

SOUTH ASIA: REGIONAL PROGRAMMES

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Reflecting the longer term development plan for South Asia, each National Society is now in the process of producing a two year strategy time-scale. This was conducted as part of the Hanoi Declaration follow up process. A series of major disasters have reinforced Societies' operational knowledge and experience, which are being further strengthened by training and evaluation exercises. Health surveys are making progress and health projects are being prepared for sponsorship. Institutional capacity building continues as does regional resource and information sharing. While funding situation has some what improved, more support with cash and personnel is required from the Donors.

The context

A comprehensive description of the situation in the region which appeared in the previous situation report remains relevant. Since then, however, three new disasters, in Pakistan, Bangladesh and India, have drawn the National Societies into action once again.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Since the last meeting of Secretary Generals, held in the second quarter, there is now an established format and timing for these meetings. The next one is scheduled to take place on 30th November - 1st December in Delhi. The meetings provide a good opportunity to review all the activities of the regional delegation, particularly related to sharing of expertise and cooperation within the region.

At the suggestion of the Secretary Generals, each meeting will concentrate on one major priority area identified during the regional planning process - in the case of this next meeting, the fourth in the series, the topic will be disaster preparedness and disaster management. The arrangements for this meeting fit in very neatly with an international disaster management conference in Delhi which will also be attended by all the South Asia Secretary Generals.

Part of the fourth meeting will concentrate on funding and financial security issues. This is seen as a very serious priority within the region. It is intended that examples of experience elsewhere in the world will be provided and detailed country plans will be developed.

The forthcoming meeting will also include, for the first time, the heads of Federation Country delegations from Afghanistan and Bangladesh, thus creating an even stronger regional network, involving all the senior representatives of the Federation and all the national societies within the region.

Institutional capacity building and financial sustainability

Following the production of a "longer term development plan for South Asia", (see previous report), the country specific and regional priorities have been incorporated into the 2 year Federation country assistance strategies and the overall regional assistance strategy.

In each country the longer term development plan has been used by the National Society and the Federation in the process of building the country assistance strategies in the form of a narrative and financial budget for 2000 and 2001. The two year strategy also identifies some longer term considerations and trends, in order that a rolling budget can be extended easily, this will form part of a four year planning horizon.

In the case of two National Societies in the region (Nepal and Bangladesh) this initiative has seen a strengthening of the planning process and is leading to an updated longer term plan. In the case of the other four countries, the process has helped to identify priorities which will be developed into a longer term country specific plan - these National Societies will now be building on this process, and with the assistance of the Federation will be producing 2 - 4 year strategic plans.

In varying degrees, each National Society has used this activity to strengthen their own planning - in the case of two national societies an internal steering committee has been set up, without Federation prompting, to actively turn the longer term regional plan into a realistic and implementable 2-4 year plan.

Institutional Development

The Regional programme officer responsible for disaster preparedness and general institutional development programmes has been involved with capacity building programmes in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. In each of these programmes two additional objectives have been added, namely:

- To develop the National society so that these programmes can be continued in the future without Federation involvement.
- To include representatives from other National Societies in the region in order to strengthen the exchange of skills and experience .

Resource Development Workshop

A tailor-made approach is being adopted to this very important area of National Societies' operations. A South Asia regional workshop was scheduled to take place in November in Sri Lanka.

Finance Development

The regional finance delegate visited Pakistan and Nepal. In Pakistan, the main purpose of the visit was to hold a 2 day Financial Management Workshop for both finance personnel and management. It was the first time that the accountants from the various provincial branches had met each other, so was an excellent "networking" opportunity. In Nepal, the main purpose of the visit was to provide the Nepal RC with additional computer training.

Disaster Response and Preparedness

In conjunction with ECHO, a report on the 1998 flood operations in Nepal, Bangladesh and India has been produced. The intention was not only to review the operations, but also to highlight longer term, capacity building assistance that can be provided through the Federation. At present, a flood operation is being conducted, (in the Indian states of West Bengal and Bihar), with very little input from the Federation, and without a Federation international appeal. This was made possible because: emergency buffer stocks were built up during the 1998 operation.; and because knowledge and experience gained during the last Federation assisted operation has been used by the Indian Red Cross branches, reducing the need for large-scale outside assistance.

The forthcoming disaster management conference in Delhi will provide a good opportunity to develop further, more detailed, prioritisation in the area of disaster preparedness and disaster management, to be discussed at the next meeting of secretary generals on 1st December.

India

The fifth DP workshop with the revised standard five day curriculum was held in Maharashtra in September. The technical preparations were undertaken by the State Branch. Gradually, these programmes are being handed over to the Indian Red Cross. The joint ICRC / Federation approach to these workshops is now becoming very streamlined. The involvement of the Indira Gandhi National Open University staff is also a very positive step in the direction of developing the sustainability of these programmes.

Pakistan

As planned, a Community based disaster preparedness workshop was held in Quetta, Balochistan in September. This workshop included an extra session evaluating the joint Federation / Pakistan Red Crescent response to the May 1999 Sindh Cyclone. (A detailed report on this evaluation is available). To complete these provincial programmes, one further workshop is planned in Sindh. The whole programme has proved very successful.

Sri Lanka

As a first step, two sub regional awareness raising workshops were held earlier in the year. The follow up programme with community based disaster preparedness training workshops at district level is in line with the India and Pakistan programmes.

Health

The regional planning process has helped considerably in identifying trends and, therefore, priority areas in the region. The 2-4 year strategic plans now include these priorities.

Within the health sector a number of strategic reviews are now being conducted, or are planned. In each case these will help considerably with the development of a health sector programme aimed at the immediate and changing needs of the countries of the region. The intention is to identify first the priority needs within the country, and secondly the optimum role of the Red Cross / Red Crescent.

The situation of these reviews is as follows:

<u>Bangladesh</u>	Health sector review completed. Identification made of major areas for the Bangladesh Red Crescent to address.
<u>Pakistan</u>	Health sector review completed - aspects incorporated in the 2-4 year plan
<u>Nepal</u>	Health sector review completed and being discussed with the Nepal Red Cross
<u>Sri Lanka</u>	Health focus review proposed, funding secured.
<u>India</u>	Terms of reference for a health review agreed, consultant identified.
<u>Afghanistan</u>	A strategic review is being conducted.

The regional health delegate has made visits to Pakistan, in order to develop a number of health and blood related programmes, to India to a number of branches, including Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh in order to develop a shanty town programme involving health and hygiene assistance and training, and to Sri Lanka in order to develop an operational assessment involving other humanitarian agencies and the Sri Lanka Government.

A regional meeting on safe blood is being organised and funded by the Federation. It will involve senior National Society representatives from four Red Cross / Red Crescent societies in the region.

Information and communications

The regional delegation is in the process of developing a regional information facility. It will provide details of all the developments taking place in the region, and will concentrate on the development of a database for regional cooperation. This is another area that will be discussed at the forthcoming secretary generals meeting.

The new information delegate in the regional delegation has already started on a programme of visits to all the National Societies in the region in order to assist with the strengthening of the information and media services of the societies.

The name of the Red Cross / Crescent is now much more widely known than a year ago. There is also a much better and wider understanding of the role of the Movement. During emergencies, the media and other agencies now contact the Red Cross / Crescent directly. There is no doubt that the ongoing emergency relief and rehabilitation activities in the region develop the profile of the Red Cross / Crescent. In the past quarter there have been three more significant operations: Cyclone relief and rehabilitation project, Sindh Province, Pakistan; flood relief and rehabilitation operation, West Bengal and Bihar States, India; and flood relief and rehabilitation operation, Bangladesh.

In addition there is also a much wider knowledge of the capacity building and developmental areas of the Red Cross / Crescent within the region. This has been helped by: the organisation and funding of a disaster management conference in Delhi; the setting up of informal meetings of all the major international NGOs present in India; and the distribution of a review of the 1998 flood operations in India, Bangladesh and Nepal to all major agencies, governments and potential and existing donors in all South Asia countries.

Outstanding needs

Sourcing of regional funds is, as mentioned in the last report, an important part of the regional delegation's activities. Increasingly, to support the funding initiatives of the Secretariat and donor national societies, it keeps in regular contact with the embassies in Delhi, Islamabad, Colombo and Kathmandu.

Other issues/constraints:

A number of constraints were listed in the last report. An update for some of these is given below, along with one additional constraint -- political instability -- which has increased its effect within a number of countries in the region.

Funding and Delegates

While through 1999 some improvement in funding situation took place there are still important gaps remaining, as detailed below, which do require urgent attention and support from the donors. With regard to the regional programmes, core delegates are funded either through DFID, or PNS, Netherlands. There is a need to build a funding base for programme activities

that complements the important contribution from DFID. Expressions of interest by the German and Japanese Red Cross to support some of the activities in the Region (Regional Health, Sri Lanka) is encouraging, however more definite support is required.

Particular funding gaps still to be covered are in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and India. The Federation is looking for Delegates, members of the Regional Delegation, who will be stationed in Pakistan (Regional Health Delegate), and Sri Lanka (Regional Institutional Delegate), both performing Representative functions out of each location.

These two outposted Delegates along with 4 Delegates based in Delhi will form a Regional Capacity Building team. Such approach is aiming at a more rational utilisation of the human resources and funding.

National Society senior staff changeover

This continues to be a difficulty, although all the national societies in the region continue to function very efficiently. It means that the Federation needs to spend much more time on strategic issues and issues that would otherwise be the domain of the National Society. The Indian Red Cross, for example, has been without a permanent Secretary General for 6 months.

Roles of regional and country delegations

This issue is becoming clearer, and the potential creation of a regional task force (see above) will help solve many of these issues.

Reporting

Over the past three months it has become clear that, largely due to joint Federation / National Society relief operations, at least three of the national societies in the region have considerably improved their understanding of the operational requirements within this area of work. This will be an area of continued prioritisation next year.

Political instability

At the time of writing, a new government is being formed in India and Pakistan is under military rule. These two issues reflect the ever changing political situation which is so often the case in this part of the world. One effect of this political instability is that priority issues like healthcare or safe blood sometimes become secondary concerns. This often increases the need for the Red Cross / Crescent action, and puts even more pressure on the Federation to provide financial and technical support and inputs.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The Head of Delegation acted as chairperson for a newly created information-sharing meeting of all the major international NGOs present in India. More than 10 national and international agencies participated. This forum will continue to meet on a regular basis, with increased liaison during relief operations. It is intended to set up a similar meeting in other countries of South Asia., also involving the national Red Cross / Crescent Societies

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Peter Rees-Gildea
Director
Operations Funding and
Reporting Department

Hiroshi Higashiura
Director
Asia & Pacific Department

