

BANGLADESH: HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

31 July 2000

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A relatively calm first half of the year (in terms of recurring natural disasters) gave the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) the opportunity to be involved more consistently in their on-going Disaster Preparedness, Disaster Response and Health Programmes representing a part of the Federation assistance in enduring emergencies.

The context

Over CHF 5 million were sought for the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) for the year 2000. The Federation supported programmes include the Myanmar Refugee Relief Operation (MRRO), Post Conflict Rehabilitation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP), Community Based Disaster Preparedness (CBDP) Programme and Blood Programme. Most of these programmes are a part of the long term Plan of Action formulated in 1996/1997. The local Capacity for Peace Project (LCPP) initiated on a pilot basis by the International Federation in 3 countries including Bangladesh has been operative in the Chittagong Hill Tracts since 1998. Promotional activities for humanitarian values and institutional development are in-built components in most of the programmes.

Latest events

The first half of the year passed without any major natural disasters. However, several tornadoes battered the country including Dhaka city, killing over 24 people and causing widespread damage to houses and trees. Devastating fires in many places including several slum areas of Dhaka rendered many families homeless. Flash floods occurred in many places in early June and there are predictions

of severe flooding this year. With changing global weather patterns, river and coastal erosion is becoming a disaster of the future, rivalling cyclones and floods in economic and human costs.

On the economic front, for the first time in its history, the country's food deficit has been reduced to zero this year, with the production of a record harvest of 22.4 million MT. The rate of inflation has fallen to 3.21% in March 2000 compared to 4.11% in March 1999. The Economic and Social Commission of Asia and Pacific (ESCAP) estimated the GDP growth of 6.4% for Bangladesh during the fiscal year 1999/ 2000. The government announced a deficit budget with development allocations of BDT 175 billion (BDT 51= 1 US\$) for the fiscal year July 2000- June 2001. The UNDP Human Development Report released on 30 June 2000, shows an elevation of the country from the 150th to 146th position as its human development index (HDI) rose from 0.440 in 1998 to 0.461 in 1999.

In May, a 3-day conference of the Secretaries General of the National Societies from South Asia region, was hosted by the BDRCS and co-ordinated by the South Asia Regional Delegation.

The World Health Day was celebrated on 7 April jointly with WHO and the Ministry of Health. It was an opportunity to promote the BDRCS blood programme and reinforce the importance of safe blood.

The Acting Chairman of the BDRCS was confirmed as chairman by the President of the country with effect from 8 March 2000. Major Quoreshi, who retired in May 1999, was re-appointed as Secretary General of the Society by the Managing Board for one year effective from 17 January 2000.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Disaster Response •

The BDRCS is currently involved in two disaster response projects involving relief and rehabilitation activities: the Myanmar Refugee Relief Operation (MRRO) and the Chittagong Hill Tracts Post Conflict Rehabilitation Programme concerning Rohingya refugees and the tribal (Chakma) returnees, respectively.

The housing programmes from 1998 and 1999, have taken considerable time and resources in implementing and monitoring. The 1998 housing programme is now complete and the 1999 one is underway.

Emergency relief for the victims of the tornado, fires and flash floods was distributed by the BDRCS out of their existing buffer stocks of food, clothes and blankets.

The Myanmar Refugee Relief Operation (MRRO)

Only 905 persons belonging to 153 families were repatriated during the first half of 2000. As of 30 June 2000, the number of refugees is 21,573 belonging to 3,748 families. Some 5,000 out of over 7,000 already cleared cases still remain to be repatriated by the Myanmar authorities. Despite earlier decisions to completely pull out from the refugee operations in Bangladesh, the UNHCR is most likely to continue on a reduced scale at least until the end of 2001. A high level Bangladesh government mission visited Myanmar in January 2000 to press for a speedier repatriation of refugees. The Myanmar Prime Minister, General Uthun Shwe, was due in Bangladesh on 29 May but his visit was cancelled on health grounds.

The following table shows the relief distribution in January-June 2000:

Month	Food Items (MT)							Non-food Items			
	Rice	Dal	Oil	Salt	Sugar	Baby Food	Spices (M/T)	CRH (M/T)	Soap (Pcs)	Kerosene (Ltr)	Blankets (Pcs)
January	278.074	19.033	14.00	6.315	3.416	-	0.51	249.14	13,486	3,665	2,173
February	252.951	17.314	9.234	5.745	6.673	-	3.645	271.46	8,301	3,624	1,397
March	271.86	8.046	4.826	6.175	7.036	-	6.646	225.78	3,628	3,612	-
April	280.876	37.334	10.368	3.156	7.163	-	3.145	252.08	7,610	3,599	-
May	264.456	41.939	9.581	-	6.842	-	2.501	235.50	7,572	3,547	-
June	265.874	27.176	10.857	5.999	6.782	16.54	6.523	254.54	11,093	3,529	-
Total	1,614.10	150.84	58.865	27.39	31.07	16.54	22.969	1,488.50	56,690	21,576	3,570

The present food basket consists of 2,122 Kcal per person.

The MRRO officials also participated in a refreshers training course on Food Basket Monitoring and a workshop on cyclones organised by the UNHCR in April 2000.

Post Conflict Rehabilitation in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)

The historic Peace Treaty, signed on 2 December 1997 between the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) and Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS - the organisation of the tribal people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh) brought to an end a decade long armed conflict in the region. Repatriation of the remaining 11,000 families from India was concluded in February 1998.

In June 2000, however, the Bangladesh armed forces recovered arms and ammunition from several secret hideouts at Rangamati belonging to a small group opposed to the peace treaty.

The government CHT Task Force has finalised the figures for tribal (90,208) and non-tribal (38,156) internally displaced persons in the region. A four point package programme has been announced for the internally displaced persons: the return of their land, writing off of loans, provision of long term loans for income generating activities and cash support of BDT 15,000 to each family. On 12 June 2000, the government appointed Justice M.A.Karim a chairman of the 9 member land commission constituted earlier for the CHT.

Under the terms of the Peace Treaty, all returnee families were to receive food, cash, building material and land from the government of Bangladesh. A three month supplementary family food package consisting of 12 kg of lentils, 6 litres of cooking oil and 6 kg of salt was provided to each family by the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society.

At the request of the BDRCS, the Federation launched an appeal on 23 March 1998, seeking funds for supplementary food for 10,426 families for a further nine months, for community activities for about 120,000 beneficiaries and for disaster preparedness and health programmes to benefit a large portion of the total CHT population of one million people. The distribution of supplementary food rations was later extended to 1,948 members of the resolved "Shanti Bahini", the armed forces of the PCJSS. In total, six month rations consisting of 46,728 kg of dal, 23,364 kg of salt and 23,364 litres of soya oil were distributed.

In April 1999, the government requested the BDRCS to provide family food packages consisting of 4 kg of lentils, 2 kg of salt and 2 litres of cooking oil to the same beneficiaries for another six months. The government also allocated 11,000 MT of food grains for CHT districts under the "food for work" programme during the fiscal year ending 30 June 2000.

Procurements during the year to date included 148.5 MT of dal (lentils), 74.3 MT of salt and 74.3 MT of soybean oil for distribution among the tribal returnees.

A total of 10,426 repatriated families received two separate monthly distributions in May and June of 4 kg of dal, 2 kg of salt and 2 litres of soybean oil.

The following table shows the distribution to repatriated families:

Sl. No.	Thana	No. of families	No. of beneficiaries	Dal (KG)	Salt	S.Oil (ltr.)	Date of Distribution
1.	Khagrachari	1,045	5,627	8,360	4,180	4,180	21 - 23 May
2.	Diginala	3,217	17,820	25,736	12,868	12,868	25 May-1 June
3.	Panchari	3,126	17,782	26,248	13,124	13,124	4 - 11 June
4.	Matiranga	1,357	7,209	10,856	5,428	5,428	13 - 17 June
5.	Ramgarh	1,163	5,711	9,320	4,660	4,660	19 - 21 June
6.	Manikchari	288	1,287	2,304	1,152	1,152	24 June
7.	Mahalchari	18	98	144	72	72	24 June
8.	Laxmichari	6	25	48	24	24	25 June
	Total	10, 426	55,559	83,408	41,704	41,704	

Local Capacities for Peace Project (LCPP)

Having in mind the successful peace agreement in CHT, the LCPP in Bangladesh was linked with the CHT programme and launched officially in March 1999.

This pilot project was initiated by the Federation primarily to look into the impact of aid in conflict areas, and assess if “the aid does any harm” at any stage.

The Federation’s LCCP co-ordinator who is based in Ethiopia, visited Bangladesh in May and attended some of the training sessions of the CHT programme. On 22 May, a day long refresher course on LCPP was run for over 30 senior officials of the BDRCS.

Health

Over 13,000 persons have reportedly been affected by malaria in the first four months of the year, with seventeen deaths.

Six training courses on health education and dissemination were held in the three CHT districts during February and May 2000. The courses included Community Based First Aid and dissemination and were attended mostly by new volunteers. The number of trained volunteers representing both the tribal communities and the Bengali settlers has now risen to 180. About 50 of these trained volunteers have been recently recruited for the CHT development programme.

In January, the BDRCS, prepared an overall Health Plan of Action (PoA) and budget for a period of 18 months ending 30 June, 2001. Several activities have already been undertaken in line with this PoA.

Disaster Preparedness (DP) •

The DP programme of the BDRCS started three decades ago with a Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP) and has later included three Community Based Disaster Preparedness (CBDP) Programmes sponsored separately by different donors. At the moment, the CPP covers 11 coastal districts. The Federation CBDP programme launched in 1997 currently covers 23 disaster prone districts of the country, while other CBDP programmes mostly deal with the beneficiaries of various cyclone centres in 3 coastal districts of the country.

At the initiative of the Federation, a high profile DP review was conducted in April 2000 by a team of independent consultants. In their final report submitted in May, the consultants concluded that "the DP could and should become a flagship programme for the BDRCS in terms of taking a leading role both within the Bangladesh national context and in offering an example to other Red Cross and Red

Crescent Societies." They recommended five areas to be addressed as a matter of priority, including further discussion and negotiation on the purpose, content and logic of the CBDP, progressive change in the present donor related division of programmes, decentralisation of authority, staff rationalisation and removal of class and gender gap within the National Society.

The National Disaster Preparedness Day was observed in the country on 30 March 2000. The main theme was "Community participation - key to secure lives and properties from natural disasters." The occasion was also marked by a supplement published by the government in leading newspapers.

Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP) •

The CPP is operative in 30 sub-districts and 260 unions through a network of 2,733 volunteer groups with over 33,000 trained volunteers. The current activities of the CPP are being implemented in line with the second 5 year Plan of Action (1998-2002).

A large and impressive CPP conference, inaugurated by the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, was held in Cox's Bazar between 2 - 4 March 2000. Some 3,000 volunteers attended this conference while their group leaders attended a subsequent training course.

The 37th CPP Implementation Board meeting was held on 28 June at the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief.

Awareness Campaigns

A large field demonstration (dry rehearsal on cyclone preparedness) was mounted on the Cox's Bazar sea beach on the occasion of the volunteer conference on 2 March.

Another field demonstration was organised at Badarkhali in Chakaria Upazila (Thana) on the occasion of the visit of the Secretaries General of the South Asia region who attended their biannual conference in Cox's Bazar in May.

Folk song sessions on awareness were organised by CPP volunteers in collaboration with a local NGO called Association of Disaster Mitigation and Development (ADMD) at Galachipa and Amtali Upazila.

The CPP officers of Amtali, Dasmina and Galachipa conducted a training course on cyclone awareness for community leaders in these thanas during April - June. The course was organised in collaboration with the ADMD.

CPP equipment

The following equipment was repaired in workshops at the National Headquarters and in Barisal and Chittagong:

HF:	29
VHF:	29
WalkieTalkies:	25
Solar controller:	16
Antenna Masts:	11
Battery Chargers:	16
Transistor radios:	56
Megaphones:	54
Torch Lights:	11

In total, 13,026 large size and 18,598 medium size dry cell batteries were distributed among the volunteers in the first quarter of the year for use with their torches, radios and megaphones.

Community Based Disaster Preparedness (CBDP) •

The BDRCS CBDP programme has been implemented in 35 disaster prone districts of the country and designed to benefit over 1.9 million vulnerable people. It was first launched in 13 disaster prone districts in April 1997 and expanded to a further 10 by the beginning of 2000. The CBDP activities

have been carried out at national, branch and community level. A mandatory Disaster Emergency Fund (DEF) with BDT 50,000 has been created in 18 units.

Prior to the DP review in April, a separate mid-term evaluation of CBDP was conducted and the report was prepared in March.

Water supply and sanitation

Twenty shallow tube wells have been installed in Sirajganj to ensure safe water for community members. Seven hundred sets of low-cost sanitary latrine components have been produced and distributed to beneficiaries in Sirajganj, Kurigram, Sunamganj, Jamalpur, Noakhali, Borguna and Pabna districts in the first half of 2000 on payment of a fixed, token price of Taka 100 each.

Shelter maintenance and management (SMM)

More than a hundred monthly meetings of 22 Shelter Management Committees (SMCs) and the annual general meeting with the catchment community from 22 shelters were held in the Noakhali region during the first half of the year. Twelve new SMCs were formed and 96 monthly meetings of 12 shelter based SMCs were held in Borguna region during the same period.

Workshops/Training courses

A 3-day DP workshop was organised at the BRCS headquarters in connection with the CBDP mid-term evaluation in March.

In April, a CBDP Basic Community Based First Aid (CBFA) Training and Training of Trainers (TOT) were organised for unit level officers (ULOs) of Chandpur, Kishoregonj, Norshingdi, Gopalganj and Satkhira. In June, a Capacity Building and Institutional Development Training was organized for the Vice Chairmen, Secretaries and ULOs of 13 Units.

On 29 and 30 June, a five day basic training for squad members was held in Keshoreganj, Narshingdi and Satkhira districts.

The Red Cross Youth training was organised for members from 10 schools in each of the districts of Chapai N.Ganj, Shariatpur and Kushtia.

Skill development training for making slab latrines was organised for the communities of Shariatpur, and Sylhet and for the units of Bagerhat, Chittagong, Gaibandha, Kushtia and Pabna.

The basic CBFA training courses were held between January and March in five units for their community groups.

Disaster Preparedness conferences were held at three units in the first quarter and in two more in the second quarter involving district administration and others concerned with disaster management.

Disaster Contingency Plans (DCPs)

Unit DCPs for Sylhet, Sunamganj, Munshiganj, Shariatpur and Kushtia units and community DCPs for the 2nd group of 13 Red Cross district units (in addition to one district missed out in the first group of DCP) , were formulated during the current reporting period.

Membership Drive and Fund Raising

A month long membership drive began in Sylhet on 27 June. The total number of life members in 23 CBDP units is 12,782 at present.

Community level beneficiary family contributions of Taka 10 per month to the local DP assistance funds continued among 36 communities of 18 units. The total collection exceeded Taka 120,000 by the end of June 2000.

Promotional Activities

Dramas to promote DP awareness were held for 8 units in March and for 13 units in May. A dry run rehearsal was held in June for the local communities in Borguna.

Video presentations highlighting the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and its fundamental principles, DP awareness and personal hygiene etc. have been organised in 18 Units.

Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments (VCA) and Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRA) have been conducted in the local communities of Pabna and Chapai N.Ganj. Community level mobilisation meetings have been held in almost all communities on regular basis.

Health Programmes •*Health Institutions*

The BDRCS runs 4 general hospitals, 5 maternity hospitals, 60 mother & child health (MCH) centres, 2 eye clinics and 3 outdoor patient clinics. The 45 year old Red Crescent Holy Family Hospital in Dhaka is operated with considerable autonomy while 22 of the MCH centres in Barisal and Khulna divisions are supported by the Japanese Red Cross.

With direct government assistance, the BDRCS has set up a medical college at the Holy Family Hospital complex in Dhaka.

Blood Programme

Under a Tripartite Agreement signed between the Italian Red Cross, BDRCS and the Federation, a new three year Blood Programme started in October 1998. As per the agreement, a mid-term evaluation of the blood programme was carried out in April 2000.

A Health Ministry working group has finalised a draft Legislation for Safe Blood Transfusion - 2000 recommending among other things, a 3-year term of imprisonment plus a fine for illegal blood transfusions and introduction of ID cards for donors.

So far, about 18,000 HIV/AIDS tests have been conducted at the blood centre but no HIV positive cases have been detected. The latest WHO World Health report, however, mentions the existence of up to 20,000 HIV positive people in the country.

Activities of the blood centre during the first half of 2000 included 150 motivational sessions, the collection of 5,730 units of blood and 3,587 units of blood components as well as 1,056 blood transfusions. About 200 units of blood were discarded. At the Jessore centre, 250 units were collected but 60 were discarded mainly because they had expired. Presently, possible transfer of unused blood units within the system is under consideration. A refrigerated centrifuge for the Blood Programme was procured in June. The construction of the privately-sponsored Sylhet blood centre is almost completed.

Outstanding needs

The response to the 2000 Appeal for Bangladesh has not been as encouraging as in previous years and some of the programme activities could not be undertaken due to the lack of funds.

Three significant reviews were conducted in the first half of 2000 - the CBDP mid-term evaluation, ID review and DP review (plus a mini review of the Blood Programme) - and it is crucial that a structured methodology for follow-up is designed to ensure all recommendations are carried out. In this regard, a consortium of donors is needed to provide the expertise and financial support to the BDRCS in preparing a human resources strategy and implementing a redundancy package and a new staff structure. Strong support is also needed in the field of property development and income generation initiatives.

Three programme reviews (CBDP, DP and ID) and the BDRCS driven Country Assistance Strategy, represent the foundations for the long overdue changes to be made with the support of donors

With the threat of yet another flood (three information bulletins have been issued by the Federation in June), there might be a need for immediate relief activities and support before the end of July.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The conference of volunteers in March, received the highest media attention on TV, radio and in the press. In her address at the conference, the Prime Minister praised the BDRCS role in disaster management and urged donors to build more cyclone shelters in the coastal areas.

The World Disasters Report 2000 was officially launched in Bangladesh on 28 June. This event was attended by representatives of the media and relevant government and humanitarian aid agencies. The report obtained substantial coverage on national and private TV channels and in national newspapers.

In order to further promote the activities of the BDRCS and the Federation, good relations have been maintained with the government, UN and bilateral agencies including UNHCR, EU, ECHO, USAID, DFID and AusAid as well as with foreign embassies and high commissions in Dhaka. Relevant officials and delegates attended all regular inter-agency co-ordination meetings. The Federation initiated fresh contacts with USAID and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) in connection with health programmes. The BDRCS and the Federation Delegation have successfully maintained warm relations with the leaders of the tribal as well as Bengali communities.

The Australian Aid Agency (AusAid) opened a Web site Education Package related to the CHT project in March 2000.

The CPP volunteers and officials took an active part in various national programmes including the National Disaster Preparedness Day, World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day, the BDRCS Day, National Polio Immunisation Day and the Tree Plantation Week.

On 16 February 2000, the Guardian newspaper published an article on cyclones focusing on CPP activities.

In May, a Japanese TV team filmed a CPP field demonstration at Charfession Upazila and interviewed cross section of people including CPP officials.

In their 7 May issue, a national daily "Jugantar" published an article on the CBDP programme. The local dailies including "Aranya Barta" (News from the Greenery), "Giri Darpan" (Glimpses from the Hills) and "Purba Koon" (the Eastern Corner) published articles on workshops and other activities within the CHT programme.

The DP delegate gave a lecture at the National Defence College on the subject "Aid - Help or Hindrance ?"

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

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This and other reports on Federation operations are available on the Federation's website: <http://www.ifrc.org>