years of age making up around 80% of the beneficiaries. ***This represents 6.5% of the year's target.***

Traditional Birth Attendant (TBA) training

Training was completed for 26 TBAs in the Mazar-i-Sharif and Jalalabad regions. In Mazar, 10 of the 13 TBAs are widows. During January the TBAs countrywide assisted in 78 deliveries, distributed 122 clean delivery kits and registered 335 pregnant women, while 201 women received contraceptives.

Development Programmes •

Community Based First Aid & Youth

For the second consecutive month, general volunteer recruitment, training and follow-up activities were limited due to the suspension of activities until new programme agreements are signed. It was however decided that activities already agreed on would be continued and paid for, to avoid communities' loss of trust in the trainers.

Volunteer training activities

In Maiwand district of Kandahar a total of 46 volunteers covering 45 villages were trained. Training has been completed in Samangan province, where 20 volunteers were trained from 20 villages in Kholm district. Although surveys had started at the end of January for Takhar province, these were halted at the last minute due to the general suspension of payments. The 78 volunteers trained during January in the 7th district of Kabul received their first aid kits.

The 179 volunteers trained during the first two months of this year constitute 7% of the targeted 2,500 volunteers for 2000.

Since the CBFA trainers have no other activities, they provided first aid training for 12 ARCS and 4 Federation permanent staff in Herat. No training was conducted in the Eastern (Jalalabad), Central (Kabul) and Western (Herat) regions of Afghanistan due to suspension of payments.

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The Kandahar team organised an educational meeting with the new trainers to refresh and upgrade teaching methodologies. The CBFA Regional Supervisor for the Northern Region met with the Samangan training team to discuss possibilities of enhancing the level of volunteers' awareness in health care when they participate in follow-up training sessions.

Youth programme

Because schools are closed for the winter the youth volunteer training programme has been suspended until the end of March.

Community Based Disaster Preparedness (CBDP) •

An agreement has been reached on the storage of CBDP items, under which the capacity of the ARCS will be assessed and reviewed and a possible, gradual hand-over of warehousing will be decided on. Linkage of volunteer training on CBDP issues to CBFA training was still outstanding.

During the Federation delegation meeting of 15 and 16 February, an internal commission was set up to develop a DP plan for the Federation/ARCS. The commission will use plans and materials from other national societies. As part of the process, discussions were held with the ARCS counterpart to address the need for ARCS to establish contacts with the authorities.

Institutional and Resource Development •

New programme agreements & core structure agreement

The new ARCS President /Secretary General, appointed on 1 February, mandated the former first Vice-President, now nominated second Vice-President, to continue the process of preparing new agreements. He set up a commission comprising competent and experienced senior staff from the Health, Inspection, International Relations, Dissemination and Cadre & Personnel Departments.

Extensive discussions commenced immediately with the newly created negotiation body. On the tripartite issues (ARCS, ICRC and the Federation), an understanding has been reached concerning the earmarking of budgets to programmes, the reduction of the core structure, the increase of incentive level of ARCS staff, a new standardised grading system in the ARCS, the formalisation of counterpart relations, and the issue of internal centralisation. A time-frame to implement all the above issues has been agreed upon. The consensus reached will be confirmed in writing.

Concerning the outstanding bilateral issues (on ARCS programmes supported by the Federation only), a consensus was found on the opening of clinics and warehousing for CBDP relief items. The agreements and other documents related to the PHC (including MCH) and CBDP were ready for signing by the end of the month. The final drafts for CBFA and ID/RD were presented to the commission and were to be finalised in March.

Following the appointment of the new President/Secretary General, the expected series of replacements of heads of departments and some branches took place. In order to demonstrate concern, the Federation delegation suspended discussions on agreements for one week, allowing the delegation to consult the ICRC and the Secretariat and explore ideas to address ARCS integrity issues in a more comprehensive and systematic way. On the other hand, during an inauguration ceremony, the new President/Secretary General voiced his intention to respect the Fundamental Principles of the Movement as well as the rules and regulations of the ARCS.

National Leadership Workshop

The ID department went ahead with planning for the last two National Leadership Workshops, in Kandahar (4 - 7 March) and Mazar-i-Sharif (25 - 28 March) for senior staff of the branches of, respectively, the Southern and Northern regions.

Resource Development (RD)

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Resource Development (RD)

The RD activities in the Central Region branches were limited due to the above mentioned discussions on programme agreements and the core structure agreement. Possibilities of initiating RD activities in the Southern Region were explored.

Outstanding needs

Funds are urgently needed both for the CBDP and for the health programme -- the primary focus of Federation support. Funding is available for the MCH component only until 31 May, although there are good prospects for continued backing. Funds are also needed to ensure continuity of the CBFA programme until the end of the year; currently financing is assured until end November.

The recruitment of a Field Delegate to cover Herat and Kandahar Sub-Delegations remains a pressing need, particularly in view of the Federation commitment towards the ARCS and the ICRC to put in sufficient and continued capacity to guide the implementation of the new agreements and the proposed new planning/budgeting procedures for the branches.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

In the beginning of the month a consultant for UNFPA visited Afghanistan to discuss progress made in the implementation of MCH.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Peter Rees-Gildea
Director
Operations Funding and Reporting Department

Hiroshi Higashiura
Director
Asia and Pacific Department

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