

BANGLADESH

CHF 5,172,000

Programme No. 01.22/2000

National Context

In Bangladesh, which ranks 150th on the UN's Human Development Index, poverty alleviation is the foremost national objective. With a population of 130 million, the country has an annual food deficit of some 2 million metric tons. Fifty-six per cent of children under the age of five are underweight, life expectancy is 58 years and adult literacy is 38.9%. However, the country has led the way with some universally acclaimed innovations in poverty reduction, primary health care and water supply.

Close behind the poverty issue as a national concern comes disaster mitigation. Bangladesh's average of over 44,000 deaths from disasters every year is the highest in the world, making it one of the most disaster prone countries in the world. Situated between the Himalayas and the storm-crossed Bay of Bengal and traversed by major river systems, it is vulnerable to cyclones, tidal surges, tornadoes, floods droughts and cold spells.

Bangladesh is also situated in a geo-politically unstable area, vulnerable to ethnic, religious and social unrest in parts of India, Myanmar, Nepal, Bhutan and China. Over 250,000 refugees from Myanmar took shelter in the country, first in late seventies and again in 1992. Internally, some 60,000 tribal refugees who returned from India to the Chittagong Hill Tracts after the 1997 peace accord are being rehabilitated, ending a quarter century of insurrection.

Country Assistance Strategy

A review of the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) by an outside management consultancy firm in 1995 has served as the baseline for action by the National Society and the Federation ever since, resulting notably in the introduction of a Disaster Preparedness programme and systematic institutional development, both with a long-term perspective.

Building on five-year plans of action which are rolled on each year, the BDRCS has three development priorities: to strengthen its overall organisation in order to become a well-functioning and eventually self-supporting National Society; to increase assistance and protection to the most vulnerable; and through improved health services to promote socio-economic development in the weakest sections of society.

Federation support in the last five years has evolved in line with the management review's recommendations and with the National Society's priorities. The Federation will continue to focus its effort on the development of a well functioning Society and effective, nation-wide disaster preparedness and response and health programmes, but will put increased emphasis on an integrated and result-oriented approach.

Programme Objectives

Disaster Response

BDRCS is at present involved in two ongoing relief operations, the Myanmar Refugee Relief Operation (MRRO) and the Chittagong Hill Tracts Post Conflict Rehabilitation Programme (CHTPRO)

Myanmar Refugee Relief Operation (MRRO)

Of the total 265,000 refugees who took shelter in Bangladesh only 21,000 remain. They will continue to be provided with food rations and other relief items by BDRCS with support from the Federation. At present the operation involves two camps with 23 staff and paid volunteers. For humanitarian reasons, the Federation will actively encourage the search for a lasting solution for those refugees who may not be able to return to Myanmar within the foreseeable future.

Chittagong Hill Tracts Post Conflict Rehabilitation Programme

The Community Service, Disaster Preparedness and Branch Institutional Development Programme begun in 1998 in the Hill Tracts Area will continue in 2000. The BDRCS will continue to provide operational advice, supervision and support to the three local branches in Khagrachari, Rangamati and Bandarban, and to provide the necessary Institutional Development support for these Branches in accordance with its branch Institutional Development component objectives.

The CHTPRO is supported by the Federation and the ICRC in conjunction. It is also part of the Federation supported Local Capacities for Peace Project (LCPP), and thus a pilot project with possible positive implications not only for Bangladesh but for the 27 other countries where the Federation is involved in areas of communal conflict. This programme can only achieve its peace promoting function if it can count on a long term commitment from the Federation and a well functioning BDRCS.

Disaster Preparedness

The BDRCS has two disaster preparedness programmes. The first, Community Based Disaster Preparedness, (CBDP) aims at developing the capacity of the NHQ, the Branches and the vulnerable communities in all high risk disaster prone districts of Bangladesh to respond effectively to any kind of disaster. The second, the Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP) aims at building a system of effective, well trained and equipped community based volunteers for awareness, warning, rescue, first aid and relief in the most cyclone prone areas in the coastal belt.

The CBDP programme encourages each Branch to develop a District Emergency Plan. Other activities focus on first aid, early warning and training to assist communities to withstand and cope with disaster. During recent calamities, BDRCS was handicapped by its lack of a ready stock of relief materials, which was particularly true at branch level. Federation support, in building a buffer stock of relief goods and more regional distribution points will be an operational asset and also cost effective.

During 2000 - 2003, the 38 districts assessed as most vulnerable to natural disaster will be covered by this programme. However, all of the remaining districts have experienced disasters of a magnitude which has justified the launch of Federation Emergency Appeals during the last four years alone, and expansion to the remaining 20 districts should be considered after completion of the first phase in 2003.

The CPP is a well established, key activity within BDRCS. It is partially funded by the Government and governed through a joint BDRCS/GoB Implementation Board where the Federation is also represented. The CPP network of 33,000 volunteers promote community awareness, give warning signals to the vulnerable communities along the coastal belt, assist communities in evacuation to shelters and provide first aid and relief. The CPP radio communications system, the largest in Asia, provides the only reliable means of communication pre and post cyclone for the entire coastal belt.

The focus in 1999 - 2003 will be on increasing the effectiveness of the warning systems through community awareness and through the extension and upgrading of the system, including the radio network. Refresher training for the all volunteers including the 5,466 female volunteers, and basic training of newly recruited volunteers, will be carried out. The need for integration of women into the programme has been recognised and efforts intensified to increase their participation. The training of CPP staff officers will continue and the programme will be reviewed and evaluated to ensure better responsiveness and flexibility. The Federation will fine-tune and maintain this programme, while increasing efforts to find funding for the recurring costs, in addition to government sources. It will also promote the integration of the CPP with the other community based disaster preparedness programmes of BDRCS.

Health

Two years ago, the BDRCS initiated a planning process aimed at decentralising and technically developing all health activities, focusing on its 60 Maternity and Child Centres (MCH), and hospitals and clinics. Following a comprehensive review of its Health activities in early 1998, it developed a five year Plan of Action for enhancing the services of all MCH centres, and a detailed Plan of Action for 1999. The objectives of Federation support will be to develop and upgrade the existing community-based maternal and child health programmes; and strengthen emergency health preparedness and response (disaster medicine). It will also help to establish the management and organisational capacity in the NHQ for providing operational advice, supervision and support for Branches to manage and raise funds for Health programmes. Also as part of its health area support the Federation will continue with the upgrading of the technical facilities of the BDRCS blood centre in Dhaka and the establishment of two more centres.

Humanitarian Values

All BDRCS programmes have information elements which promote the humanitarian values of the Movement and these elements are particularly strong in the CBDP and CPP programmes. The BDRCS Information Action Plan for 1997-2001 lists as part of its mission the dissemination of the Movement's Fundamental principles, International Humanitarian Law and the world-wide role of the components of the Movement. The Federation will assist the BDRCS in drawing up an information strategy which comprises sub-strategies for external and internal audiences and will provide the necessary training and equipment to achieve this objective.

Capacity Building

In order to implement successfully relief operations, Disaster Preparedness Programmes, Health programmes and Community Services programmes, the BDRCS needs to develop a network of 68 strong and proactive district Branches. Institutional Development of the Branches is not a separate programme, but a component of all BDRCS development programmes and emergency relief operations. By the end of 1999, 42 Branches were scheduled to be covered by the ID component of programmes. However, to achieve substantial and lasting capacity, it is expected that at least four years of support will be needed. With Federation support, the BDRCS will continue to develop the necessary management and organisational capacity in the NHQ for providing operational advice, supervision and support to the Branches.

In line with the recommendation in the Hanoi Declaration, the Federation will assist the BDRCS to draw up a detailed Resource Mobilisation Strategy, broken down into international, national and district levels. The strategy will cover income generation, fund-raising, and the development of a business plan and a property development plan.