

BANGLADESH: COLD WAVE

19 January 2000

Information Bulletin N° 1

The Disaster

Since 29 December 1999, a severe cold spell has been sweeping Bangladesh, where winters are generally mild and short. Weather experts had forecast two severe cold spells during January. The next one is expected around 25 January.

Temperatures have fallen to 6.4° Celsius in some areas, and to between 8° and 12° in others. This is perceived as severe cold by the general population who are used to much warmer weather, even at this time of year. It is causing extreme hardship for under-nourished and underweight members of the population. These include people who lost their homes and possessions in heavy flooding in 1998 and 1999 and large numbers of poor in northern districts who are going through the seasonal lean period for unemployment and have few resources to protect themselves from the cold. Colds, fevers, pneumonia, and asthma are on the increase. There have been 49 cold-related deaths to date.

On 6 January the Prime Minister's relief fund sent some 62,000 blankets, 28,000 sarees (women's wear), 2,500 lungis (men's wear), 9,500 pieces of winter wear, 22,000 ready-made garments and 121,000 square metres of cloth to the affected districts. A further 80 cartons of garments and 272 cartons of second hand clothes has been allocated for distribution.

The Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief has been co-ordinating the relief operations implemented by the district administrations. The meteorological department is monitoring temperatures and publicising weather-trends.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action and Needs

The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) and the Federation Delegation have been closely monitoring climatic developments. The BDRCS has distributed over 18,500 blankets and 3,000 garments from supplies received last year from the Swedish Red Cross. In addition, 500 cartons and 200 bales of second hand clothes, 10,000 garments, 380 MT of rice, 76 MT of dal (pulse) and 800 kg of margarine have been despatched to the affected districts, including the Chittagong Hill Tracts. BDRCS Headquarters has instructed local units to continuously monitor events and report regularly.

The BDRCS urgently requires 20,000 blankets in anticipation of a second cold spell later this month. The Federation has immediately responded by releasing CHF 50,000 from its Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF) for the purchase of part of this quantity. In kind or cash donations are welcomed to cover the remaining needs and replenish DREF.

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