

AFGHANISTAN: Humanitarian Assistance

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The establishment of new agreements with the Afghan Red Crescent Society on 27 March prepared the ground for the resumption of all activities. They will promote improved quality, transparency and accountability towards the beneficiaries identified in Afghanistan. There is concern over the possible consequences of water shortage in southern and south-western Afghanistan due to unprecedented lack of rains during the first months of 2000, worsened by the scarcity of rain in 1998 and 1999.

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

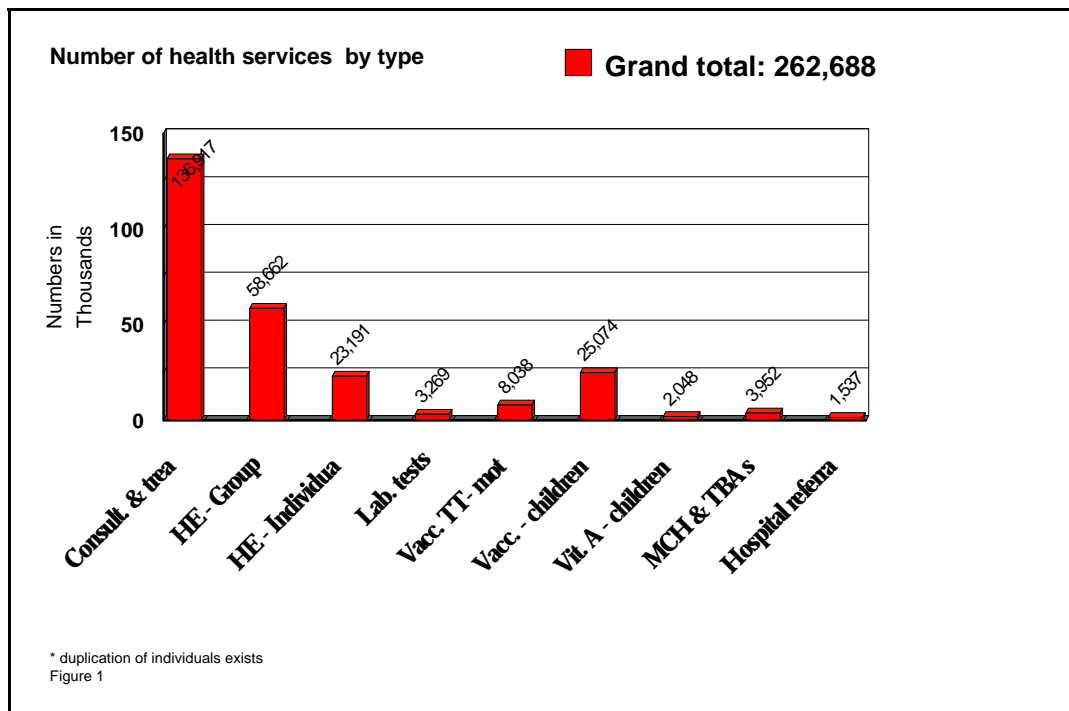
The unprecedented lack of rains during January and February this year is creating water shortages in southern and south-western Afghanistan, where it is threatening the upcoming May-June harvests and

affecting the livestock. The current water shortage is made worse by the scarcity of rain in 1998 and 1999. On 30 March the Taliban called on all aid agencies to help overcome the consequences of the drought.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Health Programme •

After almost two months of discussions, the ARCS and the International Federation on 27 March signed the programme agreement for the Primary Health Care Programme, including its maternal and child health care component (MCH). The agreement deals with the following key issues: the provision of training for ARCS clinic staff, recruitment of a female MCH supervisor and counterpart to the MCH delegate, staffing in the ARCS headquarters Health department, grading and classification of health workers and allocation of running costs for clinics. The agreement will allow a more rational approach to the implementation of the Primary Health Care (PHC) programme, following clear objectives and guidelines.



Health Clinics

A total of 262,688 health services were provided from 1 January up to 29 February. **This represents 12% of the year's target.** However, it should be noted that this figure contains January data from only 44 of the total 48 clinics and February data from only 33.

Women and children under age of 14 form over 80% of the total beneficiary group.

By the end of March, the civil engineer had visited the clinic sites of Kunduz and Samangan in order to establish renovation and construction needs. The clinic in Samangan needs to be expanded with two additional rooms and a bathroom for the female section, as part of the expansion of maternal and child

health care services. The clinic run by the ARCS Kunduz branch will have to move out of the current premises, and be rebuilt on a new plot allocated to the ARCS. The authorities have agreed to call a general meeting with elders, traders and other officials to seek a community contribution to these renovation works. The Central and Ariana clinics located in Balkh have been painted and provided with window glazing.

Regular monthly monitoring visits were carried out to most clinics.

The maternal and health care services in Qayak clinic (Ghazni province) can now be expanded, after recruitment by the ARCS of a female doctor. UNICEF has been approached to establish a EPI centre in the same clinic, and train vaccinators.

Traditional Birth Attendant (TBA) training

Up to the end of February, the TBAs (Traditional Birth Attendants) countrywide assisted 211 deliveries, distributed 190 clean delivery kits and registered 397 pregnant women, while 2,288 women received contraceptives. The TBAs give health education and advise on birth spacing, using all appropriate opportunities, including wedding ceremonies.

Preparations are underway for training additional TBAs in Ghazni province in April, but this could be hampered by the delayed arrival of the MCH delegate.

The further delay in the arrival of 500 medical kits will seriously threaten the medicine supply to the clinics and curative care interventions.

Development Programmes •

Community Based First Aid (CBFA) and Youth

For the third consecutive month general volunteer recruitment, training and follow-up activities were limited due to the suspension of activities until new programme agreements are signed. Therefore, no progress was made during the month towards the annual target of recruiting and training 2,500 volunteers. However, after the signing of the agreement on 27 March, planning for the month of April for recruitment, training and follow-up activities began immediately.

From 7 to 9 March, a general meeting was held for all 29 CBFA supervisors, trainers and two senior headquarters staff, in order to enhance participants' knowledge of the final programme outline, objectives, expected results and its importance to community health care and disaster preparedness.

Volunteer training activities

No volunteer training was conducted in March.

Volunteer training activities

Two groups of 25 volunteers participated in follow-up training in Rustaq district of Takhar province. No activity reports were received from active and trained volunteers since no follow-up training and only one field visit were carried out due to the general suspension of payments.

The follow-up sessions in Takhar province were linked to a monitoring visit to Takhar and Badakhshan provinces by the ARCS CBFA Supervisor for the northern region, the CBFA Assistant Director from ARCS headquarters and the Federation's CBFA Field Officer. The review of the volunteers' and trainers' knowledge and skills revealed that the trainers responsible for Takhar province needed to be replaced. With the ARCS branch president for Badakhshan, it was agreed that two trainers would be recruited in order to initiate CBFA activities in that province.

Youth programme

Although schools were closed for their last month of the winter season, a preparatory meeting was held with 17 teachers at schools in Kabul where the programme was carried out last year. The objectives of the year were explained: the recruitment and training of 160 teachers, followed by the recruitment of

1,600 school students and their training in the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, first aid and basic health education.

Community Based Disaster Preparedness (CBDP) •

The main activities were suspended, awaiting the programme agreements.

The commission tasked to develop a DP plan for the Federation/ARCS met on 11 and 12 March. The draft plan deals with various departments' responsibilities and tasks, co-ordination mechanisms within the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement and the tools to mobilise resources in case of an emergency. The final draft will be shared and discussed with the other components of the Movement. Contributions on preparations for the DP Plan from a regional -- northern Afghanistan -- perspective were reviewed and included.

After the ARCS's call for action on the drought situation in south and south-west Afghanistan, a preliminary discussion was held with the ICRC on the Movement's approach. The CBDP delegate participated in the meeting organised by the authorities on 30 March in which they urged the international organisations to provide assistance. By the end of the month, different fact-finding initiatives were underway.

Institutional and Resource Development •

New programme agreements, General and Core Structure agreement

On 27 March, the ARCS, the ICRC and the International Federation signed new agreements, replacing the MoU and co-operation agreements of January 1996 that had become obsolete. Thus, a long and intense review process, involving the three components of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement in Afghanistan and in Geneva, came to completion. Co-operation between the three parties now has a new basis, promoting improved quality, transparency and accountability in the delivery of humanitarian services in Afghanistan, and initiating a process of restructuring in the ARCS. The signing of the agreements prepared the ground for resumption of all activities.

During the visit of the senior finance development officer from the Federation Secretariat, a first assessment was done of ARCS financial management systems, producing recommendations for the improvement of these systems and for staff training. A series of financial management workshops will take place in April and May for the administrators of all ARCS branches. Their aim will be to introduce the new agreements and to train branch personnel in the planning, budgeting and reporting requirements.

National Leadership Workshops

The last two National Leadership Workshops were held, in Kandahar (4 - 7 March) and Mazar-i-Sharif (25 - 28 March) for senior staff of the branches of the southern and northern regions. At the Kandahar workshop 20 senior branch staff participated, while the ARCS branches in the northern region were represented by a total of 44 staff. These workshops were especially useful in the northern region where five of eight branch presidents have been replaced since 1 January, followed by some changes in administrators and relief officers -- a huge setback. However, the presence of the ARCS branch president of Takhar -- opposition held territory -- was important. Local radio broadcasts attracted a lot of attention to the workshop in Mazar-i-Sharif: the aim of the workshop was announced a few days in advance, and daily updates on progress followed.

The workshop team has been asked to organise the workshop again in the ARCS headquarters in Kabul, because of the change in the leadership and other positions. It will provide a good opportunity to familiarise the new leadership with the fundamentals of the Movement.

Resource Development (RD)

The RD activities in the Central Region branches have been limited, due to the programme agreements and the Core structure agreement discussions. In April, income generation investments will be provided

for ARCS Ghazni branch -- a shop construction project -- and for Paktia -- the second ARCS bakery project.

Plans for April further include the organisation of financial management workshops, the follow up on the implementation of the new agreements, follow-up on the plans of the resource development commission of the ARCS, and the preparation of the sixth NS Leadership Workshop, in Kabul.

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 shortly. Funds are also needed for the CBDP and the CBFA programmes to ensure their continuity until the end of the year;

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

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