

BANGLADESH: CYCLONE

31 October 1997

appeal no. 11/97

situation report no. 4

period covered: 11 August 1997 - 14 October 1997

The Bangladesh Red Crescent/International Federation operation to assist victims of the vicious cyclone which struck the country's south east coast in mid-May has delivered emergency food, shelter and essential relief items to vulnerable communities, with the provision of wind-resistant huts well underway.

The context

Cyclone One Bravo hit the south eastern coast of Bangladesh on 19 May 1997 with an estimated one million people taking refuge in cyclone shelters, thereby significantly reducing potential loss of life. The Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP) of the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) with its effective volunteer network, warning system and awareness campaigns assumed a major role in ensuring the endangered population's were evacuated to safety. The dedication of the CPP team is well illustrated by the bravery of one volunteer who drowned during the cyclone in a vain attempt to rescue five fishermen.

The cyclone left a trail of devastation along the 200 kilometre coastal belt between Chittagong and Teknaf, at the southern tip of Bangladesh. Some 250,000 homes were totally destroyed and over 100,000 damaged by the violent squally winds and torrential rainfall; crops and livestock were seriously affected. Heavy rains during June and July caused further damage and suffering to tens of thousands of people previously affected by the cyclone and this hampered relief efforts.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society immediately forwarded relief goods to the affected area and provided assistance to approximately 35,000 people. Items distributed to the vulnerable population included chira (compressed rice), ghur (molasses), flour, milk, tarpaulins, corrugated iron (CI) sheets and plastic sheeting.

After the emergency phase of the operation, the emphasis was placed on the provision of food, roofing materials and reconstruction of huts for the most vulnerable in the cyclone-affected areas. A Plan of Action and budget with three components was drawn up by the BDRCS in conjunction with the International Federation. Teams of BDRCS staff were deployed from national headquarters to the field to work with the district branches during the distribution/implementation

phase. At district level, the local implementation committees were formed and Red Cross youth and CPP volunteers in the Chittagong and Cox's Bazar Districts began the work of selecting beneficiaries against defined criteria and in accordance with the BDRCS/International Federation relief manual.

Tenders were raised and orders placed for the provision of 4,800 food rations comprising rice (15 kg), lentils (2.5 kg) and oil (1 lt). Contracts were also negotiated for the supply of CI sheets for 4,310 families. The food distribution was completed in early August despite severe flooding in the operational area. The selection of the 4,310 beneficiary families for CI sheet was completed by the last week of August with distribution achieved in mid-September. Procurement of replenishment buffer stocks of plastic sheeting and tarpaulins is currently delayed due to unsolved storage problems from rat infestation.

The third component of the operation - wind resistant huts - is currently underway, with design approval and the contract process completed. Two 'pilot' huts have been constructed at national headquarters in Dhaka and these were used in training the four team leaders drawn from CPP volunteers. Beneficiary selection on a cluster basis (20 to 40 huts within a radius of half a kilometre) is now underway according to agreed procedures. The four Phase 1 cluster sites for the installation of the first 100 huts have been selected, with work due to commence in early November and completion of the project as a whole expected next January.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The BDRCS/International Federation has actively followed the work carried out by the Government of Bangladesh (GoB), NGOs and international organisations; around ten NGOs have been involved, with seven undertaking health-related activities. The BDRCS will ensure continued coordination with GoB and those NGOs implementing housing programmes. The International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research (Bangladesh) sent two teams to Chittagong and Cox's Bazar and is assisting the health ministry in assessing any diarrhoea-related problems. The BDRCS acting secretary general attended several GoB coordination meetings following the cyclone. BDRCS officers and the International Federation's disaster preparedness delegate also attended meetings held by the government's disaster management bureau. Overall, a previously unsurpassed level of disaster relief coordination was reached and this is seen as a positive development.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details. Any further funding could be utilised in increasing the number of wind resistant huts provided, otherwise the operation will be finalised.

Conclusion

Delays in funding commitments added to hold ups in implementation of the operation, particularly the wind resistant huts component where the programme did not become viable until 35 per cent coverage of the proposal was reached. Even so, the operation is achieving its priority objectives and has broken new ground in cooperation with government, local authorities and the international community.

Ann Naef
Acting Head
Appeals & Reports Service

Hiroshi Higashiura
Director
Asia and Pacific Department

