

AFGHANISTAN: Humanitarian Assistance

29 May 2000

***appeal no. 01.21/2000
situation report no. 4
period covered: 1 - 30 April***

In response to increasing concerns over the rapidly declining water sources in the south and south-west of Afghanistan the Federation delegation undertook planning and initiated assessment missions to the affected areas together with the ICRC and ARCS. In parallel, the delegation and the ARCS stepped up efforts to ensure annual targets and objectives can be reached despite nearly three months delays related to the negotiation of new co-operation agreements.

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 drought situation in the southern and south-western regions of Afghanistan is causing growing concern among the authorities, international governmental and non-governmental organizations and the international media. According to Radio Shariat, the Taliban's Supreme Leader has ordered officials to send assistance to the affected areas. The authorities have reportedly transported nomads and their livestock to other areas, using helicopters and trucks, and have evacuated several hundreds of families from the worst affected areas.

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On 7 April, the UN Security Council reaffirmed its readiness to consider imposing further targeted measures against the Taliban authorities, to compel them to end the fighting and to hand over Osama-bin-Laden, as demanded by the UN. During a visit in late April, the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy to Afghanistan appealed in Kabul to the Afghan warring factions to stop the fighting and refrain from new offensives. The UN Security Council imposed sanctions on the Taliban authorities in November last year.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

The Health Programme •

Health Clinic Data

A total of 440,793 health services were provided from 1 January to 31 March. This represents 22% of the year's target. It should be noted that this figure contains January data from only 44 of the 48 clinics, February data from only 43 clinics and March data from 44 clinics. Women and children below the age of 15 form over 80% of the total beneficiary group.

Clinic Supplies & Running Costs

The supply of medicines to clinics throughout Afghanistan has been seriously compromised by the delayed arrival of the medical kits. An emergency local purchase of some essential drugs was begun, pending the final arrival of the 500 kits at the Tughundi border, now expected in the first half of May. In the meantime, remaining medicines have been redistributed internally, ensuring a minimum supply in the clinics.

Practical Pediatric Guidelines and Practical Drug Guidelines (108 books) in local languages were procured and distributed to all clinic head doctors and ARCS regional health officers in all regions except the Central Region, where this will be completed in May.

Clinic construction

Following last month's clinic visit to Kunduz by the civil engineer for renovation and construction works, the authorities have indicated their willingness to contribute 30 truckloads of gravel and wooden beams for the future clinic building. They urged the ARCS branch to start building in order to stimulate more contributions from the community. The main problems remain property title and the amendment of the municipality master plan. In the Hairatan clinic (in Mazar-i-Sharif), the female section quarters were completed and the female staff moved in during the month. By constructing a well in the clinic in Kandahar, the ARCS has managed to reduce the water supply problem, exacerbated by the drought in the region.

New Programme Agreements & Training

The new financial system is slowly being implemented, following the financial management workshops conducted by the ID and Finance Departments. In Mazar-i-Sharif, the Federation Finance Administration Manager organised a mini-workshop with six ARCS clinic head doctors, and ARCS and Federation Regional Health Officers on the new programme agreements and financial management procedures. This is the first step towards involving clinic personnel in the financial aspects of their activities and the procurement of essential supplies. In Kandahar and Herat, female and male ARCS vaccinators participated in vaccination refresher courses organized by the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH). An EPI centre has been established in Kandahar clinic.

All over the country, co-ordination meetings were held with WHO/UNICEF to prepare the National Immunization Day for the eradication of poliomyelitis, 1 - 3 May.

Monitoring

Regular monthly monitoring visits were carried out during the month to most clinics, although security concerns limited some visits in the northern regions.

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TBA training and activity reports

As of the end of March, the TBAs (Traditional Birth Attendants) countrywide had assisted with 238 deliveries, distributed 326 clean delivery kits and registered 472 pregnant women, while 3,194 women received contraceptives.

The training of additional TBAs in Ghazni province, scheduled for April, was postponed, since preparations were incomplete. In Herat, 20 TBAs have been selected for training, now scheduled for next month. The recruitment and selection of 20 TBAs is planned in Lagman's Alingar district. It is hoped that the delays in the implementation of this maternal and child health care component will be made up once the MCH delegate, delayed by visa issues, finally arrives.

Development Programmes •

Community Based First Aid & Youth

Community Based First Aid

After the signing of the agreement on 27 March all activities resumed after a three-month interruption. In response to the worsening drought, additional plans were developed (see below).

A total of 135 volunteers, covering 137 villages, were trained in April. They were recruited from six districts in all five regions in Afghanistan. This brings the total number trained this year to 314, or 16% of the annual target. The start of the harvest delayed training in some areas. All new volunteers received a first aid bag and a Dari or Pashtu manual.

Eight more trainers were recruited for Logar and Wardak (Central Region), Takhar and Badakhshan (Northern Region, Northern Alliance controlled territory). This brings to 29 the total number of active trainers.

In response to the drought in the south and south-western regions, it was agreed to recruit three additional training teams covering Zabul, Helmand and Uruzgan provinces. This represents a modification of the annual plan, which foresaw one team only, scheduled for later in the year. Contrary to the normal approach, which requires training of volunteers in one district at a time, these volunteers are being recruited from as many districts as possible within each province, in order to facilitate drought monitoring and action. Obviously, this requires more resources since recruitment, training, transport and follow-up costs are higher because of the larger geographical areas to be covered.

Follow-up meetings have been held with 20 volunteer groups in the Northern, Eastern and Central Regions. In the Southern Region, a meeting was held with 17 volunteer groups and district leaders, together with the ARCS CBFA Supervisor and the Federation's CBDP delegate. The ARCS Regional Supervisor met with the Lagman and Nangahar training teams early in the month for planning purposes.

According to activity reports received by the end of the month from the Eastern, Central and Northern Regions, volunteers have handled 2,095 cases, varying from first aid to the provision of advice in their respective villages. The cases reported show a predominance of fractures, bleeding, diarrhoea and burns. No activity reports were received from the Southern and Western Regions.

The following examples indicate the scope of the volunteers' activities:

- In Kholm and Charbolak districts in Balkh province, volunteers assisted with or carried out the digging of seven wells. Volunteers in Kholm district warned of the consequences of swarms of grasshoppers devastating agricultural lands, and their concern was relayed to the appropriate agencies.
- In Alishing district in Lagman province, a volunteer group team leader organised the building of a wooden bridge. In Dehbala district, a volunteer gave first aid to 20 wounded villagers and referred

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six of them to hospital after clashes between two villages. In Rodat district, demonstrations were given in 3 villages on preparing Oral Rehydration Salts.

- In three districts in the Central Region, health education sessions were conducted for a total of 310 villagers, while another 30 participated in a mine-awareness session. Mine-awareness was also promoted in Pagman district through the mosques.

Transportation remains a problem for the training teams who need mobility for recruitment and follow-up activities. *See under Supplies*. One of the volunteers' main problems is insufficient supplies of dressing materials and antiseptics. The current three months restocking schedule will be reviewed in the light of the objective of exploring cost-sharing mechanisms and resource mobilization strategies in order to ensure the future sustainability of the programme.

Supplies

The purchase was completed of 1,000 first aid bags and contents, funded by the Swiss Red Cross, Swedish Red Cross and Japanese Government. Refill materials were procured for some 1,580 bags from the same donors. The procurement of 13 motorbikes (for the CBFA training teams and the Youth Supervisor) is under way. Another motorcycle has been added to the order, in anticipation of extra training and follow-up activities in the drought affected areas.

Youth programme

When schools reopened the training of student volunteers resumed in 18 schools in Kabul city, where 372 volunteers attend courses given by 36 teachers. In Jalalabad city, eight volunteer teachers started activities in four schools, with 154 students attending. The appropriate facilities and teaching equipment has been provided in two of these schools. The teaching of 53 volunteer students, started in December 1999, resumed in three other schools in Jalalabad.

Community Based Disaster Preparedness and Response

Drought

The main activities within the disaster preparedness and response programme focused on the drought in the south and south-west of Afghanistan. Several assessments and fact finding initiatives have been undertaken by the three components of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement.

General situation

The scarcity of rain in 1998 and 1999 has been exacerbated this winter by an unusually dry period from January until now. Although it has rained three times this year, precipitation is far below average. Snowfall in the central mountain ranges of Afghanistan has generally been less than average -- in some areas reportedly one third to half of a normal year. The snow melt from these mountains is an important source of water for the southern and south-western regions.

The southern region comprises the provinces of Kandahar, Helmand, Oruzgan and Zabul, a total area of 156,000 square kilometres with an estimated population of nearly three million. Climatically, it also includes the southern parts of Ghazni. The south-western region includes the provinces of Nimrooz and Farah, an area of 90,000 square kilometres, with around 725,000 inhabitants.

These regions cover large ranges of desert and semi-desert areas, interspersed with arid mountains. The infrastructure has suffered immensely from 20 years of war: roads are hard to travel and in several areas in the south-west access to land is limited by unmarked and uncleared mine fields. The main occupation of the people is farming and the production of livestock. Large groups of nomads (Kochies) live in and travel through areas inhabited by semi-settled populations in scattered villages close to the rare rivers and canals.

Reports from other provinces, such as Paktia, Paktika, Ghor and Herat indicate that the acute water shortage has already extended northwards or is likely to do so as summer progresses.

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Reports from other provinces, such as Paktia, Paktika, Ghor and Herat indicate that the acute water shortage has already extended northwards or is likely to do so as summer progresses.

The Federation and the ICRC are co-ordinating closely their dialogue with the ARCS on all issues related to the drought response. While the general understanding of roles and responsibilities in Afghanistan under the Seville Agreement remains valid as a whole, the Federation delegation assumes a co-ordinating role in the response to this natural disaster situation and ensures linkages to the regional efforts in South Asia.

Current ICRC and Federation efforts to support the ARCS aim to:

- further assess the needs arising from the effects of the emerging drought on the health and livelihood of the population in most affected areas, on their access to safe water as well as water for farming and livestock;
- develop an appropriate and adapted response through the ARCS branch network in the fields of preventive health and the preservation of the scarce safe water resources for human consumption through the training and deployment of community-based volunteers and other measures;
- increase considerably the efforts to rehabilitate and improve access to water resources for farming and livestock.

So far, the ARCS has already started to increase its community-based first aid volunteer network in these regions (see above under the heading CBFA).

The joint action of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement is part of the regional disaster response efforts undertaken under co-ordination of the Federation, notably also in Pakistan and India. The Joint Assessment Mission composed of specialists from different National Societies in the fields of general relief, agro-veterinary issues, water/sanitation and nutrition was scheduled to arrive in Afghanistan mid-May. This team will build on the preliminary assessment carried out jointly by the ARCS, ICRC and Federation and develop a further course of action within the framework of regional efforts in South Asia, taking into account the specifics of Afghanistan.

More information will be made available soon after this assessment has been finalised and more comprehensive data have been collected.

Other disaster preparedness and response initiatives

While parts of Afghanistan are affected by drought, the ARCS reported a small flood on 16 April in Talua-u-Barfak district of Baghlan province, in the northern region. According to the ARCS Baghlan branch survey team, the flood affected 50 families, damaging 40 houses and some 50 acres of agricultural land, livestock and stocked crops. No further action was deemed necessary as the community could cope with the situation.

Initial steps have been taken to conduct Vulnerability Assessments in each of the five regions of Afghanistan, through the ARCS Regional CBDP Supervisors and Federation Field Officers.

Institutional and Resource Development

Following the signing on 27 March of new cooperation agreements between ARCS, ICRC and the Federation, the month of April was largely used to introduce the new agreements to all the concerned parties. On 4 to 6 April, a joint Federation - ICRC meeting was organized in Kabul, gathering all Federation delegates, office managers and field officers from Kabul and all sub-delegations, as well as ICRC cooperation delegates and national staff.

The new agreements, besides providing a framework for effective programme implementation, contain a strong finance development component, aiming at improving the transparency of ARCS' financial management systems.

Members of the ARCS negotiating commission and of the ARCS finance department, together with the ICRC Cooperation department and the Federation Finance and ID departments, designed a Financial Management Workshop, in order to familiarise all relevant ARCS staff with the new agreements and train them in the new planning, budgeting, financial reporting and activity reporting requirements. The

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workshop also represents an opportunity for ARCS to reintroduce its own financial management and accounting systems and procedures to all its branch and headquarters offices (no such training has taken place in the last five years in most regions, and most ARCS heads and administrators are relatively new, with non-financial background).

The first such workshop took place 25 - 27 April in Kabul, gathering all heads and deputy heads of headquarters departments, as well as all heads and administrators of the branches of the Central Region. Similar workshops were scheduled for the four other regions of Afghanistan: on 1 - 3 May in Jalalabad, on 8 - 10 May in Kandahar, on 21 - 23 May in Herat and on 29 - 31 May in Mazar-i-Sharif. This should ensure that the new agreements are fully operational throughout Afghanistan as from 1 June 2000.

Copies of all programme agreements, and the General and Core Structure agreements, have been provided in the local language to nearly all branches.

The organization of a sixth National Society Leadership Workshop in Kabul for all new ARCS headquarters staff members was postponed, probably until June 2000, because of the Financial Management Workshops.

In April, two new revenue generation projects were initiated, a shop keeping project in Ghazni, and a bakery project in Paktia province. The inflation of the Afghani and the rising price of wheat flour destroyed the earning capacity of the Logar bakery project initiated in January 2000. The branch will either have to raise the price of a loaf of bread or suspend the project until the situation stabilizes. The development is another indication that revenue generation is not an easy matter in war- and disaster-stricken Afghanistan.

Outstanding needs

The primary focus of Federation support is the health programme, followed by the CBDP. A revision of the budget for the MCH component of the health programme is under way, and modifications covering further needs will be announced. Funds are also needed for the CBDP and the CBFA programmes to ensure their continuity until the end of the year.

In the current situation, there is an urgent need to recruit a CBFA delegate, preferably female, in order to stimulate and strengthen the participation of women volunteers in the development of ARCS in general and the CBFA in particular. This recruitment was recommended by the review of the CBFA/CBDP programmes carried out in 1999.

Potential needs arising out of the drought situation will only be determined on the basis of the outcome of the assessments and subsequently to be developed strategies and plan of action.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

Staff attended meetings with UN and other international and non-governmental organisations on various subjects including the drought, to ensure co-ordination with other actors, promote a complementary approach and avoid duplication.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Peter Rees-Gildea
Director
Operations Funding and

Hiroshi Higashiura
Director
Asia & Pacific Department

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