

BURUNDI: SOCIAL, HEALTH AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE

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Despite recent 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. In this context, the Burundi Red Cross (BRC) and the Federation have primarily focused efforts on providing assistance to the vulnerable, as well as strengthening the operational capacity of the National Society, reintegrating returnees, 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 (estimated to be 467,959, or some 8% of the total population) 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. Also, the refugees in camps in Tanzania could return at a moment's notice either voluntarily or through organised repatriation. The Federation has, therefore, aimed to:

{ Strengthen the operational capacity of the National Society during this transition period so that the relief aid dispensed can lead to longer-term development projects to help the reintegration of the beneficiaries back into their places of origin. The projects include infrastructure rehabilitation, agriculture, animal husbandry and improvements to community health facilities;

{ Continue the institutional and resource development of the BRC through training and operational experience in the field.

Latest events

A number of relevant political issues have occurred during the reporting period. The suspension of the economic embargo on 23 January, although significant, has not improved the living conditions of the population 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.

The general reluctance of the parties to open an effective dialogue in addition to the continuing disparity in their positions at the talks in Arusha does not signal an imminent or successful end to the peace process, thereby adding to the tension with Tanzania which is accused by Burundi of harbouring rebels.

In June the DRC made a formal complaint to the International Tribunal in The Hague against Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda for invading its territory, and this was followed by threats by the head of the Congolese army to bomb Bujumbura.

The Government of Burundi has proposed a stabilisation period of 10 years during which the present regime would rule for five years before ceding power to a Hutu president. The democratic base to this would be determined by a consensus and the representation in the national assembly of all the groups currently taking part in the peace process in Arusha. Furthermore, the country would see a new police force while the current paramilitary units and the army would be combined to ensure the security of all citizens.

With regard to the repercussions of the conflict in the DRC's Kivu region, only 350 Congolese refugees remain in a site in the province of Cibitoke and all the Burundians who were repatriated from the DRC have returned to their provinces of origin. The coordinated attacks of rebel groups in May initiated an exodus of some 6,000 Congolese refugees to Tanzania, and with these forces now on the point of potentially attacking Uvira in the DRC, there is an increased danger of Burundi becoming directly involved in the conflict.

During this period there has been an intensification of the rebel attacks in several provinces leaving at least, according to information provided by the UN, 600 people dead and 170 injured. The majority have been civilians in the Bujumbura Rural, Bururi, Makamba Rutana and Ruyigi areas and the fighting has also left more than 88,000 people displaced. In addition, reports from UNHCR show that 14,900 people have fled to Tanzania, a third of which from the most southern provinces. In the same period they have only registered 6,300 repatriates coming back into Burundi.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Food distributions w

The number of Burundi repatriates returning from Ngara in Tanzania through the transit camp at Mugano has remained low, yet has constituted 28% of the total (6,300) for the country during the reporting period. 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.

Non-food distributions w

The following target populations have received distributions (see as well Annex 2 attached):

- { Repatriates passing through Mugano transit centre;
- { Some 253,134 beneficiaries received from the Red Cross a total of 80,022 non-food items comprising tarpaulins, blankets, jerry cans, cooking sets and pagnes as well as 102 tonnes of soap, 1,789 kg of clothes, 8,566 hoes and 62kg of vegetable seeds. These distributions have been made mainly in Bujumbura and the provinces of Bujumbura Rural, Bururi, Makamba et Bubanza (where one out two people are displaced). Amongst the targeted populations, 187,265 people (74%) have received non-food items funded by ECHO and this total can be sub-divided as follows: Beneficiaries in sites 90,285 (48%); Beneficiaries in health or nutritional centres 49,504 (26%); Beneficiaries subjected to recent armed attacks 40,713 (22%); Beneficiaries resettled in sites 3,502 (2%); Beneficiaries dispersed around sites 3,170 (2%).

A number of distributions in Bururi, Makamba and Rutana were postponed due to the security situation.

The FAO seed distribution for the February-March season 1999 had more impact than its predecessor due to the drought conditions and the resultant increase in the number of families affected. This raised the number of beneficiaries served by the Red Cross in three of the provinces from 70,271 to 328,409. Each family in Kirundo (the worst hit area) received 16 kg of beans, and 10 kg in the other provinces. The food ration of 20 kg of maize, donated by WFP to prevent the seeds from being eaten were distributed at the same time by CARE. More than 940 tonnes of beans seeds have been distributed in

addition to 540 kg of vegetable seeds and 9,088 hoes that were financed by ECHO. For the next growing season (C) which begins at the start of June a further 666 kg of vegetable seeds will be spread amongst 12 provinces while 14,702 hoes will be given out in Kirundo and Ngozi thereby reaching some 320,000 beneficiaries.

National Reconstruction Programme w

This programme looks to improve the conditions of those beneficiaries re-establishing themselves in their communities and to help in infrastructure projects such as houses and classrooms. The Red Cross aids this initiative in supplying materials such as nails, window frames and tools. Notwithstanding the response of UNOPS in providing partial financing, the programme it will start in July thanks to a number of PNS's who have indicated support for it.

Disaster Preparedness Programme w

At the moment a DPP stock of tarpaulins, blankets, clothes, soap and jerry cans is maintained for 20,000 people and it is hoped that this can be increased to support a target population of 50,000 by the end of the year.

The 15-day training course for the first emergency team started on 24 May for 29 volunteers of which 17 successfully passed the examinations set. The training and equipment was financed by the Spanish Red Cross, ICRC and the Federation. The next course will take place in July in the southern provinces but is dependant on the prevailing security situation.

Community health programme w

Public awareness campaign

76 Community health assistants have been trained in the provinces of Kirundo, Makamba, Muyinga and Ngozi. They have since organised 392 awareness meetings covering various themes (including water purification, vaccinations and nutrition) in 335 collines populated by 25,519 people. Some 4,673 people have been referred to health centres and taken part in a polio vaccination campaign that immunised 8,471 children.

In future it is planned that provincial health workers who are currently being recruited and trained will have the task of training other community health assistants, and supervising all the activities of the BRC with regard to health matters in their respective provinces. A health worker has also been recruited in the province of Rutana to develop an awareness campaign in conjunction with the current water and hygiene project. About 28 volunteers from the BRC have been trained on a four day course on hygiene promotion through active participation (PHAST). In the last two months the volunteers have worked in 12 collines and held 20 meetings with 218 participants in order to try and identify the local health problems and help solve them. A plan of action for the construction and distribution of a latrine model for the most vulnerable has been initiated and will start in July in Rutana.

Epidemics

The Spanish Red Cross has provided a stock of medicines to counter the principal epidemic diseases prevalent in Burundi. With this stock the BRC were able to intervene in an outbreak of cholera that effected 600 people on the outskirts of Bujumbura at the start of the year. The National Society also held 346 awareness meetings for hygiene and sanitation, distributed soap, and sprayed infected areas with the assistance of MSF, ultimately assisting 1,734 beneficiaries. The head of the health department in the BRC attended a HELP course (Health Emergency in Large Populations) in Canada.

Health Centre Rehabilitation

The Minister of Public Health signed an accord with the BRC to implement the Bamako Initiative to recover costs in health centres built or renovated by the BRC, which was a condition in their being worked on. The construction of a centre in Kirundo ought to start in July and a second has yet to be identified.

Water infrastructure Project in Rutana

The official opening of the water system in the Gihofi hospital was made on 6 May. A report was sent to ECHO as well as a request to revise the budget in order to extend the project and finish the renovation of 5 other systems before the end of July. The number has been reduced from 8 to 5 due to the cost of the materials in Burundi and the degradation of the existing components. In collaboration with DGHHER, 30 local government water workers trained for 4 days in water management committees and the collection of rates to ensure the long-term maintenance of the system. The proposed extension of the project has been given to ECHO with the hope that the work can restart from September onwards.

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 6 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 15,333. This is before 20% is refunded to the women.

The Street Children's centre in Ngozi has been functioning with an average of 80 children per month, of which half are boarders. Of the 80, about 40 go to primary school, 32 follow a reading and writing course in the centre as they are too old for the school, and 6 have enrolled in carpentry courses. the centre in Bujumbura opened its doors in May to 37 children and the sale of market garden vegetables has brought in CHF 708.

The food kitchen in Bujumbura, which is situated in the BRC compound, has served in the region of 7,800 meals since the start of the year to vulnerable women, the old and street children

Agricultural Projects

Some 1,586 farmers have benefited from this USAID financed project which aims to improve the food security situation in 8 provinces. For season B (February - March), the beneficiaries received 980 kg of bean seeds and 17,272 kg of seed potatoes, as well as hoes and such things as fertilisers, pesticides and fungicides. These groups of farmers have been trained by an agronomist from the BRC in collaboration with provincial experts on agriculture and animal husbandry.

The sale of the produce, apart from the USAID project in Bujumbura and in the provinces of Muramvya, Muyinga and Ngozi, has generated receipts of CHF 3,027.

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 4,007.

The kilns for baking tiles in Matongo and Muyinga are now operational and the first has already sold 4,200 tiles for a total of CHF 459.

The work on two brick making kilns in Kirundo and Muramvya has finished and the first has started its first batch of 82,000 which are yet to be sold.

Outstanding needs

The Red Cross is in the process of finishing the distribution of food and the rehabilitation of the water systems funded by ECHO. A proposal to extend this project has been submitted and it is hoped that the second phase could start in September, which would necessitate the presence of two Watsan delegates. The health delegate will also have to be replaced in August as this position is very important regarding training and supervision on the hygiene side.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

Relations with the Government w

The signing of an accord in March has legalised the Federation's presence in Burundi. A protocol has also been signed with the Ministry of Community Development and Craft Work to complete the Watsan project in Rutana. To date the co-operation has been excellent. Good relations have also been maintained with the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security (with whom the accord was signed), and the Ministry of Reinsertion, and Reintegration of Refugees and Displaced People.

Relations with UN Agencies w

There is good co-ordination between these agencies, the Red Cross and the NGOs which can be seen in the inter-agency evaluations (for population displacements due to rebel attacks, epidemics etc.) and in helping to support humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable. Fora for discussion are organised on a regular basis to exchange and define ideas on the parameters surrounding the work of the humanitarian agencies. Protocols of co-operation have been signed with UNICEF to set up the water and hygiene project in Rutana, and with UNHCR with regard to the repatriation of the refugees from Ngara. Furthermore the Red Cross is working in direct collaboration with FAO in distributing seeds and agricultural needs to the most vulnerable, and with WFP in a "Food for Work" programme which supports the Women's Promotion Groups as well as the occasional emergency project. The Red Cross also attends the meetings at OCHA, particularly to follow the ongoing crisis in Kivu.

Relations with the NGOs w

Co-operation is undertaken on a case by case basis in assisting with particular distributions to people affected by fighting, for example, with IRC, CRS, MSF and Oxfam GB in Makamba and Ruyigi, and with MSF and GVC in Kabezi. In addition the Red Cross work with Oxfam Quebec in the repatriation of the Burundians coming back from Tanzania and distributions to the vulnerable in Nutritional Centres with MSF and ACF.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The majority of the activities over this reporting period have been devoted to the 2 programmes financed by ECHO: the distribution of non-food items and the water and hygiene project. These 2 programmes have necessitated a huge logistics effort to ensure their completion. The rehabilitation projects (houses, school classrooms and health centres) have been postponed until the second half of the year awaiting confirmation of their being financed. The income generating projects will be subject to a financial analysis before determining the most effective to introduce into other regions. The programme to train the emergency teams will be continued with one course every two months. Following an agricultural evaluation mission financed by USAID, further funds may be available to 5 other provinces for the next agricultural season.

Although it did not appear in the 1999 Emergency Appeal, the progress made in Institutional Development has allowed the BRC to expand its presence throughout a large part of the country as the number of provincial committees has grown from 4 to 11 since the start of the year. The BRC is in the process of revising its statutes before having them approved by a joint commission of the Federation and ICRC and then adopted by the General Assembly. This should convene before the end of the year and will be the first since the founding of the BRC in 1963.

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