

# ***MONGOLIA: BUILDING CAPACITIES TO SERVE THE COMMUNITY***

*17 July 2000*

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*Despite the significant impact that the Snowfalls operation has had on the Mongolian Red Cross Society (MRCS), they have continued to implement their development programmes and carry out additional activities to the original programme objectives for the first half of this year.*

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## ***The context***

For Mongolia, the 1990s have been a period of transition from a command economy and communist rule to democracy and market economy. Despite some growth in the economy, the increased unemployment and poverty, with a growing gap between the rich and poor, is more and more apparent.

Lack of funding has brought a deterioration to the quality of public services - water systems, basic health care, and the school system - and left the state struggling to pay the already very low salaries for teachers, doctors and nurses, let alone retirement benefits. Poverty is visible in the presence of street children, increased alcoholism, suicides and growing crime.

Although effective immunisation has successfully prevented many childhood diseases, according to the latest official figures, one out of four children are undernourished and non communicable diseases such as cardiovascular illnesses and cancer are on the rise.

With its extreme climate, vast steppes and fragile soil, Mongolia is one of the most scarcely populated countries in the world. Areas of the country are regularly affected by natural disasters, including heavy snowfall during its harsh winters, drought, strong winds and dust storms, floods, and steppe and forest fires and earthquakes are common.

The Mongolian Red Cross Society (MRCS) has 33 branches covering each of the country's 21 Aimags (provinces) and metropolitan areas. In 1999, it embarked on its second three year Development Programme (1999 - 2001) prioritising financial sustainability and organisational decentralisation, disease and accident prevention, social welfare and youth programmes, and the upgrading of its disaster preparedness programme.

## ***Latest events***

Last summer's drought, the worst in 30 years, was followed by a harsh winter characterised by severe snowfalls and extremely low temperatures. This and other factors combined to create what is locally called a multiple 'dzud'. Some 450,000 people have been affected by the harsh winter which has also caused the death of some 2.4 million head of livestock, the mainstay of the rural economy and the main source of food for herders and their families who represent some 40% of Mongolia's total population.

The possibility of yet another drought this summer is fast becoming a reality with severe shortages of rainfall being experienced throughout the country. This has serious implications on the regeneration of the pasture land and the weight of animals particularly as the Mongolian summer is a short season. Not only do livestock need to be in peak condition by the end of the autumn to enable them to survive the winter but also to allow herders to prepare their own winter sources of meat.

Steppe fires which started in Russia in February spread into northern Mongolia and affected 24 soums (counties) in 9 Aimags located mostly in forest and forest-steppe areas. A recent outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Dornogobi Aimag has now been brought under control through an intense programme of mass animal vaccination, culling of infected animals and an imposed quarantine for the affected areas.

The second National Human Development Report (HDR) - an independent study commissioned by the Government of Mongolia and the United Nations Development Programme - entitled 'Reorientating the State' was launched on 8 May 2000 as a follow up to the first HDR for Mongolia which was issued in September 1997.

The preliminary results of Mongolia's general election that was held on 2 July, show that the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP) has gained the vast majority of seats in Parliament over the coalition of democratic parties who have been in office for the past 4 years.

Two important laws for the MRCS have been passed in the first half of this year. The legal status of the MRCS reflecting the Statutes and Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement was officially recognised and a law adopted to this effect on 28 April. This grants the MRCS the sole right to use the Red Cross name and emblem to provide impartial humanitarian assistance within Mongolia. Another law recognised the MRCS as an organisation authorised to collect blood donations.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent action***

### **Disaster Response •**

As the devastating effects of the harsh winter or the multiple 'dzud' became apparent at the beginning of this year, the International Federation, in close co-operation with the MRCS, launched an Appeal (Mongolia Snowfalls) on 22 February 2000 to provide support to 30,000 beneficiaries over a 3 month period.

Further assessments of the situation indicated that the conditions were likely to deteriorate with far reaching consequences for the affected population. The International Federation revised its Appeal on 29 March to support 35,000 beneficiaries over a 12 month period with wheatflour, rice or millet as well as with 8,000 winter boots.

So far, the Federation and the MRCS have carried out 2 distributions of rice and wheatflour representing a 3 months supplementary food ration to 6,300 households (or 35,000 beneficiaries) and distributed 2,827 working boots. The third distribution of a further 3 month supplementary food ration of wheatflour for the same 6,300 households is being implemented at the moment which will bring the

first phase of the operation to a close. Phase II of the operation will include a further 2 distributions in September 2000 and January 2001 of food supplies and winter boots.

A joint MRCS\Federation team will carry out a mid term evaluation of the programme in August with the possibility of further expanding the scope of the operation to include additional beneficiaries. The Snowfalls Operation has been supported by the Regional Delegation in Kazakhstan, Beijing and Bangkok\Kuala Lumpur. The Appeal has been well supported by sister National Societies.

In addition to the joint MRCS\Federation Appeal, the MRCS have also distributed additional relief supplies such as warm clothes and basic household items (candles and matches) to herders affected by the 'dzud'.

### **Disaster Preparedness •**

Following the signing of a co-operation agreement between the MRCS and the Mongolian National Radio, a ten to fifteen minute programme on disaster preparedness has been broadcast on a monthly basis since January covering the following topics: a) the prevention of forest and steppe fires; b) basic health care during the winter months; c) dissemination on possible outbreaks of infectious diseases, particularly in relation with the foot and mouth epidemic in Dornogboi Aimag.

Twenty five Red Cross volunteers in Gobi Sumber Aimag received first aid and disaster preparedness training in May and a similar course was conducted for 15 employees from one of the major cashmere factories in Ulaan Baatar. A co-operation agreement has been signed between the MRCS and the factory administration for future training.

Several activities that were scheduled to take place in the first six months of this year were postponed due to the lack of financial resources and the involvement of the MRCS staff in the activities related to the consequences of heavy snowfalls.

### **Health •**

#### *Health and First Aid Programme*

A working group has been set up to review the MRCS existing health related policies and strategies in accordance with the Federation revised health policies and Strategy 2010. The Federation Regional Health Delegate and a Health Consultant from the Hong Kong Red Cross visited the MRCS in March and provided technical advice on the first draft of policy papers produced by the working group.

The following activities were carried out in the first six months of this year:

- Seven types of health related leaflets have been prepared;
- 45 driving instructors from Ulaan Baatar city and 6 aimags received first aid training in February;
- A 5 minute radio programme on HIV/AIDS/STD prevention was broadcast in February and March;
- A training room with a capacity to hold 30-40 persons per course at the MRCS headquarters has been renovated and equipped for health and first aid training;
- A refresher training course for 30 volunteer instructors on Red Cross health and first aid services was conducted in Selenge Aimag in May;

#### *Blood Donations*

In January 2000, the MRCS was legally authorised to collect blood donations. The President of Mongolia has appealed to the public to support the Red Cross blood donation campaign as state funds will be made available for blood donor related activities.

In co-operation with a local television company, a series of successful programmes on blood donation have been broadcast by the MRCS. To mark the World Health Day on 7 April, a campaign entitled "Safe blood starts with me" was launched.

#### *Additional First Aid Activities*

A series of First Aid training courses were carried out in 8 Aimags with 690 participants. In co-operation with the National Traffic Police Department and local NGOs, the MRCS organised a competition promoting road safety and first aid training which was attended by children from 59 schools in 6 districts of Ulaan Baatar.

#### *Social Welfare Programme*

Humanitarian centres have now been set up in 5 districts of Ulaan Baatar providing social welfare services and income generating activities. The following activities have been carried out in the five newly established humanitarian centres in the first half of this year :

- over 2,000 people were provided with hot meals;
- 600 people benefited from public showers for hygiene;
- 700 visited the hairdresser;
- 3,500 were involved in basic training on the Red Cross movement and the MRCS activities;
- 1,700 people received health and first aid training;
- moral and material assistance was provided to over 700 people.

#### **Humanitarian Values •**

##### *Information and Dissemination Programme*

Ten MRCS branches were provided with TV sets and video players to support their dissemination activities. Some 2,000 copies of the poster "Dare to Dream" related to the International Red Cross Day were distributed through the extensive MRCS branch network.

To mark International Red Cross day and the founding of the MRCS, a photo competition entitled "The Red Cross through a camera lens" was organised. The winning photos will be used for promotion of the Red Cross activities within Mongolia.

One of the prominent achievements was a co-operation agreement signed between the General Staff of the Mongolian Armed Forces and the MRCS in April to continue co-operation on the ICRC-supported issues such as the dissemination of the International Humanitarian Law.

##### *Red Cross Youth Programme*

In accordance with the Mongolian government decision to mark the year 2000 as a "Year for the Development of Children", the MRCS organised a special one-day event in January for 300 children, their parents and teachers to disseminate information on the Red Cross movement, to provide basic first aid training and to familiarise the children with the concept of humanity.

One of the main aims of the youth programme has been to initiate activities for pre-school children, as they will be the next generation of Junior Red Cross members. With this in mind, a training seminar for kindergarten volunteer instructors was held in Ulaan Baatar in January and was attended by 32 teachers from 11 kindergartens.

In April, a training course focusing on the Red Cross movement and MRCS activities was held in Uverkhangai Aimag for thirty Youth Red Cross volunteer instructors and leaders with the aim to improve the capacity and activities of the Aimag Youth Red Cross .

The first edition of the Youth Red Cross newspaper, covering Youth Red Cross activities was published and 6,500 copies have been distributed to branches. A project to establish the Youth Red Cross Centre at the MRCS headquarters has been prepared.

The implementation of a national Youth Red Cross programme called "Pre-school children Red Cross", aimed at involving the children under 8 in Red Cross activities is underway.

A special one-day event held on the International Red Cross Day was organised in the Children's National Recreation Centre and was attended by more than 5,000 children.

The second National Youth Red Cross summer camp will take place from mid-July.

### **Capacity Building •**

#### ***National Society Support Programme***

A law recognising the legal status of the MRCS was approved by the Mongolian Parliament on 28 April. A Red Cross dissemination campaign was carried out by the Railway Red Cross Committee on the eve of the International Red Cross Day. A specially commissioned train travelled 1,810 km from the Russian\Mongolian border to the Chinese\Mongolian border with a special emphasis on the dissemination and promotion of the two new Red Cross laws adopted this year.

A nation-wide campaign to promote these laws has been launched through local Red Cross Committees and amongst Red Cross members and volunteers. A booklet entitled "Reforms of the MRCS in the transition period" has been published.

To continue the process of decentralisation of the Ulaan Baatar Red Cross Committee and to provide support to an increasing number of vulnerable people living in the city, three new Red Cross Committees were established in Songinokhairkhan, Bayangol and Bayanzurkh districts of Ulaan Baatar in February 2000. The MRCS headquarters continue to provide financial and technical support to the two new Red Cross Committees which were established in Sukhaatar and Khanguul districts of Ulaan Baatar in 1999. The structure of these committees has been set up according to the Society's Statutes.

The Red Cross Committee of Ulaan Baatar has initiated income generation activities focusing on a bakery project involving women from vulnerable groups. The bakery produces 5,200 pieces of bread a month, 50% of which are used in the soup-kitchen for vulnerable people and 50% are sold in the open market. During the second quarter of this year, five newly established humanitarian centres in Ulaan Baatar made a profit of over USD 1,000 (1 million Tugrigs) from income generating activities through their bakery and sewing workshops.

Renovation work of the Red Cross headquarters in Tuv Aimag has been completed and will enable the branch to expand its current activities to meet the needs of the local community, Red Cross members and volunteers.

A livestock breeding project to support the newly established Tosontsengel Red Cross Committee in Zavkhan Aimag is now underway. An independent Red Cross Committee to work within the Mongolian Border Guard Board has been established.

## ***Outstanding needs***

The joint MRCS/Federation Snowfalls Operation is the largest relief operation that the MRCS have been involved in and it has received generous support from sister Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies and the international community.

The programme activities planned for the first half of 2000 have been carried out according to the schedule with the funds carried forward from 1999. As only 36.4% of the funds sought by the Appeal 2000 are covered, funds are now needed to enable the MRCS to implement its established development programmes.

## ***External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media***

A special forty-minute program highlighting the MRCS/Federation assistance in response to the “dzud” disaster was broadcast on the national TV on the occasion of the International Red Cross Day. The MRCS disaster headquarters staff continue to work closely with the government, UN agencies and other international organisations and NGOs on various issues regarding relief activities to promote a complementary approach and to avoid duplication of efforts.

Regarding the Snowfalls operation, the MRCS has closely cooperated with the relevant government authorities, UN Agencies, NGOs and the international donor community and provided practical assistance and support to the interested media and press agencies.

## ***Contributions***

See Annex 1 for details.

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