

INDIA : FLOODS

31 August 2000

appeal no. 19/2000

situation report no. 03

period covered: 23 August-30 August

The ongoing flooding has caused extensive loss of agricultural land and standing crops. The impact of the floods varies widely from region to region. The majority of the flood victims have settled in temporary huts on top of embankments while others have constructed makeshift shelters close to their land which remains under water. As people start returning to the water-logged areas, widespread health problems can be expected during a prolonged recovery process. Food shortages are expected due to extensive losses of crops and stocks. The floods have increased the vulnerability of India's most deprived population as recurrent floods over the past decade have decreased their capacity to cope with the present disaster.

The context

More than ten million people have been affected by the floods in India as the south-western monsoon arrived early to the north and north-eastern states. Most recently, it started seriously affecting the southern part of the country as torrential rains have swept through the states of Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra.

Reports of flooding in the state of Assam started coming in by late July. The situation worsened dramatically at the beginning of August when flash floods resulting from heavy rains in the Himalayas swept south, causing breaches in the embankments along the Brahmaputra and Ganges rivers as well as their tributaries, inundating hundreds of districts in Assam, Bihar, West Bengal, Arunachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh.

The combined death toll due to floods, torrential rains and landslides in India and Bhutan, is now reported to be close to 500 people. The worst flooding has been reported in India's north-eastern state of Assam, where local authorities say over 3.5 million people were forced to flee their homes.

Excessive rainfall in the states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh caused more flooding last week. There are fears that further flooding may be expected in the coming weeks since the monsoon is not expected to abate until mid-September.

The unprecedented rainfall on 22-24 August, in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh, causing flash floods in the capital Hyderabad and rural districts located along the state's main river systems, resulted in more than 140 deaths and tens of thousands of homeless people. For detailed information on floods in Andhra Pradesh, refer to the Federation Information Bulletin no.1 issued on 29 August 2000.

As the waters started receding, most people have now attempted to return to their homes. However, hundreds of villages in the flood affected regions are still submerged or marooned, and tens of thousands of people who have lost their homes and land due to erosion are now living in makeshift shelters on embankments. A joint Indian Red Cross/Federation team has travelled in the affected regions and assessed that the flood victims are in acute need of relief, especially clean water and basic health care. The need for food may arise at a later stage due to an extensive crop loss.

Latest events

The assessment team, travelling in Assam, Bihar and West Bengal, encountered a common phenomenon in all the three states. The same population have been struck by recurrent floods approximately every two years for the last decade and tens of thousands of families have repeatedly lost their land and crops. Floods are a familiar misfortune for the people living along the Brahmaputra and the Ganges river systems. Each year they try to cope by shifting their homes to higher ground and by recropping to make up for lost harvests. However, with the monsoon arriving extremely early this year, the magnitude of the flooding proved to be too much for large communities living in flood-prone areas. The impact of the flood is mainly threefold:

1. Flash floods, caused by excessive rainfall in Nepal and Bhutan, sweep through whole villages, destroying houses and farmland. In many cases, the fields will remain inundated for months, so people resort to makeshift houses on higher ground close to their homes until the water recedes.
2. Whole villages are marooned by flood water as the main rivers overflow their banks. The villagers may lose their crops, their cattle and their livelihood during the flooding although their houses remain intact. Fields remain waterlogged for months and people may not be able to sustain themselves by cultivating the land until the following year.
3. Most of the population living along the river systems of the India's two mightiest rivers are victims of land erosion. Slowly, as the monsoon season proceeds, the water level rises and the rivers eat away the land. Although this gradual process allows people to shift their homes to higher grounds and to save their possessions and even cattle, their livelihood is seriously affected. In reality, these people lead the life of nomads. They are continuously challenged by the rivers, they move to an embankment and settle there for a while until it is time to shift their homes again. As the beds of the Brahmaputra and the Ganges rivers rise due to silting and the rivers grow wider, people are left with fewer and fewer resources to cope with the problem while the authorities have not enough land to spare to compensate them for their losses.

Local authorities list health risks, stemming mostly from drinking contaminated water, as the main concern. Even prior to the flooding, 30% of all cases registered in local hospitals in Assam suffered from waterborne diseases. They also point out malaria and snake bites.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Assam •

The Federation met with the DFID team in Assam on 28 August, where they visited flood-affected districts together with senior officials from the Assam Branch of the Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS). Five delegates from the American Red Cross have been working for the past 10 days with the IRCS on providing relief in Assam. Two delegates have remained in the state for a week to prepare for distribution of relief and they were joined by two further delegates on 30 August. The American Red Cross team anticipates that the first consignment of relief supplies under their programme will reach Assam by 1 September, for immediate distribution by the state Red Cross branch. The American Red Cross has targeted 5,000 families as beneficiaries of prepared family packets consisting of blankets, tarpaulin, kitchen sets, clothing, plastic buckets and cooking oil. Chlorine tablets will also be distributed for water purification. The Assam State Branch mobilized over 200 volunteers at the beginning of the disaster to carry out relief efforts in 14 districts, distributing mosquito nets, kitchen utensils, tarpaulins, blankets and clothing to the flood victims.

Bihar •

According to the data from the Bihar State Branch, 21 districts in the state have been struck by the floods this year. Approximately 2,050 villages have been flooded, affecting more than 3.5 million people. Local authorities have provided relief in 15 districts, assisting more than 15,000 flood victims. The local Red Cross has distributed relief items including clothing, tents, quilts, tarpaulin, water purification tablets and medicine and seems to have a good capacity for relief operations. The branch operates a polyclinic at its headquarters in Patna, the state capital, and is active in first aid training, relief operations, disaster management as well as in Red Cross youth. The branch used the emergency funds transmitted through the Indian Red Cross Society to procure additional tarpaulins for distribution this week.

However, the situation in the state itself is complicated. This year, the floods were less serious than in 1998 and the state is simultaneously suffering from a drought. The drought is caused by the lack of rainfall in the state itself while the floods (mostly flash flooding) are caused by excessive rainfall in the neighbouring Nepal as numerous rivers flow southward into Bihar. The Red Cross branch claims that the situation is worsening every year in the flood prone districts, partly due to the impact of the expanding population settling along the riverbanks. The joint assessment team reached Bihar on 23 August and was joined by two DFID representatives as well as one delegate from the British Red Cross, two days later. Five team members visited the districts of Begusarai and Khagaria while the team leader together with the DFID representatives travelled to Muzaffarpur and Sitamarhi districts close to the Nepalese border. The emphasis in terms of needs was on tarpaulins, household goods, medicines and water purification, rather than food.

West Bengal •

Two team members travelled to West Bengal on 28 August and visited the staff and officials of the West Bengal State Branch in Calcutta. Despite the fact that the branch is clearly under-resourced (it has only one vehicle), it distributed relief to several thousand families in the 1998 floods. Since logistical considerations preclude a visit to the most severely affected areas in the Siliguri Corridor in the extreme north of the state, only one member of the team went to assess the situation in two flood affected districts in West Bengal - Maldah and Murshidabad, on the Ganges and is due back in Delhi on 1 September.

Other Flood-Affected States •

Through the IRCS headquarters in Delhi, the assessment team is continuously collecting the flood data on Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Arunachal Pradesh. Two team members visited Andhra Pradesh to collect data on the flash floods in which more than 140 people are reported to have been killed.

Outstanding needs

Thousands of rural water points have been submerged by floodwaters, forcing people to consume contaminated drinking water. Prevailing sanitary conditions pose a serious threat to health since the floodwaters have submerged toilet facilities. Access to clean water is limited even during the dry season. Many areas have become isolated by the floodwaters. Many villages are completely cut off from the primary health care facilities. The local authorities and the Red Cross branches visited by the assessment team have pointed out an urgent need for clean drinking water and medical aid, rather than food relief at this stage.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The joint Indian Red Cross/Federation assessment team has met and travelled with local Red Cross workers and local authorities in Assam, Bihar and West Bengal. The team received extensive briefings from local Red Cross branches and officials at the district level. The team also met with the governors of Assam and Bihar in order to inform local authorities of the relief operation planned by the Indian Red Cross/Federation. The team has coordinated with American Red Cross delegates as well as with representatives from the relevant United Nations agencies represented in the region.

The work of the assessment team has been covered by all major local media in Assam, Bihar and West Bengal. The team leader will have interviews on the results of the floods assessment to international media based in Delhi. Five delegates for the floods operation have been identified and will join the assessment team in Delhi next week.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

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This and other reports on Federation operations are available on the Federation's website: <http://www.ifrc.org>

| India Floods | | | | | | ANNEX 1 | |
|----------------------------------------------------------|----------|-------------------------|------|------------------|----------|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| APPEAL No. 19/2000 | | PLEDGES RECEIVED | | | 01/09/00 | | |
| DONOR | CATEGORY | QUANTITY | UNIT | VALUE CHF | DATE | COMMENT | |
| CASH | | | | | | TOTAL COVERAGE | |
| REQUESTED IN APPEAL CHF -----> | | | | 6,000,000 | | 27.7% | |
| BRITISH - RC | | 50,000 | GBP | 126,000 | 11.08.00 | PURCHASE, TRANSPORT & DISTRIBUTION OF RICE | |
| BRITISH GOVT/RC - DFID | | 245,098 | GBP | 617,646 | 11.08.00 | | |
| CANADIAN - GOVT/RC | | 99,000 | CAD | 111,118 | 11.08.00 | | |
| DANISH - RC | | 250,000 | DKK | 52,650 | 21.08.00 | | |
| DANISH - RC | | 950,000 | DKK | 200,070 | 14.08.00 | | |
| FINNISH - RC | | 84,094 | EUR | 132,162 | 11.08.00 | | |
| ICELANDIC - RC | | 200,000 | ISK | 4,456 | 11.08.00 | | |
| JAPANESE - RC | | | | 150,000 | 14.08.00 | | |
| KOREA, REPUBLIC OF - RC | | | | 30,000 | 28.08.00 | | |
| SPANISH - RC | | 5,000,000 | ESP | 47,225 | 18.08.00 | | SPANISH DEL. MEMBER OF FACT TEAM |
| SWEDISH - GOVT/RC | | 750,000 | SEK | 140,775 | 11.08.00 | | |
| SWEDISH - RC | | 250,000 | SEK | 46,925 | 11.08.00 | | |
| SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED IN CASH | | | | 1,659,027 | CHF | | 27.7% |
| KIND AND SERVICES (INCLUDING PERSONNEL) | | | | | | | |
| DONOR | CATEGORY | QUANTITY | UNIT | VALUE CHF | DATE | COMMENT | |
| SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED IN KIND/SERVICES | | | | 0 | CHF | 0.0% | |
| ADDITIONAL TO APPEAL BUDGET | | | | | | | |
| DONOR | CATEGORY | QUANTITY | UNIT | VALUE CHF | DATE | COMMENT | |
| SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED | | | | 0 | CHF | | |
| THE FOLLOWING PROJECTS ARE LINKED TO THIS APPEAL: | | | | | | | |
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