

## ***SRI LANKA: FLOODS***

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#### ***The Disaster***

The heavy rain which over the last two weeks of September and early October caused extensive flooding in several parts of the southern and western provinces of Sri Lanka, left thousands of families homeless and large numbers of houses and property damaged. However, the rain has now subsided and is reduced to intermittent showers. An initial assessment by the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society (SLRCS) and the Federation's country representative, which included discussions with Red Cross branches and government officials in the three most affected districts, found that the flood waters had subsided more quickly than anticipated. As a result, dry food rations provided by the government and distributed with the help of numerous Red Cross volunteers, were discontinued as displaced families returned to their homes and resumed daily activities.

Road and rail links have been re-established. However, the Flood Monitoring Unit of the Irrigation Department of the government of Sri Lanka has reported that some rivers continue to flow at close to danger levels and that more rainfall may result in immediate flooding in some parts. The government's Meteorological Department continues to issue warnings that rains can be expected to continue during the inter monsoon period prior to the onset of the second monsoon season in October and November, and might continue therefore until December.

The government's Social Services Department has co-ordinated government response in the form of dry food rations and emergency shelter supplies through its own officials, as well as through Red Cross branches and volunteers and other village level voluntary organisations. The Sri Lanka Red Cross Society has been in continual contact with government departments at both national and district levels and has co-ordinated relief assistance needs through a joint needs analysis with the director of Social Services at national level.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent Action***

There has been positive feedback from government officials in the flood affected districts concerning the value of the assistance given by Red Cross branches and volunteers to date. SLRCS volunteers have been actively assisting divisional government offices with relief assistance from the outset of the disaster, rescuing people, giving first aid to those affected, supplying and distributing dried and cooked food and transporting displaced people to safer areas. The information provided by the district authorities in the affected areas confirms the value which is attached to Red Cross assistance. In Galle district, the government stated that a total of 13,000 families had been affected, with 5,500 families displaced in the two worst affected divisions. The government distributed cooked food and dry rations to 1,000 of these families for three days, and between 25 September and 3 October, the remaining 4,500 displaced families received food assistance. The Red Cross was the only organisation which provided support to the government in order to assist the victims of the floods.

In Matara district the government states that a total of 3,800 families were affected. In the division most affected by the floods, a total of 900 families received rations for a period of five days. The government welcomed the active support provided by Red Cross volunteers. In Matara the government plans to request further Red Cross assistance in order to implement a water purification and health education campaign in the five most affected divisions where people who have returned to their homes are in danger of drinking polluted water. The government's regional director of health has stated that, as a result of this experience, in future he will "immediately approach the local Red Cross branch to assist at times of natural disaster" and has welcomed the Red Cross's readiness to support the health activities.

In Gampaha district the two worst-hit divisions have 700 families who were badly affected. Of these, 100 families received food rations for three days. The Red Cross was the only organisation which provided support to local government officials. In Kalutara district, the latest update after the heavy rains, verified by the local Red Cross branch, indicates that there are no urgent needs.

## ***Needs***

In order to prevent the spread of water borne and communicable diseases, the SLRCS plans to begin a health education campaign in collaboration with the district and divisional health authorities in Matara. The local branch will mobilise 250 volunteers to liaise with government community health extension workers to cover all five most affected divisions over a seven day period. Health education materials will be used to prevent people in flood affected areas from consuming water from the flooded rivers and to inform affected communities about how to purify and maintain clean water sources. These materials will be printed with the Red Cross emblem and contact details. Volunteers have also planned to undertake a water purification process in flood affected areas as a precautionary measure to prevent water borne diseases such as malaria and dengue fever. The government at district level is concerned by the increased incidence of dengue fever.

A programme for chlorination of wells and water sources has been planned by the government and the local Red Cross branch. In early October, the SLRCS undertook discussions with the government's regional directors of health services in Galle, Gampaha and Kalutara as to whether similar health education and water purification campaigns were necessary and to offer Red Cross assistance.

As the budget for the above activities remains modest, the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society and the Federation Delegation will aim to raise resources to support this emergency operation at national level within country. Nevertheless, with the prospect of more rain, the need to call for international assistance cannot be excluded.

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