

# Information bulletin



International Federation  
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

## SOUTH ASIA: FLOODS

Information bulletin n° 01

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This bulletin is being issued for information only.

Following the severe floods in 2007 much attention has been given to improve the effectiveness of disaster response through contingency planning and strengthened disaster response mechanisms across the region. With the first stages of the monsoon hitting South Asia, the National Societies of the region are getting prepared to respond. This bulletin gives a situation update and overview of the preparedness levels of the National Societies

This bulletin (no. 01/2008) is being issued for information only, and reflects the situation and the information available at this time. The Federation is

not seeking funding or other assistance from donors at this time.



Disaster preparedness stock at a state branch warehouse of the Indian Red Cross Society

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## The Situation

Every year the monsoon season brings about major flooding in parts of South Asia. Heavy rainfall and a rise in temperatures causing melting of snow in the Himalayas result in the rapid and massive rise of water levels in large rivers like the Indus, Ganges and Brahmaputra, and their tributaries. As a result, the plains of Bangladesh and Nepal, north-eastern states of India, as well as parts of Pakistan get flooded almost every year between July and September. Although Afghanistan is not affected by the monsoon there is a high risk of spring flash floods due to melting snow in the mountains and spring rains from April till June. Global climate change has potentially serious consequences for this situation and it is suspected that over the coming years the combination of increased glacial melt and increased monsoon intensity will add to the devastation caused by floods during the monsoon season.

This was evident during 2007 when the heavy monsoon rains during the summer period caused severe flooding in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. Areas which are normally not flood prone were also affected like Uttar Pradesh in Northern India. In Pakistan the flooding were exacerbated by Cyclone Yemyin in late June and Bangladesh was hit by Cyclone Sidr in November. It is estimated that over 3,783 died and more than 9.3 million families were affected by these disasters. The South Asian national societies provided assistance to hundreds of thousands of affected people. The International Federation launched emergency appeals seeking close to CHF 55 million and used another CHF 1.25 million out of its disaster relief emergency fund (DREF).

This year the annual monsoons rains have swept across **India** about two weeks early - causing floods that have killed at least 363 people. It is the first time since record-keeping began 108 years ago that monsoon rains have

covered almost the entire country two weeks before the start of July. In **Nepal** the early monsoon has triggered moderate rainfall in the eastern and western part of the country. So far, 14 districts are affected by the flood and landslides, recording 17 deaths and total 1,816 families are affected.

In the last weeks **Bangladesh** received heavy showers throughout the country which affected the northeast with flash flood and the southeast with landslides. The first effects of this year's pre-monsoon season were also felt in **Sri Lanka**. In May, early monsoon rain caused flooding in western and southern parts of Sri Lanka.

Compared to 2007, **Pakistan** is experiencing considerably less rainfall this year. However, according to the Pakistan Meteorological Department, due to infrequent weather patterns, heavy rains are expected during the summer monsoon season. The melting of glaciers in the north of the country is also a main concern as is the increased frequency of tropical cyclones in the Arabian Sea.

Following the harsh winter in **Afghanistan**, a high number of spring flash floods from the melting snow were expected but have not happened so far. The spring rains from April to end-June have also not come and Afghanistan has been hit by a severe drought. In the **Maldives**, the seasonal monsoon generally has limited, if any, adverse effect and flooding is rather a consequence of sea-swells.

## Red Cross and Red Crescent action

Years of experience in floods response in South Asia have stressed the importance of disaster preparedness and mitigation components in the work of Red Cross and Red Crescent societies in the region. In their efforts, national societies rely on large networks of volunteers who live and work in disaster prone communities, thus ensuring commitment to, and ownership of, long-term disaster preparedness efforts.

To address the imminent danger of flooding, some of the steps that have been taken so far by the International Federation and the national societies in the South Asia region are:

- Development of national contingency plans for flood response, through constant interaction and coordination with concerned government departments and other stakeholders in each country, and informing the branch offices in the districts of these plans. A regional training was held last year to disseminate the International Federation's "Disaster response and contingency planning guide". This year contingency workshops were held in India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Afghanistan to follow up on the development of national contingency plans. In the former two countries, the contingency planning is for flooding.
- Establishment and strengthening of national and state/district disaster response teams, a pool of highly skilled and trained disaster management professionals, ready for deployment in the immediate aftermath of disasters. In May/June National Disaster Response Team (NDRT) trainings were carried out in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan and in the fall three trainings of the Regional Disaster Response Teams (RDRT) will be held.
- Coordination between the disaster management teams of the International Federation's regional and country delegations and the headquarters of the national societies has also been strengthened through regular meetings and information exchange.
- Focus on community-based preparedness, with strengthening of human and material resources through volunteer training schemes, improvement of storage facilities in strategic locations, pre-positioning of relief stocks, as well as construction of flood platforms, water and sanitation facilities. Through the Disaster Risk Reduction programmes the local early warning systems will be strengthened.

## Current state of preparedness of National Societies

### Afghanistan

Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) recently updated its existing contingency plan for flash floods. In the Government's disaster management plan, ARCS's role is specified as a member of the Government's national emergency operations centre and national commission for emergency and disaster management, specifically responsible for community disaster preparedness and response. Regular coordination meetings are held within the Movement and all disaster management activities of ARCS, International Federation and ICRC are harmonised. Next year ARCS is planning to revitalise the Emergency Operating Centre.

ARCS has propositioned stocks in five regions (Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, Mazar and Jalalabad) for 10,000 families and has a big warehouse in Kabul. The human resource capacity of the national society is strong: 37 trained Disaster Response Unit members in northern, western and central region of Afghanistan, 9 trained RDRT members, 50 local committees trained in community based disaster preparedness and response along with around 39,000 volunteers. ARCS also has 10 equipped emergency mobile units.

### **Bangladesh**

Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) is in the process of developing a contingency plan for floods. Lessons learnt workshops from last years floods will be held in the coming months and will feed into the contingency plan. Requisition of stocks is in the process and will be prepositions in Dhaka and all 64 BDRCS units (branches) will be supplied with one set of rescue and First Aid kits.

BDRCS have a big pool of human resources in the disaster management field: 6 peer teams with experienced officers, 6 trained RDRT members, 250 Unit Disaster Response Teams, 500 Community Disaster Response Teams and thousands of volunteers at district level ready to be deployed in case of flood. A NDRT is in formation.

### **India**

The Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS) is in the process of developing a contingency plan for flooding and has a disaster management centre (DMC) that is activated during disasters. Lessons learnt form last year underlines the importance of pre-positioning of disaster preparedness stock and capacity building of state and district level disaster response teams. IRCS disaster response structure includes national disaster response teams (NDRT), state disaster response teams (SDRT) in each state and district disaster response teams (DDRT) at branch level. IRCS has pre-positioned 43,000 non-food family packs as disaster preparedness stock. This stock is available at six strategically located regional warehouses. The NS has seven water purification units, which can be deployed at a short notice and are stationed at these regional warehouses.

### **Maldives**

The national society is in formation in the Maldives. However, should the need arise the International Federation delegation is willing and prepared to support government initiatives as was done during the seasonal flooding that occurred (as a consequence of sea-swells, rather than monsoon rains) on a few islands last year.

### **Nepal**

The Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS) has relief materials (30,000 family packages) and basic rescue kits pre-positioned at various strategic locations. NRCS has developed and tested an earthquake contingency plan, which will also support other emergency working procedures during disasters. A Disaster Management Centre (DMC) was established at national headquarters equipped with basic information and rescue kits. During disasters, as part of the contingency plan, the DMC will be converted to an Emergency Operation Centre and play a vital roles in coordination and communication. NDRT alerts have been sent out and coordination meetings in most of NRCS' district chapters have been held to support the government's preparedness for response.

In May NRCS held a NDRT refresher workshop and explored the lesson learned and challenges faced during the NRCS flood and landslide response operation-2007. This led to improvements in the rapid assessment format and guidelines for conducting the assessment.

### **Pakistan**

From last years flooding and cyclone it was evident that there was a need to prepare for possible disasters earlier. The Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS) is therefore in the process of finalizing a contingency plan for flooding which outlines the roles of PRCS, International Federation and various PNS (participating National Societies) present in the country. The plan is in line with and contributes to the Government's nationwide monsoon contingency plan for 2008. The country plan also discusses the concept of Emergency Operations Committee, which will work as the coordinating body for the disaster operation; it will include upper management from the national society, International Federation, ICRC and PNSs.

Presently, PRCS has DP stock for 35,000 families placed at strategic locations. In May the NDRT was trained to prepare PRCS personnel from different sectors (including health, water & sanitation and disaster management) in organizing an efficient flood response during emergencies.

### **Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka Red Cross Society (SLRCS) is in the process of updating its 2007 flood contingency plan. The National Disaster Response Team (NDRT), consisting of 29 trained SLRCS staff and volunteers, is ready for deployment. Experience form last year's flood underlined the importance of strengthening the branch level disaster response and SLRCS is therefore setting up Branch Disaster Response Teams (BDRT) in all 26 branches by the end of 2009. To date, 13 branches have BDRTs trained and ready for deployment. The branches have also been equipped with first aid equipment. At community level, 173 Community Disaster Response Teams (CDRT) have been formed and are undergoing training.

In addition, SLRCS has one regional warehouse housing emergency relief stocks for approximately 3,000 families and construction of another regional warehouse is near completion and is expected to be operational within the next month, equipped with stocks for 2,000 families. A Disaster Management Centre is being constructed and will

be finished in the coming months. In eight districts 66 Hazard Vulnerability Capacity Assessments were conducted and 18 school level Vulnerability Capacity Assessments have also been carried out. In January an early warning project started in three cyclone/tsunami prone districts (Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Ampara).

## Coordination

During the regional disaster management working group meeting in May 2008, discussions were held on flood preparedness and contingency planning with all national societies in the region.

As in the past, in all countries close coordination is maintained with government authorities, both at national and provincial levels, and other partners assisting the preparedness activities in communities. Contacts with donors have been established and/or strengthened. In addition, coordination between the disaster management teams of the International Federation's regional and country delegations and the headquarters of the national societies has also been strengthened through regular meetings and information exchange.

The South Asia regional and country delegations and national societies will continue to work together closely to monitor the progress of the monsoon and keep all partners up to date with preparedness and response activities in the region.

## How we work

*All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations \(NGO's\) in Disaster Relief](#) and is committed to the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.*

The International Federation's activities are aligned with its Global Agenda, which sets out four broad goals to meet the Federation's mission to "improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity".

### Global Agenda Goals:

- Reduce the numbers of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.
- Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.
- Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.
- Reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion and promote respect for diversity and human dignity.

## Contact information

### For further information specifically related to this operation please contact:

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