



NEPAL: FLOODS AND LANDSLIDES

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The Disaster

Over the past three months Nepal has suffered extensive flooding and a series of landslides that have caused widespread loss of human life and property across 72 of the Himalayan Kingdom's 75 districts. According to government estimates, 144 people have been killed and over 10,000 families have been directly affected by the disaster. Traditionally, the monsoon affects Nepal between June and September every year. However, this year has proved to be an exception with heavy rains arriving a month early in May, leaving the Government as well as village communities unprepared. The scale of the disaster has increased as many rivers have changed their course, destroying entire village settlements through which the rivers have charted their new course.

The situation is compounded by landslides which have rendered access roads into affected areas impassable, hampering the delivery of relief supplies to village communities living in remote mountainous areas. Even though it is almost two months since the floods and landslides began, access to approximately 11 village development councils including over 40,000 people remains extremely difficult.

This year's floods and landslides have destroyed an estimated 2,290 houses and have made many sources of potable water unusable. The loss of property has been estimated at almost CHF 12 million. Over 1,500 landless and economically deprived families have lost their homes and the loss of livestock and damage to thousands of hectares of rice paddy is a threat to food security.

In addition to fatalities caused by drowning or landslides, the monsoon has also led to public health problems. 250 people have died from cholera and an outbreak of Japanese encephalitis. Nepal was close to eradicating malaria, but it is now feared that the disease, together with encephalitis, may spread once the monsoon abates, since the swamps that the rain has left behind make ideal breeding spots for mosquitoes. Cases of black fever, or kalazar, have also been reported in the Udaypur district.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The Government of Nepal has formed a special committee for the management of the current floods and landslides. This committee is chaired by the Vice Chairman of the country's Planning Commission which works in collaboration with the Central Disaster Management Committee. The Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS) is a permanent member of both committees. The national headquarters of the Nepal Red Cross Society responded rapidly to the disaster, dispatching relief materials to the affected districts, following requests for assistance from NRCS district chapters. NRCS Central Executive Committee members made assessments in all of the 72 flood affected districts which were followed up with procurement of relief materials at local and central levels. Through its nation-wide network of district chapters, the NRCS has been able to resettle people affected by the floods, distribute food and non-food relief, provide drinking water facilities and carry out various interventions to meet basic health needs. On 21 September, a Federation field delegate arrived in Nepal to carry out a two week assessment of the humanitarian needs. He was accompanied by the information officer from the Federation's South Asia regional delegation.

To date, over 6,650 family packages have been dispatched for distribution by the NRCS through its various district chapters. These packages consist of non-food relief materials for a family of five which include kitchen utensils, tarpaulin sheets for temporary shelter, clothing, candles and matches. Until recently, the inaccessibility of many remote villages as a result of landslides and the damage to roads and bridges has hampered the work of the NRCS. In some instances, Red Cross volunteers have delivered relief supplies on foot. In many districts the NRCS has arranged temporary accommodation for families who lost their homes. The issue of permanent housing is particularly urgent given the impending arrival of the severe Himalayan winter in November. The NRCS has already approached the government at central and local levels to acquire land for the reconstruction of houses.

In order to prevent the spread of waterborne and communicable diseases, NRCS has undertaken a health education campaign to prevent people in flood affected areas from consuming water from the flooded rivers. Volunteers have also been spraying insecticides in some areas as a public health precaution against the spread of malaria. Subchapters or co-operative committees have been mobilised and junior and youth Red Cross volunteers have also been involved in this initiative. In three districts the NRCS, in co-ordination with UNICEF, has also provided medicines to patients suffering from encephalitis.

The situation of over 15,000 families who were recently freed from generations of bonded labour is of particular concern. Called *Kamayyas*, these families have little economic or social status in Nepalese society. Given their increased vulnerability following the disaster, the NRCS has included the *Kamayyas* as target beneficiaries in need of rehabilitation assistance. The NRCS Kanchanpur district branch has so far provided limited relief materials to 100 *Kamaya* families.

Needs

The disaster has had a severe impact on a high number of marginalised communities in rural Nepal. The damage to personal property and loss of livelihoods has been considerable and there are few local employment opportunities. The floods have destroyed the standing paddy crop in many areas and farming communities face difficulties in paying their labour force.

The NRCS estimates that at least 2,000 families will need emergency relief assistance for a period of 60 days. These families are totally destitute following the floods. In addition to emergency relief support, they will also require external assistance to rebuild their houses. The warehouses of the Nepal Red Cross Society have been depleted of their stocks in the wake of the floods and the landslides and there is an urgent need for replenishment to meet needs over the coming months, as well as to maintain a minimum level of emergency stocks for preparedness in the event of future disasters that may affect the country. It is anticipated that an appeal in favour of victims of floods and landslides will be issued in the coming days.

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