

BURUNDI: SOCIAL, HEALTH AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE

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period covered: July - December 1999*

Despite some earlier signs of progress at the protracted peace talks in Arusha, Tanzania, the situation in Burundi continues to be characterised by insecurity and internal strife, with a disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups. Some 16% of the total population have now been forced to leave their houses and live in "regroupement sites", with limited or no access to shelter, clean water or medical care. In this context, the Burundi Red Cross (BRC) and the Federation have primarily focused efforts on providing assistance to the vulnerable, particularly those in the sites, as well as strengthening the operational capacity of the National Society and the institutional and resource development of the BRC.

The context

Following the departure of the Rwandan refugees in 1996, the Burundi Red Cross (BRC) and the Federation have redirected their activities toward the most vulnerable in Burundi in 12 out of the 16 provinces where the BRC has a presence. It is important to note that certain areas of the country remain difficult to access due to the security situation. The Federation has been working on strengthening the operational capacity of the National Society so that the relief aid dispensed could lead to longer-term development projects to help the reintegration of the beneficiaries back into their places of origin.

However, increasing levels of insecurity throughout the country have meant the priority Red Cross activities have had to change to be much more relief-oriented. Some existing projects including infrastructure rehabilitation, agriculture, animal husbandry and improvements to community health facilities have indeed continued, but within an increasingly difficult security context and a very uncertain future.

Despite this the Delegation has continued to work on the institutional and resource development of the BRC through training and operational experience in the field. It is hoped that a General Assembly of the Burundi Red Cross will be planned and organised for early 2000.

Latest events

During the reporting period a number of relevant political issues have occurred. Principally the death of the mediator at the Arusha Peace Talks, Julius Nyerere, in October brought an abrupt halt to those proceedings. It is hoped that Nelson Mandela's agreement to take over in April 2000 will once again try and bring a resolution to the conflict. Meanwhile the living conditions of the population continues to deteriorate as the country has experienced a devaluation of the Burundi franc against the dollar (almost 70% over the past year on the black market) and price increases on all goods, thereby hampering the revitalisation of the economy.

At the end of September the government decided to forcibly move approximately 260,000 people from their land and homes throughout the province of Bujumbura Rural, and settle them into some 53 sites of "regroupement", ostensibly for their own security. This displacement, into areas without shelter, clean water or access to health care, has increased the number of Burundians now living in camps to approximately one million, or some 16% of the national population. There are said to be about 325 such sites throughout the territory, most of which are not accessible to outsiders. The displaced families have very limited access to their fields and crops, are expected to pay for medical care supposedly available from the government dispensary at the nearby commune, have no educational facilities, have extremely limited quantities of water available, and live in very basic shelter on bare hillsides.

In addition, there are still approximately 264,000 people living in refugee camps in Tanzania, with more families are still crossing the border - about 10,900 new refugees this year.

On 12 October an attack in a site for displaced people in the south-eastern province of Rutana left seven people dead, including two UN officials. The UN immediately suspended all its activities outside Bujumbura including all its humanitarian distributions. About 60% of the UN Agencies' international staff were withdrawn from the country. Negotiations continue regarding safe operating conditions, especially for emergency assistance to the displaced and others affected by drought in the province of Kirundo.

Rebel attacks in several provinces have continued and indeed intensified, with a marked change in strategy and a corresponding increase in casualty numbers. A curfew remains in force.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Red Cross actions and planning has changed considerably in recent months to take account of the immediate needs of the displaced populations around Bujumbura Rural province. The BRC has local committees in three communes of the province and works in several of the sites, including the largest, Kabezi. Here seven BRC volunteers live on-site to assist full-time with public health education, water distributions, assistance to the vulnerable groups and non-food distributions.

Non-food distributions w

These continued throughout the period to vulnerable people in a number of areas:

{ A total of 59,541 families had been assisted with 102 tonnes of soap, 2,005 kg of clothes, 9,055 hoes and 62 kg of vegetable seeds. These distributions have been made mainly in Bujumbura and the provinces of Bujumbura Rural, Bururi, Makamba and Bubanza; and repatriates passing through Mugano transit centre (until early October);

Since October the main focus of BRC and Federation support has been to assist the displaced populations in Bujumbura Rurale province:

{ Some 58,000 people were helped with shelter and household items in the months of October and November. Financing for goods was provided by ECHO, the Danish, Finnish and British Red Cross Societies, and with goods in kind from the Swedish Red Cross.

Water distributions w

Using an 8,000 litre water tanker on loan from the Delegation in Rwanda, the BRC is delivering 24,000 litres of drinking water every day to the displaced population living in Kabezi, a site housing some 37,000 people about 20 kms south of Bujumbura.

Food distributions w

The number of Burundi repatriates returning from Ngara in Tanzania through the transit camp at Mugano is very low (195 families from July to early October). The total returnee numbers for 1999 through this route are 883 families or 2,256 persons. The BRC gives each returnee a WFP food ration for three months comprising 30 kg of maize, 20 kg of pulses, 1 kg of oil and 450 grams of salt. Since 12 October and the cessation of UN activities in the countryside, there has been no official repatriation and therefore no RC food distributions.

National Reconstruction Programme w

This programme looks to improve the conditions of those beneficiaries re-establishing themselves in their communities and to help with infrastructure projects such as houses and classrooms. The Red Cross aids this initiative in supplying materials such as nails, window frames and tools. Using Norwegian RC funding support, a programme of construction of 147 houses in Bururi province has begun, of which 68 houses have already received their roofing materials and other fittings.

Disaster Preparedness Programme w

The DPP stock of tarpaulins, blankets, clothes, soap and jerry cans was being established for 20,000 people but has now been largely utilised. With financing available under the 1999 Appeal, fresh deliveries are awaited from Nairobi to replenish the stocks.

The training course for the first emergency team due to take place in July in Makamba province was cancelled due to the unsettled security situation.

Seeds Programme w

The FAO estimates the need for 4,800 mt of bean seeds for the next season, and the Federation/BRC will continue its involvement with this activity through its identification of beneficiaries and distribution of seeds. Subject to security, these activities are likely to cover the following provinces: Cankuzo, Kirundo, Makamba, Muyinga and Ruyigi.

Community health programme w

Due to the uncertain security situation, the health delegate has been transferred to another Delegation. However, wherever possible the BRC is continuing work established, particularly the sites for the displaced.

Public awareness campaigns

50 new community health assistants have been trained in the provinces of Kirundo and Muyinga and now planning their future activities. In addition, those volunteers working at the sites around Bujumbura have received further training on group communication skills, camp hygiene and spraying techniques. In Ngozi, the volunteers have continued to hold meetings on vaccinations, health and hygiene information and nutrition, reaching some 40,000 people. They have continued to refer people to health centres and have taken part in a polio vaccination campaigns.

Anti-malnutrition campaigns have also continued in Kayanza and Ngozi, the latest in mid-November. In the Kabezi camp south of Bujumbura, the volunteers have been heavily involved (during early December) with other NGOs in a nutrition survey of the children.

Also in Ngozi, the fabrication of SanPlat latrine slabs has continued, with new commitments of support for this activity from the French Red Cross.

Epidemics

Cholera has once again appeared, this time in a number of the displaced sites. In early December several dozen people had already been reported dead in several of the squalid and unhygienic sites. Where it has access the Burundi Red Cross has provided tents to serve as isolation wards, has provided drugs, has sprayed the homes and neighbourhoods of the patients and has undertaken a large-scale public hygiene campaign amongst the populations.

Health Centre Rehabilitation

The rehabilitation works on Burara Health Centre in Kirundo financed by the British Red Cross has begun after the signature of an agreement with the Ministry of Public Health.

Water Infrastructure Project in Rutana

The first phase of this ECHO-funded project, also supported by the British RC, was finalised in August with a successful completion of rehabilitation work. A second phase of the project was signed with ECHO for commencement from the beginning of September but the events in Rutana in October has meant a temporary suspension of activities in the province. The delegate has been relocated and most of the Burundian staff have been laid off. A detailed evaluation will be done in January 2000 prior to a final decision on the continuation of the project being taken.

Community and Income Generating Projects w

Social Projects

The centres for the promotion of women in Bujumbura, Muyinga and Ngozi have brought together 120 vulnerable women to provide training in sewing, embroidery and basket weaving, as well as helping to teach them to read and write. After six months of instruction these women receive materiel that allow them to continue producing their wares by themselves. The total receipts from the sales of the goods produced is CHF 18,910, of which 20% is refunded to the women.

The Street Children's centre in Ngozi has been functioning with an average of 90 children per month, of whom 26 are boarders. Of the 90, more than half go to primary school, others follow a reading and writing course in the centre as they are too old for the school, and the rest have enrolled in carpentry and masonry courses. The Bujumbura centre now has 41 children, of whom 39 go to school. The sale of market garden vegetables tended by the children has brought in CHF 1,236.

The food kitchen in Bujumbura, situated in the BRC compound, has continued to serve daily meals to about 50 vulnerable women, the old and street children.

Agricultural Projects

During late 1999 and in time for the first season 2000, the BRC has distributed more than 44 mt of potato and bean seeds to 4,233 smallholders, under projects financed by the German and American governments. In addition, for the second season 2000, the German government will finance the purchase of vegetable seeds for 200,000 families. The seeds are being bought at this time.

Income Generating Projects

The chicken husbandry projects in Bujumbura and Muyinga which started at the beginning of the year have generated gross receipts of CHF 22,006.

The kilns for baking tiles in Matongo and Muyinga, and the two brick making kilns in Kirundo and Muramvya, are now operational and so far this year have generated receipts of CHF 2,309.

Outstanding needs

The Burundi Red Cross is facing an uncertain time in its programming, and is having to expend much of its effort in addressing the critical emergency situation in the camps around Bujumbura. Inevitably this means that the needs may well change from more developmental support to more operational assistance, and thus the need for cash and goods-in-kind to be able to respond, where possible, to those needs. The DPP stock is being used and will require replacement during 2000, and ongoing distributions require a strong supply of goods. This was not foreseen when the Appeal 2000 was being drawn up. We propose to continually assess the situation and the BRC capacity to respond, and issue additional requests for support as further needs are identified. Where developmental work can safely continue, this will go ahead as outlined in the Appeal 2000 document.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

Relations with the Government w

The Federation has enjoyed a good relationship with the government of Burundi at all levels despite its opposition to the policy of regroupment.

Relations with UN Agencies and NGOs w

There is good co-operation between the UN Agencies, the Red Cross and the NGOs, particularly with regard to the changing security situations and co-ordination regarding emergency assistance to the displaced populations. At the same time, the Federation and BRC insist on undertaking their own independent assessments and distributions.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The first few months of this reporting period saw a continuing development of the planned programmes being run by the BRC with Federation support. Despite the difficult conditions these developmental activities in several provinces will continue. However, the displacement of the Bujumbura Rural population, the deteriorating security situation throughout the country and the killings of the UN staff in Rutana have all led to a re-focussing of the BRC's activities in the last quarter of the year. The priority area now is emergency support - where possible - to the displaced families and the continuing distribution of non-food items and the water for them.

The outlook for the vulnerable populations in Burundi is very unsettled and it is hard to predict how the situation will develop. The people of Burundi have never needed outside help more than they need it now, and we count on the continued support from donors into 2000 to ensure the Burundi Red Cross continues to assist them.

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