

NEPAL Refugee Relief, Capacity Building

24 January 2000

appeal no. 01.31/98

situation report no. 2 (final)

period covered: 1 January 1998 - 31 December 1998

The Federation ended its assistance to Bhutanese refugees in Nepal after almost six years. The lack of any solution to the refugees' situation over the years gradually transformed programmes from emergency relief operations into maintenance and care programmes, bringing an inevitable drop in donor funding.

The Context

The first Bhutanese refugees of ethnic Nepali origin arrived in the south-east of Nepal in 1992. Since then, the Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS), which was the first organisation to assist the refugees, has provided vital services and covered essential needs for a group of people that grew from an initial 86,000 in the first year to over 95,600 in 1998.

In November 1992, the NRCS appealed to the International Federation for assistance in supplying relief to the refugees, including non-food items such as blankets, kitchen utensils, stoves and clothes, and the provision of essential ambulance and referral services. After the initial appeal, the operation featured each year in the Federation's Annual Emergency Appeal, appearing for the last time in 1998.

As the operation evolved, the National Society became the sole distributor of food and non-food items to the refugees, who are scattered in 8 different camps in the south-eastern tip of Nepal, close to the border to India. NRCS also started a systematic training of refugees in fire-fighting techniques and in tree-planting campaigns, both prominent issues in the crowded camps. It employed hundreds of local women in the annual production of clothing, maintained an ambulance and referral service, and established an effective, efficient, and transparent human resource and management system.

As other organisations reduced or discontinued their involvement, NRCS was tasked to take over additional responsibilities. When the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) withdrew its main support, it handed over to NRCS an entire warehousing system which the Society has kept fully functioning. NRCS also used the warehouses to train its staff and improve the overall training and performance of local employees involved in logistics.

NEPAL Refugee Relief, Capacity Building

24 January 2000

appeal no. 01.31/98

situation report no. 2 (final)

period covered: 1 January 1998 - 31 December 1998

The Federation ended its assistance to Bhutanese refugees in Nepal after almost six years. The lack of any solution to the refugees' situation over the years gradually transformed programmes from emergency relief operations into maintenance and care programmes, bringing an inevitable drop in donor funding.

The Context

The first Bhutanese refugees of ethnic Nepali origin arrived in the south-east of Nepal in 1992. Since then, the Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS), which was the first organisation to assist the refugees, has provided vital services and covered essential needs for a group of people that grew from an initial 86,000 in the first year to over 95,600 in 1998.

In November 1992, the NRCS appealed to the International Federation for assistance in supplying relief to the refugees, including non-food items such as blankets, kitchen utensils, stoves and clothes, and the provision of essential ambulance and referral services. After the initial appeal, the operation featured each year in the Federation's Annual Emergency Appeal, appearing for the last time in 1998.

As the operation evolved, the National Society became the sole distributor of food and non-food items to the refugees, who are scattered in 8 different camps in the south-eastern tip of Nepal, close to the border to India. NRCS also started a systematic training of refugees in fire-fighting techniques and in tree-planting campaigns, both prominent issues in the crowded camps. It employed hundreds of local women in the annual production of clothing, maintained an ambulance and referral service, and established an effective, efficient, and transparent human resource and management system.

As other organisations reduced or discontinued their involvement, NRCS was tasked to take over additional responsibilities. When the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) withdrew its main support, it handed over to NRCS an entire warehousing system which the Society has kept fully functioning. NRCS also used the warehouses to train its staff and improve the overall training and performance of local employees involved in logistics.

When NRCS took over the entire food distribution in 1995 as well as the distribution of kerosene, together with its traditional non-food provision, Red Cross became the second largest donor after the UN (UNHCR and WFP). In the course of the operation, the Federation in collaboration with NRCS and support from Sister Societies and the EU/ECHO, provided approximately 38% of all non-food items required for the minimum sustainability of the refugees. Each registered refugee received one set of clothes, mosquito nets and water containers, and each refugee family was given one blanket per year.

However, due to steadily diminishing financial support and a resulting significant deficit, the decision was taken to end the operation by December 1998. This decision was notified to the UNHCR offices in Kathmandu and Damak (Field Office). It was also explained to the Home Ministry of the Government of Nepal, the penultimate co-ordinator of this operation.

The Federation was committed to enabling NRCS to phase out this operation in a proper manner, particularly in view of any obligations to local staff, the retention of locally gained valuable expertise, and the hundreds of local women who were provided with gainful employment through seven years of clothes production. In addition, there was a considerable financial obligation in terms of planned procurement and manpower.

The Operation in 1998

During the final year of the programme, the very much reduced operation had three main core objectives:

- { To provide ambulance service to refugees as well as the host population;
- { To distribute a full set of clothes to all refugees;
- { To provide and ultimately end operational support to the NRCS after enabling it to phase out the work in a smooth and professional manner.

In 1998, assistance was provided to the following numbers of refugees:

<i>Camp</i>	<i>Individuals</i>	<i>Families</i>
Beldangi - I	16,415	2,524
Beldangi - II	20,482	3,356
Beldangi - III	10,398	1,672
Sanichare	18,674	2,786
Goldhap	9,129	1,349
Timai		1,367
Khudunabari	12,006	1,960
TOTAL	87,104	15,014

While in early years the natural population increase was as high as 360-400 per month, family planning measures introduced during 1995/1996 had an effect and the monthly population increase dropped to an average of 160 per month. However, in the 5 years of the camps' existence, the total refugee population rose by 10,832, through 12,460 births and 1,628 deaths.

Ambulance service

Ambulance Service for:	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	TOTAL
Refugees	1,610	2,945	4,133	3,277	3,596	15,561
Host Population	422	351	158	344	198	1,473
TOTAL	2,032	3,296		3,621	3,794	17,034

When NRCS took over the entire food distribution in 1995 as well as the distribution of kerosene, together with its traditional non-food provision, Red Cross became the second largest donor after the UN (UNHCR and WFP). In the course of the operation, the Federation in collaboration with NRCS and support from Sister Societies and the EU/ECHO, provided approximately 38% of all non-food items required for the minimum sustainability of the refugees. Each registered refugee received one set of clothes, mosquito nets and water containers, and each refugee family was given one blanket per year.

However, due to steadily diminishing financial support and a resulting significant deficit, the decision was taken to end the operation by December 1998. This decision was notified to the UNHCR offices in Kathmandu and Damak (Field Office). It was also explained to the Home Ministry of the Government of Nepal, the penultimate co-ordinator of this operation.

The Federation was committed to enabling NRCS to phase out this operation in a proper manner, particularly in view of any obligations to local staff, the retention of locally gained valuable expertise, and the hundreds of local women who were provided with gainful employment through seven years of clothes production. In addition, there was a considerable financial obligation in terms of planned procurement and manpower.

The Operation in 1998

During the final year of the programme, the very much reduced operation had three main core objectives:

- { To provide ambulance service to refugees as well as the host population;
- { To distribute a full set of clothes to all refugees;
- { To provide and ultimately end operational support to the NRCS after enabling it to phase out the work in a smooth and professional manner.

In 1998, assistance was provided to the following numbers of refugees:

<i>Camp</i>	<i>Individuals</i>	<i>Families</i>
Beldangi - I	16,415	2,524
Beldangi - II	20,482	3,356
Beldangi - III	10,398	1,672
Sanichare	18,674	2,786
Goldhap	9,129	1,349
Timai		1,367
Khudunabari	12,006	1,960
TOTAL	87,104	15,014

While in early years the natural population increase was as high as 360-400 per month, family planning measures introduced during 1995/1996 had an effect and the monthly population increase dropped to an average of 160 per month. However, in the 5 years of the camps' existence, the total refugee population rose by 10,832, through 12,460 births and 1,628 deaths.

Ambulance service

Ambulance Service for:	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	TOTAL
Refugees	1,610	2,945	4,133	3,277	3,596	15,561
Host Population	422	351	158	344	198	1,473
TOTAL	2,032	3,296		3,621	3,794	17,034

As planned, the NRCS ambulance service continued throughout the year. In view of the gradual scaling down and the eventual handing over of operational components to other partners and organisations, the service was operated in close collaboration with SCF (UK) and with AMDA, the latter having become increasingly responsible for the running of the three ambulances (two from NRCS/Federation, one from UNHCR). This service is provided between the camps and the local hospitals and enables the refugees as well as locals to benefit from medical facilities that would normally not be available for them. In addition, the service has helped to minimise tensions between host and refugee population.

Funds were made available from Red Cross sources and include the salary for the drivers, fuel, spares and repairs/maintenance. The service was provided seven days a week. During 1998, a total of 3,794 people benefited -- 3,596 refugees and 198 local people.

Clothing Distribution

During 1998, NRCS procured clothing material and arranged for the production of ready to wear garments. As in previous years, all sewing was done by some 300 locally employed women through the local Red Cross chapter. As planned for 1998, one complete set of clothing was distributed to each registered refugee living in the camps. In total, 180,100 pieces of clothing (plus 500 blankets) were distributed to the refugees.

The impact of this component has been significant. The regular earlier distributions provided the refugees with a much needed certainty that this specific service would be forthcoming regularly. At the end of the operation, the final distribution was a good way of closing this service on a positive note.

The withdrawal of this service will not have a negative effect since by now refugees increasingly rely on their own clothes and have also achieved a higher purchasing power in the local market.

Item	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	TOTAL
Mosquito Net	4,782	4,404						9,186
Blanket 'A'		29,752	7,915	2,599	141	14,499	500	55,406
Blanket 'B'				14,965	1			14,966
Utensil Sets				8,041	6,937			14,978
Bhoto (Baby)		14,125	10,372	9,634	9,467	8,666	7,794	60,058
Saruwal (Baby)		14,146	10,372	9,634	9,467	8,666	7,794	60,079
Shirt		32,440	22,594	37,509	46,203	36,827	37,994	213,567
Pant		32,440	22,594	37,509	46,204	36,827	37,994	213,568
Frock		6,204	8,030	8,248	8,147	7,670	7,050	45,349
Kurtha (F)		9,799	9,758	9,998	10,623	11,034	11,012	62,224
Saruwal (F)		9,843	9,758	9,998	10,623	11,034	11,012	62,268
Saree 'A'		18,852	19,485	80	73	22,166	24,357	85,013
Saree 'B'				20,215	21,027			41,242
Blouse		18,684	19,485	20,215	21,101	22,161	24,357	126,003
Petticoat		18,926	19,485	20,215	21,100	22,161	24,357	126,244
Kameej (M)		2,645	4,365	4,770	5,001	4,880	4,934	26,595
Saruwal (M)		2,611	4,365	4,770	5,001	4,880	4,934	26,561
Pete Bhoto		36		2,070	388	349	368	3,211
Aluminum Gagro (Water)					8,780	6,986		15,766

Operational Support

The Refugee Assistance Programme included provision to cover the NRCS operational support costs including the salaries of some staff and project-related costs, such as staff travel, bank charges,

As planned, the NRCS ambulance service continued throughout the year. In view of the gradual scaling down and the eventual handing over of operational components to other partners and organisations, the service was operated in close collaboration with SCF (UK) and with AMDA, the latter having become increasingly responsible for the running of the three ambulances (two from NRCS/Federation, one from UNHCR). This service is provided between the camps and the local hospitals and enables the refugees as well as locals to benefit from medical facilities that would normally not be available for them. In addition, the service has helped to minimise tensions between host and refugee population.

Funds were made available from Red Cross sources and include the salary for the drivers, fuel, spares and repairs/maintenance. The service was provided seven days a week. During 1998, a total of 3,794 people benefited -- 3,596 refugees and 198 local people.

Clothing Distribution

During 1998, NRCS procured clothing material and arranged for the production of ready to wear garments. As in previous years, all sewing was done by some 300 locally employed women through the local Red Cross chapter. As planned for 1998, one complete set of clothing was distributed to each registered refugee living in the camps. In total, 180,100 pieces of clothing (plus 500 blankets) were distributed to the refugees.

The impact of this component has been significant. The regular earlier distributions provided the refugees with a much needed certainty that this specific service would be forthcoming regularly. At the end of the operation, the final distribution was a good way of closing this service on a positive note.

The withdrawal of this service will not have a negative effect since by now refugees increasingly rely on their own clothes and have also achieved a higher purchasing power in the local market.

Item	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	TOTAL
Mosquito Net	4,782	4,404						9,186
Blanket 'A'		29,752	7,915	2,599	141	14,499	500	55,406
Blanket 'B'				14,965	1			14,966
Utensil Sets				8,041	6,937			14,978
Bhoto (Baby)		14,125	10,372	9,634	9,467	8,666	7,794	60,058
Saruwal (Baby)		14,146	10,372	9,634	9,467	8,666	7,794	60,079
Shirt		32,440	22,594	37,509	46,203	36,827	37,994	213,567
Pant		32,440	22,594	37,509	46,204	36,827	37,994	213,568
Frock		6,204	8,030	8,248	8,147	7,670	7,050	45,349
Kurtha (F)		9,799	9,758	9,998	10,623	11,034	11,012	62,224
Saruwal (F)		9,843	9,758	9,998	10,623	11,034	11,012	62,268
Saree 'A'		18,852	19,485	80	73	22,166	24,357	85,013
Saree 'B'				20,215	21,027			41,242
Blouse		18,684	19,485	20,215	21,101	22,161	24,357	126,003
Petticoat		18,926	19,485	20,215	21,100	22,161	24,357	126,244
Kameej (M)		2,645	4,365	4,770	5,001	4,880	4,934	26,595
Saruwal (M)		2,611	4,365	4,770	5,001	4,880	4,934	26,561
Pete Bhoto		36		2,070	388	349	368	3,211
Aluminum Gagro (Water)					8,780	6,986		15,766

Operational Support

The Refugee Assistance Programme included provision to cover the NRCS operational support costs including the salaries of some staff and project-related costs, such as staff travel, bank charges,

communication and utility costs. Through this support, NRCS was able not only to recruit but also to adequately train relevant staff and volunteers, establish reliable logistic support and maintain proper administration of the programme.

Previous Support, suspended in 1998

Blankets

Until the end of winter 1996, each refugee family received one blanket regularly each year. With the consensus of the refugees, this component was suspended, reducing the budget by approximately CHF 107,000.

Cooking Utensils

Until 1997, each refugee family received one set of cooking utensils every two years. Unlike cooking stoves, utensils were not repaired but totally replaced. The distribution was - with the consensus of the refugees - suspended in 1998, thus reducing the budget by nearly CHF 90,000.

Refugee Training

Refugees were trained, since the establishment of the camps, in fire fighting techniques. On several occasions, they not only effectively fought fires within the camps but took similar action among the nearby host villages, saving lives and property. The training became a self-sustaining activity, with the refugees spreading their knowledge, even without any further structured training. The component was discontinued in 1998, thus reducing the budget by a further CHF 2,200.

Problems and Constraints

General

Although Bhutan and Nepal continued high level ministerial talks over the past seven years, no progress whatsoever has been made in resolving the refugee problem. This gradually changed the operation into a long-term social maintenance programme, drastically reducing the funds available to agencies involved in assistance to the refugees. The uncertain future drove many refugees to attempt to take their future into their own hands through a series of peace marches and self repatriation in 1997. These efforts led to large-scale arrests and imprisonment in India. Such events caused a lot of regional reaction, but went largely unheeded by the international community and have, since then, died down

Ambulance Service

Very high demand from local communities put a lot of pressure on the service. This became even more apparent at the end of 1998 when it became clear that the Red Cross would no longer be able to finance this service. In addition, the non-availability of spares on the local market posed a growing problem throughout 1998.

Clothes Distribution

Payment to suppliers was much delayed due to the unavailability of funds. The procurement orders had been placed in early 1998, before the decision to end the operation by December 1998, and the commitments and obligations entered into had to be fulfilled. Eventually, invoices from suppliers were paid from (a) balances held in the programme account and (b) from the National Society's own resources.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

communication and utility costs. Through this support, NRCS was able not only to recruit but also to adequately train relevant staff and volunteers, establish reliable logistic support and maintain proper administration of the programme.

Previous Support, suspended in 1998

Blankets

Until the end of winter 1996, each refugee family received one blanket regularly each year. With the consensus of the refugees, this component was suspended, reducing the budget by approximately CHF 107,000.

Cooking Utensils

Until 1997, each refugee family received one set of cooking utensils every two years. Unlike cooking stoves, utensils were not repaired but totally replaced. The distribution was - with the consensus of the refugees - suspended in 1998, thus reducing the budget by nearly CHF 90,000.

Refugee Training

Refugees were trained, since the establishment of the camps, in fire fighting techniques. On several occasions, they not only effectively fought fires within the camps but took similar action among the nearby host villages, saving lives and property. The training became a self-sustaining activity, with the refugees spreading their knowledge, even without any further structured training. The component was discontinued in 1998, thus reducing the budget by a further CHF 2,200.

Problems and Constraints

General

Although Bhutan and Nepal continued high level ministerial talks over the past seven years, no progress whatsoever has been made in resolving the refugee problem. This gradually changed the operation into a long-term social maintenance programme, drastically reducing the funds available to agencies involved in assistance to the refugees. The uncertain future drove many refugees to attempt to take their future into their own hands through a series of peace marches and self repatriation in 1997. These efforts led to large-scale arrests and imprisonment in India. Such events caused a lot of regional reaction, but went largely unheeded by the international community and have, since then, died down

Ambulance Service

Very high demand from local communities put a lot of pressure on the service. This became even more apparent at the end of 1998 when it became clear that the Red Cross would no longer be able to finance this service. In addition, the non-availability of spares on the local market posed a growing problem throughout 1998.

Clothes Distribution

Payment to suppliers was much delayed due to the unavailability of funds. The procurement orders had been placed in early 1998, before the decision to end the operation by December 1998, and the commitments and obligations entered into had to be fulfilled. Eventually, invoices from suppliers were paid from (a) balances held in the programme account and (b) from the National Society's own resources.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The situation of the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal remains unchanged and there is little hope of an early resolution. The Red Cross continued to provide essential support and services for as long as was possible, but financial limitations have forced it to close the operation after some six years.

No other agency currently working in the camps had the capacity to provide cost-effective non-food items and services. Most agencies -- UNHCR and a handful of small NGOs -- who remained involved were facing the same financial predicament and were continuing their operations on a much reduced scale.

The Federation would like to thank all those steadfast supporters who have, for so many years, provided much needed financial and operational assistance. Through their help it has been possible for the Nepal Red Cross not only to address the needs of the refugee population but also, over the years, to build up significant operational strength and expertise that will remain as a lasting investment.

Peter Rees-Gildea
Director
Operations Funding and
Reporting Department

Hiroshi Higashiura
Director
Asia and Pacific Department

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

Conclusion

The situation of the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal remains unchanged and there is little hope of an early resolution. The Red Cross continued to provide essential support and services for as long as was possible, but financial limitations have forced it to close the operation after some six years.

No other agency currently working in the camps had the capacity to provide cost-effective non-food items and services. Most agencies -- UNHCR and a handful of small NGOs -- who remained involved were facing the same financial predicament and were continuing their operations on a much reduced scale.

The Federation would like to thank all those steadfast supporters who have, for so many years, provided much needed financial and operational assistance. Through their help it has been possible for the Nepal Red Cross not only to address the needs of the refugee population but also, over the years, to build up significant operational strength and expertise that will remain as a lasting investment.

Peter Rees-Gildea
Director
Operations Funding and
Reporting Department

Hiroshi Higashiura
Director
Asia and Pacific Department

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