

BANGLADESH: FLOODS

8 September 2000

appeal no. 20/2000

situation report no. 2

period covered: 24 August - 5 September

A tidal surge in Sandwip island which occurred at the end of August has increased the suffering of more than 1.2 million Bangladeshis who are affected by floods and acute river erosion. Bangladesh Red Crescent Society disaster preparedness volunteers worked with the government to assist 15,000 people to take refuge in cyclone shelters. A revised budget will now be drawn up to include urgent needs for the most vulnerable on Sandwip island. The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, supported by the Federation, has purchased emergency food rations and is commencing distribution to 200,000 of the most needy who have lost their homes, their land and livelihood.

The context

For the third consecutive year, Bangladesh is suffering from severe flooding and river erosion. Heavy monsoon rains in Bangladesh began six weeks early this year and the situation was compounded by severe flooding in north-east India, as flood waters making their way through Bangladesh submerged large areas. Although the death toll is not high, river erosion has forced over one million people to flee their homes, especially in the three major basins of the Brahmaputra/Jamuna, the Padma/Ganges and the Meghna.

After two weeks of little rainfall, the past few days saw moderate to heavy rain in the three key catchments areas of the Brahmaputra/Jamuna, the Padma/Ganges, and the Meghna. This rainfall has significantly increased water levels in the Padma, whilst the levels of the Jamuna are falling in upper reaches and increasing in lower regions. As of 6 September, of 46 water level stations monitored by the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre, 7 are at 'above danger' level. The forecast for the next 48 hours sees water levels remaining steady in the Jamuna, whilst the Padma continues to rise.

The plight of victims affected by river erosion and subsequent flooding continues. Many are living in squalor on elevated road embankments and little help is reaching them from the government or NGOs.

Flooded farmland has resulted in a lower demand for farm labour, increasing the vulnerability of the landless who now have no opportunities for earning a living.

Latest events

On 31 August, Sandwip island in the Bay of Bengal was engulfed by a violent tidal surge, flooding the main town and its surrounding villages with five feet of water. With the assistance of the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) disaster preparedness volunteers, the government moved 15,000 inhabitants to the safety of cyclone shelters. The government has reported that some 110,000 people were affected by the tidal flood, 5,000 acres of cultivated land were totally submerged and an additional 10,000 acres of crops were ruined. Some 4,000 houses were totally destroyed, and 6,000 were damaged.

A major contributing factor to this tidal surge was the massive exit of flood waters into the Bay of Bengal which coincided with a new moon and an exceptionally high tide.

Severe river erosion continued throughout the reporting period and is forecast to worsen as the run-off from flooded land into rivers drags with it the silty soil of Bangladesh. Erosion has created panic amongst those living along the river banks, and loss of homes and farmland is particularly acute Faridpur, Shariatpur, Tangail, Sirajganj and Chapai-Nawabganj Districts. The Union Council Chairman at Faridpur reported on 5 September that, of five unions near his area, four have collapsed into the river due to erosion. With approximately 8 to 10 villages in each union housing some 1,900 people per village, the impact of the erosion is devastating.

The flood situation in Kushtia district has improved with a fall in the water levels of its rivers, but as the water recedes, river erosion intensifies. Some 1,000 homes have fallen into the river, leaving another 8,000 people homeless. Furthermore, a recent government news bulletin stated that diarrhoeal diseases have broken out in many flood-hit areas in Kushtia.

Many areas of Bangladesh are now affected by an outbreak of dengue fever, the full extent of which is not known due to the lack of an efficient disease surveillance system.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

A Federation/BDRCS aerial and ground survey of the Sandwip tidal flood prompted immediate action on 5 September with the dispatch of a two-person team to the area to purchase and distribute emergency food relief - 40 MT. of rice and 8 MT. of dhal.

Continued surveying in the light of the preliminary appeal launched on 18 August has confirmed the need for further assistance to victims of monsoon-related disasters in Bangladesh. In the days ahead, revised Appeal objectives together with a revised budget will be completed to reflect the addition of the Sandwip tidal flood to the Federation appeal.

Survey teams are made up of BDRCS staff and expatriate Federation and National Red Cross Society staff currently working in Bangladesh on bilateral agreements. This use of available resources has provided the Federation with an excellent depth of experience and knowledge in the field to assist with relief planning.

Disaster Relief Emergency Funds (DREF) in the amount of CHF 293,000 have been received in Bangladesh. These funds will be used to purchase 260 MT of rice and 52 MT of dhal in the days ahead for immediate distribution to the 13 Districts initially targeted by the appeal: Kurigram, Gaibandha,

Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari, Chandpur, Chapai-Nawabganj, Pabna, Sirajganj, Tangail, Manikganj, Munshiganj, Shariatpur and Bogra.

Outstanding needs

The monsoon is forecast to last until mid-September and the cyclone season begins in early October: natural disasters are unrelenting in Bangladesh. While the tidal flood in Sandwip was violent, the impact of river erosion has been no less dramatic to the people it has affected across Bangladesh. The days ahead will see little reprieve from the forced relocation to marginal land or city slums of villagers left landless and homeless by erosion.

Those who can return to their homes face the daunting task of repairing them, and dealing with unserviceable tube wells and damaged sanitary facilities. With large areas still under water, and with embankments and fields destroyed, there is little scope for earning an income, leaving those who are already very poor in dire need of food and basic necessities. The possibility of epidemics remains present and any serious outbreaks of disease will require an additional response. In any subsequent rehabilitation phase, low-cost housing, and tools and seeds for replanting lost crops, will be a priority.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The arrival of a Canadian Red Cross information delegate has strengthened the Delegation's relations with both the international and national media, increasing the profile of both the current Appeal and the BDRCS relief operation. The BDRCS/Federation continues to liaise with governmental agencies, UN bodies, NGOs and the media.

The BBC correspondent in Bangladesh, accompanied by the Federation HoD, visited Shibalaya Thana in Manikganj District on 24 August. The result was a series of dramatic three-minute pieces on erosion and its victims broadcast by the BBC on 1 September. Additional support during the first week of September from BBC London, AP and Reuters, as well as the national media, has helped raise the profile of this humanitarian crisis.

On 25 August, the ECHO Correspondent for South Asia accompanied the relief delegate to eroded areas and the affected embankment dwellers to witness the situation.

The Ambassadors, High Commissioners and Country Directors of 45 selected diplomatic missions and NGOs in Bangladesh continue to receive updated information from the Federation Delegation.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The BDRCS is ready to provide more assistance to the most vulnerable but urgently requires funding to purchase supplies. Initial response to the preliminary Appeal has been encouraging, however, if the BDRCS is to succeed in its goal of providing aid to 200,000 of those worst-affected by the flooding and river erosion, there must be a generous and rapid response by donors.

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BANGLADESH - FLOODS 2000						ANNEX 1
APPEAL No.20 /2000		PLEDGES RECEIVED			09/15/00	
DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE	COMMENT
CASH						TOTAL COVERAGE
REQUESTED IN APPEAL CHF ----->				3,293,146		17.7%
BRITISH - RC		45,000	GBP	113,400	25.08.00	
FINNISH - RC		33,637	EUR	52,864	24.08.00	
KOREA, REPUBLIC - RC				20,000	25.08.00	
JAPANESE - RC				162,000	24.08.00	
SWEDISH - GOVT/RC		1,250,000	SEK	233,875	18.08.00	FLOOD RELIEF OPERATION
SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED IN CASH				582,139	CHF	17.7%
KIND AND SERVICES (INCLUDING PERSONNEL)						
DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE	COMMENT
SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED IN KIND/SERVICES				0	CHF	0.0%
ADDITIONAL TO APPEAL BUDGET						
DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE	COMMENT
SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED				0	CHF	
THE FOLLOWING PROJECTS ARE LINKED TO THIS APPEAL:						