

Tsunami two-year progress report :Bangladesh



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 185 countries.

In Brief

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Executive summary

The severe earthquake off the coast of Sumatra, Indonesia sent three aftershocks in the Chittagong area of Bangladesh causing minor structural damage to buildings, and raising the water levels of rivers, lakes and inland ponds. The tremors jolted mainly the coastal belt areas leaving two persons dead and over 100 injured. The tidal surge was four feet high at low tide. Officials at the country's observatory said that this was the first time that Bangladesh had been hit by such a high intensity earthquake of 7.36 on the Richter scale and miraculously there were no large scale casualties or damage. The epicentre of the quake was located 1019 kilometres south-east of Chittagong, south of Banda Aceh in Sumatra, Indonesia. Due to the minor damage sustained to buildings and infrastructure in the coastal belt, the affected areas are today almost fully rebuilt.

Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) has become an increasingly important national actor in the field of disaster management (DM), particularly with regard to floods and cyclones. Its growing experience has been well documented in recent evaluation and lessons learned exercises. The cyclone preparedness programme (CPP) is one of the components of the DM programme, which took the initiative to better prepare high-risk communities and women at household level in 11 cyclone prone districts during the 2004 tsunami. The CPP has been working in the coastal area for the past 35 years.

In the original tsunami appeal there were no planned organizational development (OD) activities in Bangladesh

for 2005. The focus for 2006 to 2007 is to strengthen and support the development of the branches and their volunteers in the coastal areas of Bangladesh to increase their capacities.



Disaster preparedness awareness raising rally

The main priority for the BDRCS OD programme is to bring about a 'planned changed process' and capacity building. In recent years, considerable progress has been achieved on all these fronts. This change process has enabled the introduction of more coherent management policies and strategies, and facilitated decentralization of the decision making process at national level.

BDRCS is actively engaged in the dissemination of humanitarian values (HV) and the Fundamental Principles

of the Movement as well as protection of the emblem, supported by both the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Federation at all levels of the society. Emphasizing impartiality and neutrality of its actions, BDRCS encourages respect for the dignity of human life and promotes gender and ethnic equality. To strengthen the capacity building of the branches one HV workshop per year has been included in the OD programme.

Key facts and figures

- Disaster Management programme has trained and equipped 34,152 volunteers, including 5,694 women, covering 2,847 villages.
- More than 80,000 students and teachers participated in disaster preparedness meetings, indirectly benefiting 100,000 people.

Background/Operational context

Due to unforeseen events the smooth implementation of planned activities were affected. In 2005, both Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) and Federation key staff were deployed to assist in the tsunami and Pakistan earthquake emergency operations. On 25 April 2006 a tropical depression called "MALA" gradually turned into a severe cyclonic storm. Later in the year sudden storms influenced by a land depression hovering over West Bengal and the Orissa coast of India and its adjacent areas occurred from 19 to 21 September 2006, affecting the coastal districts.

630 trawlers, 25 boats, and a Bangladesh naval ship were affected, with 3,500 fishermen and a naval commander missing, and over 1,500 fishermen feared dead. BDRCS staff and volunteers were present along the coast to assist those rescued and to help in recovering bodies. The BDRCS CPP volunteers and staff in the coastal belt of Bangladesh were mobilized in rescue operations, relief distribution and helped to rebuild temporary houses.

The ongoing political and occasional social disturbances have hampered smooth implementation of programmes. With the general election approaching in January 2007, there are worrying signs of government intentions to suppress opposition political activity. Although the overall governance setting is marked by poor law and order, systemic corruption, and a decline in civil service quality, several positive aspects of governance explain Bangladesh's success in accelerating growth and reducing poverty over the past decade.

There were also some delays in implementing programme activities, given the extended transitional

period in the BDRCS leadership. Fortunately, this problem has been resolved and the activities implemented so far are proceeding steadily as planned.

The challenge that lies ahead is to carry out the activities by incorporating the lessons learned within the vulnerable, poverty stricken and populous targeted communities.

Achievements and challenges

Disaster Management

Bangladesh falls within a location exposed to the Bay of Bengal and crossed by extensive rivers which exposes it to a high risk if another tsunami hits. The country is extremely vulnerable to the impact of cyclones, tidal waves, tornados, earthquakes and floods. These dangers have become very apparent since the catastrophic events of 26 December 2004. The BDRCS CPP immediately and effectively put to use its early warning network in the affected districts along the coastal belt. The damage assessment of the entire Bangladesh coastal belt was done within several hours in the aftermath of the disaster using the early warning network system. Taking this into consideration, BDRCS decided to address and hence incorporate 'tsunami' side by side 'cyclones' into CPP, which was already an established programme in the coastal belt region.

The initial needs in the coastal areas were to raise community awareness of the dangers posed by disasters, and the precautionary measures that need to be taken before, during and after such disasters. The awareness raising activities taken under CPP with support from the Federation have proven to be successful in terms of reaching vulnerable people with messages about tsunamis and cyclones and the early warning system.

Mock disaster preparedness (DP) exercises were carried out witnessed by more than 55,000 community people from different walks of life, learning about the tsunami and cyclone disasters and about the 'do's' and 'don't's' if a disaster strikes. However, some of the mock exercises were delayed due to the prolonged monsoon season and the five depressions that formed in the Bay of Bengal in the latter half of 2005.

Awareness raising rallies about tsunami and cyclone disasters were held in all the 265 unions. Thousands of community people witnessed the rallies comprising of a diverse group of people including daily labourers, school children, teachers, local elites and CPP volunteers from communities who are now more aware about the threats posed by disasters.

Orientation sessions were also conducted for union committees in 265 unions on topics including information about the disasters, basics of DM, early warning systems, roles and responsibilities for the RC volunteers, first aid, search and rescue, RC/RC Movement, and protecting the environment. The sessions were attended by about 2,800 volunteer leaders which included both male and female volunteers. The programme's strength is its 34,152 trained and equipped volunteers, including 5,694 women, organized in the 2,847 villages across the coastal districts under the programme. Through these sessions their knowledge on disasters are refreshed and further enhanced and their skills to help the vulnerable communities to combat such disasters developed. These sessions are usually carried out right before a cyclone season.

More than 80,000 students along with teachers participated in the dissemination meetings carried out in schools and targeted communities on the causes and effects of cyclones and tsunamis and the coping strategies that need to be adopted before, during and after disasters. The knowledge gained was effectively spread on a wider scale to the targeted coastal communities. Hence more than 100,000 people indirectly benefited from these meetings. The role of the RC Movement was also covered in the school dissemination meetings and the school students.

Orientation sessions on disaster preparedness and response were conducted before the cyclone season for 600 fishermen. The CPP helped in building awareness among fishermen that "life is more important than fishing" through the dissemination of information about the early warning system, impacts of tsunami and cyclones and, the precautionary methods to take during such emergencies. They were encouraged to listen to warning messages sent through radio, such as moving to shelters and returning to shore when safe. Besides the awareness messages, dissemination was also about the RC Movement. Fishermen are now well aware and alert about the actions to be taken in times of a tsunami or cyclone.

Among the messages contained in posters and leaflets that were developed were general awareness messages about disasters, evacuation plans, and interpretations of early warning signals, and instructions to fishermen. These have been distributed and will continue to be distributed among targeted beneficiaries, through the different awareness building activities.

Procurement of new equipment and accessories for the wireless radio network at the national headquarters had

been undertaken. Procurement and distribution of new rescue equipment and gear among 13,500 volunteers was undertaken. The update of volunteers' gear and their equipment is also a continuous process. These consisted of flash lights, megaphones, first-aid kits, gumboots, bicycles and stretchers. However, there had been delays in the procurement process including delivery of early warning system maintenance equipment and rescue items due to lack of suppliers' commitment.

The range and scope of local coping mechanisms available to communities vulnerable to disasters have increased through CPP activities. Communities have demonstrated interest in participating in disaster preparedness activities implemented by the BDRCS. The units and the communities were able to cope on their own with small scale disasters (i.e. tropical storms) through correct disaster preparedness measures by using their resources (human and material) ensuring minimum casualties and damages.

Challenges

The programme faced many challenges in the past two years. The major constraints included the lengthy and time consuming administrative procedures both at headquarters and field level, non-availability (locally) of heavy warning equipment to replace old ones, and political instability.

Future priorities

Most recently, CPP made a preliminary assessment of the physical condition of the existing cyclone shelters in coastal areas for possible major repair and maintenance work in the forthcoming months and in 2007. Further assessments are underway followed by repair work. This was long overdue and all the shelters will be ready according to need after the completion of repair work.

The number of cyclone shelters remains at 142, although some have eroded. The process of implementing repairs is ongoing, with 20 shelters in the Noakhali region having been identified for repair.

Apart from the major repairs that are planned to be carried out in the cyclone shelters in the coming months continuing to 2007, the above mentioned awareness raising activities of mock exercises, rallies, school dissemination meetings and orientation sessions with fishermen have been undertaken. These are ongoing activities on a yearly basis which will continue next year as there is need for increased awareness. Posters and leaflets will be further distributed through these events.

There is also a plan for the installation of a radio networking system in isolated islands vulnerable to tsunami and cyclone disasters. This is in addition to the existing radio network, which is not covered under the current radio networking system.

Organizational Development and Humanitarian Values

BDRCS's work in developing a systematic and integrated OD approach has created an increased interest in the development of the national society and encouraged learning on how programmes can be better implemented. The new integrated branch development approach aims to initiate a long-term sustainable development process to enable branches to raise their capacity to implement the BDRCS programs.

During the development process the OD programme has worked intensively to integrate the programmes (Health, DM and HV) and the central service functions in the process. The programme organized a daylong seminar on women empowerment issues on *World Women's Day*, on 8 March 2006.

The objective of the seminar was to create a common understanding and depict a clear picture on the condition of women in the country. The seminar recommended improving the situation and empowering community women, to rescue them from violence and being treated with indignity. The programme decided to include the issues on women's rights in the new branch development concept.

One RCY camp was arranged in the coastal district of Noakhali; approximately 250 youths participated of which 45 % were female. The basic idea behind the working of early warning systems for tsunami and cyclones was disseminated to them.

A workshop was conducted for the community empowerment programme staff and volunteers, with 50 participants from the coastal belt of the country.

BDRCS Noakhali branch which is located in a strategically important site in the coastal belt has constructed a rest house for income generation, to meet the daily expenses of the branch. BDRCS provided support by way of furnishing, to upgrade the facilities for better accommodation. Income generated from the rest house will be utilized for the development of the branch and to mitigate daily expenses.

The Red Cross youth (RCY) volunteers are becoming the focal group to conduct different youth programmes in schools, colleges and in other organizations in the country. Regular communication on the RC Movement is established with all 68 BDRCS branches, including the coastal districts of Bangladesh. The youth leaders in the branches are confident and ready to contribute to the national society's development and to respond to disasters at the time of need. The level of commitment towards the movement increases during each camp and training. BDRCS now has a disciplined young force to serve when required.

The BDRCS governance is more committed towards the (governing) responsibility of the organization.

One HV orientation for the coastal belt branches of BDRCS was conducted in Chittagong branch. Thirty youth volunteer leaders from 12 branches of the coastal area participated in the orientation. These leaders will organize orientation on HV at their own branches to integrate HV issues in all activities conducted by the branch.

Challenges and Future priorities

One of the priorities has been to create an understanding within the BDRCS of the planning cycle (assessment/evaluation, planning, implementing, M&E and reporting). The OD programme formed a cross-cutting working group (Health, DM and OD) to develop the concept and tools for the BDRCS planning cycle. During the development process the OD programme worked intensively to integrate the programmes (Health, DM and HV) and the central service functions in the process.

Plan for the upcoming year is to follow the planning cycle and the integration process with other programmes.

Coordination with other partners and stakeholders

BDRCS maintains a close cooperation with a number of UN agencies, including the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) related to refugee issues.; World Food Programme (WFP) for the provision of emergency relief food; and the World Health Organization (WHO) in relation to BDRCS' health initiatives in the disaster management programme.

The Federation also supports the national society in local fundraising efforts, targeting embassies, diplomatic missions and local corporations. With the Federation and

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partner national societies' support, as well as participatory input from the ICRC, BDRCS is gradually moving towards achieving its aim of becoming a principled, skilled and efficient national society linked to vulnerable communities. Good cooperation between the Federation's country delegation and the ICRC regional delegation ensures well coordinated support to BDRCS.

Long-term strategic partnerships with the British, Japanese and Swedish Red Cross societies are aimed at increasing service delivery to vulnerable communities. Capacity building of staff and volunteers continues to yield positive results, particularly in the critical areas of disaster management and organizational development.

The German Red Cross also continues to support BDRCS through its long-term bilateral partnership in the health and care sector.

During the "MALA" depression, BDRCS and the Federation maintained close contact with government counterparts to monitor the situation.

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