

***BANGLADESH: POST CONFLICT REHABILITATION,
DISASTER RESPONSE AND PREPAREDNESS, AND CAPACITY
BUILDING***

4 February 2000

*appeal no. 01.30/99
situation report no. 2
period covered: July - November, 1999*

Despite delays caused by a flood relief operation, most programmes moved ahead. The exceptions were the Myanmar refugee operation and Hill Tracts programmes, where funding shortages paralysed some aid efforts. Cyclone preparedness gained ground, with new units adding to coverage of vulnerable areas, increased training of volunteers and the all important maintenance of warning systems and equipment. Management changes are being introduced through governance training and resource development initiatives are making headway.

The context

Bangladesh is one of the most disaster prone countries in the world. Besides seasonal floods, river erosion and cyclones, it is also subject to droughts, earthquakes and cold spells all of which create extra hardships for the population, of whom half live below the poverty line. The floods and cyclones in particular have the further effect of worsening existing health problems. All these disasters call for substantial relief and rehabilitation aid, making the effective development of disaster response and preparedness a priority.

As the only recognised government auxiliary, the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) has been prominent in humanitarian activities since its inception. Active support from the Federation and PNSs have helped to enhance its capacity and widen its service coverage. Through the Emergency Appeal 1999, the Federation sought assistance for the following ongoing programmes: Myanmar Refugee Relief Operation, Post Conflict Rehabilitation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Community Based Disaster Preparedness (CBDP), Cyclone Preparedness (CPP), Institutional Development (ID) and Health.

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Latest events

Repeated flash floods and wide scale river erosion from July to September led to the launching of an appeal in September for relief and rehabilitation consisting of a food package, distribution of blankets and a low cost housing programme for the most vulnerable. Relief and rehabilitation have been going on since then. Unlike the 1998 floods, the worst in Bangladesh's history, this year's flood was localised but more devastating, because of the accompanying erosion.

The loss in crops due to flash floods was more than compensated by a bumper harvest. According to a 'conservative' estimate of the World Food Programme in early October, total food grains production in Bangladesh during 1999/2000 will be 22.35 million MT still leaving an annual food deficit of 2 to 3 million MT.

A moderate earthquake hit Moheshkhali island on 22 July. The press ran articles on lapses in urban construction standards and the threat of large scale destruction in the event of a severe earthquake.

The 15th Draw of the Red Crescent Lottery the single largest source of revenue for the Society was held on 31 October. This year's lottery has generated a net revenue of BDT 14.5 million (approximately CHF 435,000).

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Myanmar Refugee Relief Operation (MRRO)

Currently, only 2 of the 20 camps originally set up by the government and UNHCR for Rohingya refugees from Myanmar are still operational. BDRCS runs its operations with a staff of about 22 persons headed by a coordinator. The number of refugees living in the two camps stood at 22,260 persons (3,635 families) on 30 November. In November 210 persons (32 families) were repatriated. BDRCS continued to provide supplementary and therapeutic feedings and some essential non-food items, under arrangements with UNHCR and WFP during this reporting period.

The programme survived an acute financial crisis during the first half of the year thanks to funds from three National Societies covering up to end July. The process of further negotiations with UNHCR and efforts to identify new sources of funds continued during most of the reporting period.

Post Conflict Rehabilitation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)

BDRCS assistance in the CHT, after 10,427 tribal families returned from India, to their homes following the December 1997 Peace Accord, includes supplementary food rations to returnees, community development activities for an additional estimated 120,000 beneficiaries, and the introduction of disaster preparedness and health programmes benefiting a large part of the entire CHT population. The development component of the Programme has a three year perspective. Apart from the 12 months of food rations to the returnee families, food rations were also provided to the 20,000 members of the dismantled 'Shanti Bahini' armed force.

In April 1999, the government requested the BDRCS to provide a monthly food package of 4 kg lentil, 2 kg salt and 2 ltr cooking oil for another six months to all the returnee families. Because of funding problems, this has not yet been done. The delegation has made some local-level contacts as part of its search for financing.

Further work was done on preparations for the launching of the development programme in the CHT, in accordance with the action plan for the year 2000. The BDRCS NHQ allocated small cash amounts to the local Red Crescent units in the hill districts for the purchase of essential office items. Otherwise, no

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procurement or distribution has been effected by the Federation/BDRCS since June, due to lack of funds.

The Senior Programme Advisor for the Delegation and contact person for the Local Capacities for Peace Project (LCPP) took part in a consultation meeting in Boston from 24 to 30 September, attended by more than 20 organisations/agencies from around the world. A participatory planning workshop was held in the three CHT districts, 20-26 November. It brought together representatives of the major stakeholders in the CHT region .

Unit Officers from two of the hill districts took part in a refresher training course organised at the BDRCS National Headquarters. The BDRCS co-ordinator for the CHT project made repeated visits to the programme areas.

Community Based Disaster Preparedness (CBDP) Programme

The CBDP programme was launched in 1997 with the objective of building the capacity of both the Society and the community to face disasters effectively through skills development, awareness building, community based services, contingency plans and the generation of emergency funds. Initially, the programme was launched in 13 districts, with the target of covering all the (previously identified) 38 most disaster prone districts of the country by 2000. By the end of November 1999, CBDP had been introduced in 23 districts.

CBDP activities are carried out at NHQ, unit and community levels. Major activities during the reporting period included the following :

- Institutional Development

Two newly included units completed the mandatory formation of the 25 member squad (17 male and 8 female) and over 250 new life members were registered. Community volunteer groups were formed in the newly enlisted units. Rallies for awareness building was held in 5 new units. Several arts and cultural competitions were held in the units to observe special days of national and Red Cross/Red Crescent importance. A Disaster Preparedness Conference was held for 10 units, involving local administration, unit officials/members and a cross section of local people.

Four units were provided telephone connections while 18 units received various first aid and rescue service items. Each of the units received one motor bike and a bicycle to increase their mobility. A computer was installed in the CBDP department at NHQ.

- Training :

Basic Refresher Training and Refresher Training on Community Based First Aid (CBFA) was organised during July-September for the squad members of the original 13 units. Basic and CBFA training was also provided in October to the 5 units included in the programme in late 1998. First Aid training for Red Crescent Youth was organised for the RCY members of Bogra and Borguna in August. A Relief Management course was organised at the NHQ, 3-4 October, for the secretaries of 23 units and unit officers of 18 units.

- Modification of the Disaster Contingency Plan (DCP):

DCPs formulated by the first 13 units have been modified in the light of the experience gained during the 1998 flood relief operations on matters including buffer stocks, transport, logistic support, emergency fund management, and rescue and relief.

- Disaster Emergency Fund (DEF):

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- Disaster Emergency Fund (DEF):

DEFs of Tk. 50,000 each have been created in 3 more units, and a matching amount has been sent to them from NHQ. This fund is expected to be continuously replenished through various means. In Barguna and Bagerhat districts, through the active support of the local administration, revenues are being received from a tax on land ownership transfer documents and on cinema tickets.

- **Income Generation (IG) Activities:**

To achieve sustainability of the programme, units have ventured on viable IG activities (extension of office building for rent, computer training centre, and pisciculture). Some units now have their own income to meet administration expenses.

- **Participation of Squads and RC Youth (RCY) groups :**

At unit level, squads and RCY groups participated in damage assessment surveys and preparing priority lists of affected people during the floods in August. Members trained in Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA) and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) were involved in the selection of the most vulnerable 200 families in affected communities covered by 10 units.

In September, the tubewell water of selected communities (under CBDP) was re-tested by the community volunteers for arsenic contamination - a common but serious problem with tubewells in Bangladesh.

- **Distribution of slab latrines:**

Several slab latrine sets were distributed among beneficiary families of the Bagerhat unit.

- **Shelter Maintenance and Management (SMM) :**

A survey of beneficiary families was done and shelter management committees (SMC) were reconstituted for four cyclone shelters in Noakhali region.

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Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP)

CPP is the only programme the BDRCS conducts jointly with the government, which has been carrying the recurring expenses since 1973 and is involved in the policy making of the programme. A Government contribution to the CPP, amounting to CHF 87,687, was received for July-September. CPP is currently operative in 2,742 village units of 30 sub-districts (thanas) in 11 coastal districts of the country. It has a contingent of 32,904 trained volunteers (27,420 male and 5,484 female), supervised by 30 thana based full-time assistant directors and two directors at NHQ.

Major activities carried out by the programme during the second half of 1999 include the following :

- *Disaster exercise :*

An impressive demonstration was organised at Moheshkhali on 24 September in connection with the visit of the BDRCS management board members, following their Orientation Workshop in Cox's Bazar.

- *Annual Conference:*

The two day annual conference of the CPP officers and Thana Team Leaders was held in Dhaka at the end of July, after a gap of a couple of years.

- *Awareness Campaigns*

Field demonstrations on cyclone preparedness were arranged in Barguna and Moheshkhali Thanas. Each was watched by over 3,000 persons, including school children. Several folk song sessions aimed at awareness building were also organised .

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- *Training*

Refresher training courses for Unit team leaders and female volunteers were held in seven Thanas. Refresher courses were also conducted for the VHF and HF radio operators. Over one thousand Imams (those who conduct prayers at mosques), 3000 fishermen and students from 20 schools were given cyclone preparedness training.

- *Repair and maintenance :*

Over 130 sets of various warning equipment and tools were repaired at the workshops in Dhaka, Chittagong and Barisal. Items included walkie talkies, solar panels, antenna masts, transistor radios, and megaphones.

- *Procurement and Distribution :*

31,514 dry cell batteries were distributed to volunteers in the field for use in their torch-lights and other equipment.

Institutional development (ID)

The ID programme is being implemented through the Planning and Development Division (P&D) one of the five divisions created as part of the structural reorganisation of the Society recommended by Federation-appointed consultants in 1996.

The main ID activities during the reporting period include the following :

- ◆ The consultants appointed in August to carry out a Feasibility Study and Investigation of BDRCS properties in Dhaka produced a legal report on the title deeds of the properties and a set of development options for the properties by end October. The properties include 6,200 sq m of building space, 3 acres of green field and a vacant site. BDRCS and the Federation delegation are jointly studying options.
- ◆ A day long orientation workshop on governance was organised at Cox's Bazar on 24 September for the Managing Board members of the BDRCS It was part of an induction course designed for the policy makers which ran for two days and consisted of a day long Orientation Workshop, a visit to programme sites, discussions with local BDRCS unit officials, RCY members, project staff and local administrations, and informal meetings.
- ◆ Several training courses were organised both in house and for outsiders. Those for external organisations have become a source of additional income for the Society. Internal courses included 5 First Aid Training courses for BDRCS drivers, youth members, and core group volunteers. A ToT was also organised for the RC members of Chittagong unit. CBFA training was held for RCY members of schools and colleges in all the 15 ID units during this period as a routine event.
- ◆ Units continued the Life Membership drive and fund-raising sessions with local potential donors.
- ◆ Funds were disbursed to units for minor renovation works and the purchase of furniture and stationery for unit offices.

Blood Services Programme

The upgrading and extension of the Blood Bank was the sole Federation assisted health programme in 1999. The three-year project, initiated in 1998, envisages setting up three more Blood Centres outside Dhaka, the creation of facilities for mandatory HIV tests of all collected blood, the establishment of a 10-bed blood transfusion facility on the first floor of the Dhaka centre, the enhancement of indoor and outdoor blood collection and storage/processing facilities, and the procurement of the requisite materials and equipment.

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The major activities during this reporting period are summarised below :

- ◆ The BDRCS Dhaka Blood Centre has started testing all of its blood for HIV and syphilis before supplying it to end-users. The Blood Centre in the district of Jessore was commissioned in September.
- ◆ Construction work was begun on the site of the second Blood Centre outside Dhaka, in Sylhet.
- ◆ Commissioning is expected in early 2000.
- ◆ Staff recruitment for the new blood centre at Jessore and the additional centres for Dhaka has been completed. A mobile blood collection van and a motor bike has been procured.
- ◆ Some 53 blood donation sessions were organised by the Dhaka Blood Centre during the last quarter. Most of these sessions were held in collaboration with external agencies and benevolent organisations. About 600 blood transfusions were made and an income of over CHF 45,045 was earned through service charges. As a matter of policy, blood was given free to the poorest patients.
- ◆ The Dhaka Blood centre has entered into a collaborative agreement with Rotary International of Bangladesh to collect around 4,000 units of blood during a one-year period, starting from July 1999.

Outstanding needs

Although the National Society experienced a relatively serene governance situation, management activities still suffered from the continued absence of a permanent Secretary General and a Chairman. The elected vice chairman is now acting as chairman.

Programmes:

- The MRRO badly needs a stable source of funding, covering at least one full year.
- For the CHT programme, the launching of the development programme needs to be expedited as the beneficiaries are becoming impatient.
- An evaluation of the CDBP programme should be undertaken without further delay to ensure effective and results-oriented implementation. Integration of the bilateral (Japanese and German) CDBP with the mainstream Federation programme has yet to be made effective. CPP needs adequate and timely funding to keep it functional. BDRCS should also prepare itself to face the eventuality of a severe earthquake in an urban area.
- The ID continues to suffer from a lack of appropriate manpower as some experienced staff have left. Continuation of the increased capacity building of the units is very much required.
- Prompt completion of construction work is an essential prerequisite for the timely commissioning of the new blood centre in Sylhet.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The Federation Head of Delegation had meetings with government officials, including the Minister and State Minister of Health, regarding the signing of the Legal Status Agreement and Federation support for a proposed national blood policy advocated by the BDRCS.

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BDRCS flood relief activities were prominently featured in national and local media and press. A British TV team filmed CPP activities in a remote coastal area.

The BDRCS and Federation are regularly represented at policy or co-ordination meetings of the Disaster Management Bureau, Ministry of CHT affairs, UNDP, UNHCR and Disaster Forum.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The July- September flash floods which called for relief activities for the thousands of victims by the Society and the delegation were partly responsible for delays in normal development activities. Progress has been achieved in the field of disaster preparedness and capacity building, but the pace has been slow due partly to fund constraints and partly to a need for prompt decision making. The local Capacity for Peace Project has generated wide interest in both the tribal people and the settlers of the CHT.

The Society has intensified its efforts to develop new approaches to fund raising. The feasibility study on assets is expected to lead to effective plans to use them for the benefit of the Society.

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