

SOUTH ASIA: REGIONAL PROGRAMMES

*2 December
1999*

appeal no. 01.28/99

situation report no. 01

period covered: 1 January - 30 June 1999

The large number of disasters and relief operations in the region has raised National Society profiles and increased media coverage. The regional development of disaster preparedness, health and institutional development continues, with a growing emphasis on the sharing of regional resources .

The context

The South Asia region is one of the poorest in the world, and most of the 1.3 billion population, representing 24% of the world's population, do not share Asia's considerable human, economic and organisational resources. In total, the region has over 40% of the developing world's poor and 49% of the malnourished people; in many parts of South Asia poverty is a fact of life, and human survival is a constant struggle.

An estimated 3.2 million infants die within their first twelve months. Two thirds of the surviving South Asian children are malnourished, and only half of these children complete primary education. Maternal mortality is also among the highest in the world, with over 180,000 women dying every year from complications of pregnancy -- representing over half the maternal deaths in the world.

The latest statistics for the region show GDP rates that are among the lowest in the world. Total GDP growth is high in all countries except Nepal, but population growth is still a major problem, particularly in Pakistan. Inflation is a serious problem in many parts of South Asia, a factor that particularly affects the poorer parts of society, often resulting in a very limited diet.

The general condition of the health sector is extremely poor and the role of the Red Cross / Crescent in this area is therefore vital. Urbanisation, the re-emergence of diseases like tuberculosis and malaria, and the emergence of new infections like Hepatitis and HIV/AIDS all add to the seriousness of the problem.

Another serious area of concern within the region is safe blood. A large portion of the blood supplied is provided through unofficial sources and, therefore, is often not adequately checked

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Another serious area of concern within the region is safe blood. A large portion of the blood supplied is provided through unofficial sources and, therefore, is often not adequately checked

for HIV / AIDS, hepatitis and other transmittable diseases. The Red Cross and Red Crescent societies in the region play an important role in providing and advocating safe blood services.

In addition there are a number of major conflicts and general areas of unrest in the region. The conflict situations in Afghanistan and Sri Lanka continue to drain the economy in those two countries, and put more pressure on the medical and relief services provided through the National Red Cross / Crescent Societies. In both countries the Federation is liaising with the ICRC.

Several conflict and security situations are being closely monitored, including the tense situation in some parts of north eastern India, the Chittagong hill areas in Bangladesh and the disputed territories between India and Pakistan. The overall situation in Nepal is also of concern, along with the general worsening of security in a number of areas of South Asia, particularly in and around the major cities.

In addition South Asia is a region where there are frequent disasters including floods, cyclones, earthquakes and accidents - this area has one of the highest level of road traffic accidents in the world.

Latest events

Recently, the Federation and the Red Cross / Red Crescent National Societies have been involved in a large number of disaster relief activities including two earthquakes in Afghanistan, a serious earthquake in Northern India, floods across the whole of the north east of the region, including Bangladesh, Northern India and Nepal, floods in Sri Lanka, major cyclones in Pakistan and Western India, and other disasters like shanty town fires and a major train crash in north east India. The implications of these disasters are four fold. Firstly very large scale relief and rehabilitation programmes have been set up, secondly there has been a greater concentration on strengthening the disaster preparedness capacity of the national societies, thirdly there has been an even greater call on the medical services of the Red Cross / Red Crescent, and finally these events have created an even more severe shortage of safe blood.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

The main aim of the Federation in South Asia, as with the rest of the world, is to strengthen the capacity of the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. In addition to health, blood and disaster preparedness activities, the main thrust in South Asia is on institutional development including financial management, reporting, information systems and funding / resource mobilisation.

In South Asia a great deal of work has been put into developing a longer term strategy for both the regional delegation and each country. A set of country and regional priorities have been produced and agreed with all the national societies within the region.

The Regional Delegation will therefore reflect these priorities; in addition to a head of the regional Delegation there will be one senior delegate to cover each the following areas: Health; Institutional development; Finance and financial development; Information, PR and fundraising; Disaster Preparedness, with an additional remit to cover India.

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Institutional and Resource Development ●

A great deal of time has been spent negotiating the status agreement of the Regional Delegation in both Pakistan and India. In both cases the position is very positive and it is hoped that both these situations will be resolved soon.

Changes of senior staff within National Societies continues to cause some difficulties, although middle management tends to be very stable.

Reporting is still a problem with some National Societies, and is therefore a continuing activity for the Federation, both in actual specific assistance and longer term development of expertise.

The third meeting of the National Societies' Secretary Generals in South Asia, an extended 2 day meeting held in Islamabad, took place early in the second quarter. One of the main topics on the agenda was the use of regional resources throughout the region. This generated an increased determination to share resources between National Societies, and also to arrange for National Society staff to work in the Federation's regional office on a staff on loan basis.

A number of new initiatives have been developed:

An Indian Red Cross finance officer on loan to the Regional Delegation will continue full-time for the next 6 months. This arrangement streamlines the financial relationship between the Federation and the National Society, and also provides valuable experience to the officer.

The secondment of the finance manager from the Nepal Red Cross continued. As with the Indian RC staff on loan the finance manager works on all delegation issues, but also specifically concentrates on operations related to his own National Society.

A Japanese RC trainee delegate completed a 3 month mission with the Federation Regional Delegation. As a result of the experience he is being employed as a Federation delegate in the Kosovo. Because the delegate was an IT specialist, the secondment has been very valuable to the Indian Red Cross IT development.

The Pakistan RC has recruited a senior financial officer, who is being trained by the Federation Regional Finance Delegate. Part of this training included an assignment to Nepal, to gain experience from the more technically developed financial systems of the Nepal Red Cross.

The Federation's Regional Recruitment process was presented during the Secretary Generals Meeting in Islamabad. The idea was warmly received, and the process will now commence with a regional recruitment workshop to be held in Nepal later this year. The intention is to train staff from each National Society in the Region in order to provide an increasing number of delegates and staff on loan from within South Asia.

Resource Development

This is a priority area within the whole region. A workshop has been scheduled in Sri Lanka for the second half of 1999. It may be linked to the National Society's First Aid Programme which SLRCS would like to develop on a more commercial basis.

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Finance Development ●

Technical support aimed at strengthening the financial control capability and financial capacity of each National Society is a core part of the Regional Delegations work. In the second quarter initiatives have been developed with the following National Societies:

Sri Lanka	Financial development
Pakistan	Financial and Information/ PR development
India	Financial development
Bangladesh	Fund raising / core funding development
Nepal	Financial and reporting development
Afghanistan	Strategic planning

During the second quarter, the regional finance delegate visited Pakistan and Nepal. In Pakistan, the main purpose of the visit was to work with the newly appointed Principal Accounts Officer. Since April, he has visited all the branches and performed a detailed finance assessment. In Nepal, the main purposes of the delegate's visit were to provide a financial update on the status of the Nepal 1999 budgets, and to review the floods operation from a financial perspective.

Health ●

A number of new initiatives have been undertaken providing specific technical assistance to the National Societies within the region:

The Regional Health Delegate has been working extensively in **Bangladesh**, and has now developed a Primary Health Care Project in Dhaka Division in collaboration with the American Red Cross. In May and June a visit was made to Bangladesh to assist the Bangladesh Red Crescent in developing a Primary Health Care (PHC) project for Chittagong Division in collaboration with the German Red Cross and the European Union.

An **Indian Red Cross** Health assessment has been started with the help of the Indian Institute of Health Management Research. It is being conducted jointly by the Indian Red Cross, the Federation and the Canadian Red cross. This exercise is aimed at identifying the future role of the Indian Red Cross within the health sector.

The Regional health delegate visited Islamabad in April in order to assist the **Pakistan Red Crescent** in organising a reproductive health training workshop for project staff including medical officers, health visitors and family planning staff, as part of the Population Welfare Programme.

The next National Society Country Health Assessment will cover **Sri Lanka**, and was to commence in August.

Disaster Preparedness ●

Community based DP has developed rapidly through an ongoing series of programmes, including workshops in India, Sri Lanka and a provincial based disaster preparedness programme in Pakistan.

India

A number of lessons have been learned as a direct result of this programme. It is now agreed that a Disaster Preparedness officer will be recruited by the Indian Red Cross. The Federation programme will pay the salary of this new staff member, and in addition pay for training. This person will immediately become involved in the programme, and will act as a coordinator, taking on the work done by the Federation Delegation.

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Pakistan

To complete this years training two more workshops have been planned, one in Quetta in September, and one in Sindh in November. The Quetta workshop will also act as an evaluation for the ongoing PRCS / Federation Cyclone operation in Sindh

Sri Lanka

Two workshops were held in Sri Lanka in May. Eight branches have now made a firm commitment to take the community based approach to village level. These programmes will now be run by the SLRCS branches with no further involvement from the Federation. Under Federation guidance, the workshops used two facilitators, one from the Sri Lanka Red Cross, the other from the Pakistan Red Crescent. This provides an excellent method of passing on experience to the National Societies in the region, and this cross fertilisation is greatly valued by all participants.

Information and Communications ●

The profile of the Federation and the Regional Delegation has never been higher, largely due to the number of relief operations that the Federation and the National societies have carried out over the past year. Government representatives and the media now contact the Red Cross / Red Crescent on a regular basis.

A regional review, a new publication aimed at highlighting one particular area of general concern in South Asia in each issue, has been launched. The first issue concentrated on the safe blood programme.

As part of the presentation given by the regional head of delegation to the Pakistan Prime Minister on 8 May, a series of posters were produced summarising the work of the Pakistan Red Crescent in association with the Federation.

A series of articles have been included in national newspapers, particularly in India, including two major articles in the Times of India. The Regional Head of Delegation and representatives of the Indian Red Cross have acted as Red Cross spokespersons on both BBC World Service and Reuters TV broadcasts. There is also now a link with BBC radio from London: the Regional Head of Delegation has been interviewed several times, most recently concerning the Pakistan cyclone operation.

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Outstanding needs

The Federation country delegations in both Pakistan and Sri Lanka are not sufficiently funded. In the case of Sri Lanka this is extremely serious, and at present the Regional Delegation is providing a great deal of technical and managerial input to the Sri Lanka delegation. Although needs in the health sector in this region are massive, there is still under- funding for the regional health programmes within South Asia.

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External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

A meeting was held to develop the interest of a number of potential donor organisations in the Red Cross health sector work in India. This meeting was chaired by the Regional Health Delegate. Representatives of the following agencies were in attendance: DFID, British Government; European Union; USAID; Danish Embassy; Swiss Embassy; German Embassy; Australian High Commission.

The intention is now to follow up this meeting by developing specific project and programme proposals which fit in with the Federation / Indian Red Cross plans, and might be funded by these agencies, all of whom are extremely interested in Red Cross health sector work in India.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

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