

AFGHANISTAN

CHF 7,576,000

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National Context

More than 20 years of conflict have ruined Afghanistan's economy and reduced the living conditions of most of its 20 million population to a bare subsistence level. Afghanistan has the lowest child survival rate and the second highest maternal mortality rate in the world. Only 69.9 % of its children survive until the age of five and the average life span is 44 years.

With 2.6 million refugees abroad and hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons, Afghans continue to constitute the biggest refugee group in the world for the 19th consecutive year – an exodus that has drained most of the intellectual and financial capital from the country. Among the remaining population, literacy is estimated at around 30% for men and 13% for women.

There are few prospects of a resolution of the political and military situation. The Taliban movement which currently controls an estimated 90% of the territory continues to be challenged by the Northern Alliance. The Kabul government is not recognised internationally.

As long as the conflict continues it is unlikely the socio-economic situation will improve, leaving most Afghans facing years of extreme vulnerability, without the safety net offered by most societies. The government administration and infrastructure, and the health care and social welfare system have almost completely collapsed. Except in a few cities or urban areas, telephones, utilities, roads and other municipal services are almost non-existent. The availability of safe water is diminishing. Traditional forms of social support survive in some villages, through the mosque and the Shura (the village elders), based on Islamic tradition and depending on available resources.

Besides the effects of conflict, Afghanistan is vulnerable to natural disasters. The seismic fault that bisects the country is the site of frequent large earthquakes, while snowmelt from the mountains and Spring rains combine to cause landslides, flash floods and local flooding. Harsh winters and the occasional drought complete the picture of vulnerability.

UN bodies and NGOs have faced difficulties in maintaining a continuity of services in the country. Their presence is now reduced and programmes are curtailed as major institutional donors are reluctant to release funds in the absence of any prospect of an end to hostilities. Only the Movement – the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS), the ICRC and the Federation – has been able to sustain continuous activities.

Country Assistance Strategy

The Afghan Red Crescent Society, arguably the only indigenous, nation-wide humanitarian organisation in the country, is struggling to maintain its ability to work with all ethnic groups and to reach women through its

services. Operational in 30 of Afghanistan's 32 provinces, and with an extensive network of branches, it continues to reach more than three million beneficiaries a year, with Federation and ICRC support.

Like all institutions in Afghanistan, the ARCS has been drastically affected by the war. From being one of the strongest and richest National Society in South Asia, it has become wholly dependent on outside resources for its survival. Political interference in the running of the institution, causing high turnover of staff, has added to war-caused institutional weakness and the erosion of its volunteer base.

In the present chronic conflict situation the ICRC is the lead agency, while the Federation takes the lead role in strengthening the ARCS structures and delivering humanitarian services through them.

Until peace returns, the Federation's objectives will be:

- to improve the overall health of people lacking access to health care, with a special emphasis on services for women and children, and reaching those living in remote villages and poor urban areas
- to strengthen ARCS's disaster response systems and increase individual and community abilities to prepare for and cope with disaster situations.
- to strengthen ARCS's capacity to effectively manage programmes, to develop local resources with special focus on the grassroots level, and to re-establish its governance.
- to strengthen understanding of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement in Afghanistan.

The Federation strategy of support to the ARCS acknowledges the unique position of the Society in the country and the public recognition it enjoys. It recognises that, like all National Societies, ARCS's main strength lies in its volunteer base. It responds to the main priority identified by the ARCS for its services: improving health care. The Federation will seek to revive the volunteer base of ARCS by rebuilding its human and material capacity, and protect the reputation of the organisation and the role model status of its officials by addressing the problems arising from the frequent changes in ARCS leadership and staff, which include the cumulative loss of institutional knowledge and respect for the Movement's principles.

The Federation will tackle the need to maintain donor commitment over a time span of several years in several ways: by carrying out representation functions to UN bodies and donor governments; by building on and strengthening PNS involvement in the development of programmes; and by incorporating as an objective in all five projects presented here for financing the necessity of exploring, identifying and expanding local resource development strategies, including cost recovery schemes, and income generating activities.

Close co-ordination with the ICRC and support from PNSs will be critical to the implementation of this strategy. Co-ordination mechanisms are to be reinforced through the Federation's delegation in Afghanistan, which is based in Kabul and has four sub-delegations.

Programme Objectives

Disaster Response

The Federation will assist the ARCS in improving its disaster preparedness and response systems, in order to reduce the impact of disasters on communities. With the ARCS, it will assess needs and respond only to hazards that communities are unable to cope with.

Disaster Preparedness

The overall objective is to reduce the impact of disasters by giving communities the skills and resources to prepare for and cope with disasters.

Building on the existing CBFA network, training in disaster preparedness and response will be provided to 750 staff and volunteers. Preventive measures in disaster-prone areas and operational guidelines for effective

response will be promoted. Because of the logistical complexities in Afghanistan, non-food items for an estimated 15,000 families or 105,000 individuals will be pre-positioned in regional warehouses in the 5 regions of Afghanistan, namely Kabul, Jalalabad, Kandahar, Herat, and Mazar-i-Sharif, if security permits. Co-ordination mechanisms with the ICRC, UN agencies, NGOs and the Afghan authorities will be reinforced.

Health

The ARCS takes a three-pronged approach to its main priority, improved health care. This consists of a Primary Health Care Programme, a Community Based First Aid (CBFA) Programme and a Mother and Child Health (MCH) Care Programme, all functionally intertwined. Federation support will be as follows:

Mother and Child Health

The overall purpose is to improve the health situation of children and mothers in Afghanistan, with a special emphasis on reduction of morbidity and mortality, by gradually introducing the Mother and Child Health component, which already exists in five clinics, into a further four clinics in 2000 and to three more in 2001. The long term plan is to cover the rest of the rural areas in the following four years. After another four years of maintained support and consolidation they would be self-sustainable and completely supported by ARCS. Co-operation with two community-based midwives per clinic will be developed and 150 traditional birth attendants will be trained annually and equipped with home delivery kits.

Primary Health Care Programme

In the absence of any State service, the ARCS provides access to very basic health care services through its network of 47 clinics, spread over the five regions of Afghanistan. More than 2 million patient contacts are anticipated in 2000. The Federation will continue to fund medicines and supplies, pay incentives to clinic staff, and help increase laboratory facilities to 13 by the end of 2001. The Health Information System (HIS) will continue to monitor clinics outputs, and epidemiological trends, essential in a country where the administration does not provide this capacity. Redundant or duplicated clinics will be closed, allowing the opening of at least two new clinics.

CBFA and Youth Programme

CBFA This programme aims to recruit, train and equip 2,500 volunteers by the end of 2001. They will help not only to provide primary health services to an estimated 750,000 beneficiaries, but also to provide community education in vulnerability reduction (safe water, mine awareness, food preparation, etc.). Systems will be strengthened to maintain and motivate the volunteers and to help them to plan community services in their villages or town neighbourhoods. Integration into ARCS branch structures and clinic network will be facilitated and ways of reaching women with the CBFA training will be explored.

Youth With the constant staff turnover in ARCS, the youth volunteers are the repository of the institutional memory of the National Society. Female volunteers have been allowed to some extent to participate in some activities, such as education of children in the Marastoons and clinic assistance. The project will recruit, train and equip 160 teacher volunteers from 80 schools in order to recruit 1,600 school children to join ARCS Youth each year and train them in first aid and health education.

Capacity Building

Humanitarian Values/ institutional and resource development

The objective is to reassert the pre-eminence of the Principles and humanitarian values of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and strengthen ARCS's capacity to manage, deliver and account for humanitarian services.

A series of formal and informal workshops will be conducted within a two-year programme, aimed at ARCS staff in the headquarters, programme departments and branches as well as the local authorities. They will feature the fundamentals of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, the benefits of an expanded, trained volunteer work force

to provide community services, and the standards of governance and management in the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

A National Society Self-Assessment workshop will help the ARCS to identify its strengths and weaknesses. Resource development strategies applicable to the context of Afghanistan will be explored and expanded, and membership systems re-established and reinforced. In conjunction with these, ARCS's organisational set-up and financial and administrative management systems will be reviewed and rationalised, in order to produce more efficiency, transparency and accountability. Possibilities will be explored to reinforce a gender perspective in terms of membership and programme beneficiaries.