

BANGLADESH: FLOODS

29 September 2000

appeal no. 20/2000

situation report no. 4

period covered: 22 - 28 September 2000

On 22 September, in a further development of the flood disaster in Bangladesh, the north western districts of Chuadanga, Meherpur and Jhenidah were hit by flood waters rushing from West Bengal through Bangladesh. It is impossible to provide accurate figures at present, but it is estimated that at least a further one million people have been affected by this latest phase of the crisis. The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, supported by the Federation, has provided immediate emergency food assistance to flood victims. A full appeal, replacing the current preliminary appeal, will shortly be issued and will include needs relating to the recent flooding in the north west.

The context

Over recent years, Bangladesh has suffered from severe flooding. This year, flood waters draining from the neighbouring states of India into the Bay of Bengal through Bangladesh have caused flooding, severe river erosion and provided an increased risk of tidal floods along the coast. These monsoon-related disasters have severely affected more than 2.5 million people, with the numbers increasing daily as flood waters drain from West Bengal into the western and north-western districts of Bangladesh.

Latest events

The overall flood situation in western and north western Bangladesh has worsened as huge volumes of flood waters from India continue to sweep down the river systems into western Bangladesh. In addition to the 1.5 million people reported as affected in Situation Report No. 3, it is estimated that a further one million people have been affected in the districts of Chuadanga, Meherpur, Jhenidah, Chapai-Nawabganj, Kushtia, Jessore, Pabna, Sirajganj and Rajshahi.

North-Western districts: Chuadanga, Meherpur and Jhenidah

In the early hours of the morning of 22 September, villagers in these three Districts were awoken by the tide of flood water from West Bengal surging into their homes. In a state of panic, in darkness, they fled with their families in search of higher ground, leaving behind all their belongings. These Districts, all adjacent to West Bengal in India, have the following in common:

- There has been no serious flooding in this area since 1945, thus people were unaware of the best course of action to take in a flood disaster.
- The housing is very different to that found in the major river basins of Bangladesh -- walls are constructed of mud, often 45 cms thick and the roofing beams, purlins and rafters are of thick (and heavy) bamboo. Some houses have tiled roofs, but most have thatch for the external cover. When water reaches a depth of only a few centimetres, the mud at the base of the walls liquefies and the heavy walls collapse. A further consequence is that, if the houses are reconstructed in the same fashion, it will take many months to complete the work, taking the inhabitants well past the end of the cold season. In these regions, houses tend to be large by national standards and are often inhabited by more than one family.
- The area is generally flat and has few rivers, canals and water courses found in the rest of the country. The effects of this are two-fold: there are very few boats in the area and thus the people face difficulty in saving their belongings and the flood waters will recede slowly, as there are few natural channels for the water to exit the area.
- These border areas are particularly poor and under-developed. With hundreds of kilometres of dirt roads destroyed, rehabilitation before the onset of the cold weather will pose problems.
- Agriculture (especially jute production) accounts for virtually all of the local economy. The area is awash with rotting jute plants in stagnant water which further increases the probability of outbreaks of gastro-enteritis.

As of 27 September, water continues to rise slowly, thus the affected area affected is increasing in size. As it only takes a few inches of water to bring down a mud-walled house, we can expect the number of affected families to increase significantly. In the last 24 hours, a further 15 villages in one sub-district of Mehepur have been flooded in waters which are waist-deep. On 28 September, fresh reports of damage were coming in on an hourly basis. The latest figures provided by the government, attested by Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) and the Federation ground and air survey teams, show that in Chuadanga alone - at the moment the worst-hit District - 8,000 houses have been totally destroyed with 20,000 severely damaged, while 90,000 families (400,000 people) are homeless. Jhenidah and Mehepur report 200,000 and 120,000 people homeless, respectively. Many tens of thousands of hectares of standing crops have been lost. It is impossible to provide accurate figures at this time of rapid evolution at present, but it is estimated that at least a further one million people have been affected in the last week by this latest phase of the crisis.

Other affected Districts

As the flooding in West Bengal works its way down to the south, the Districts of Jessore, Magura and Satkhira will be increasingly affected. Alarming reports came in on 28 September of massive flooding in Jessore, with information that 150 villages were inundated in the first few hours of the flooding and 200,000 people are homeless. In Satkhira, waters are rising and border guards have been forced to evacuate their posts.

In Chapai-Nawabganj and Kushtia Districts (also on the Indian border), the recent problems are

similar, though less grave. Nevertheless, given the increasing rate of river erosion, Rajshahi and Sirajganj Districts have once again been heavily hit by flooding caused by local rains and rises in the Padma (Ganges) and Jamuna rivers. River erosion is intensifying in these areas, forcing hundreds of families to flee their homes every day. As reported in previous situation reports, river erosion in many other parts of the country continues relentlessly to take its toll.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

On learning of the crisis along the Indian border, a BDRCS officer and the relief delegate went to Meherpur District and reported back to national headquarters on the extreme gravity of the crisis. People are living on flat rooftops to escape the water and tube wells are submerged. The BDRCS local Unit immediately purchased 5 MT of rice which was distributed to 1,000 beneficiaries at five locations within six hours. A further 10 MT of rice and 2 MT of lentils were dispatched from headquarters on 26 September and were distributed to 2,000 people in six areas within 15 hours of its arrival. Both operations succeeded in the aim of providing urgent aid to the most vulnerable within hours of the disaster.

On 25 September, another BDRCS/Federation team reached Chuadanga to survey the situation. The Chuadanga BDRCS Unit collected money from local businessmen to buy medicine and with its own funds purchased 5 MT of rice for one sub-district and distributed it in 13 temporary shelters. On 26 September, a truck reached Chuadanga District with 10 MT of rice and 2 MT of dhal purchased by the BDRCS/Federation. Distribution took place on 27 September. On 28 September trucks left the headquarters carrying 5 MT of flattened rice and 1 MT of molasses for Meherpur, Chuadanga, Jhenidah, Jessore and Satkhira Districts. Equal quantities of these goods will also be transported to Chapai-Nawabganj and Rajshahi on 29 September. In the early morning of 29 September, the BDRCS transported an additional 50 MT of rice to five of the worst-hit Districts.

For the river-eroded Districts, distribution of 20 MT of rice and 4 MT of lentils has been completed in Tangail and Sirajganj Units and 11 other Units are preparing to distribute the same amount. An additional 480 MT of food will be delivered next week and distribution lists are being amended to prioritise those areas which are worst hit. The Sandwip tidal surge relief and medical operation was completed on 25 September and the four medical teams left for Meherpur, Chuadanga, Chapai-Nawabganj and Rajshahi on 28 September.

Dedicated BDRCS volunteers at branch level are doing their utmost with limited resources to meet the immediate needs of the most vulnerable. Some local fund-raising is being done and small quantities of food have been donated by private businesses.

The preliminary appeal launched on 18 August targeted 200,000 people in 20 districts for two months. An operation was also launched in Sandwip following the tidal surge at the end of August. Food distributed to date has reached 32,500 beneficiaries and a second consignment of rice and dhal will be distributed to 50,000 beneficiaries as a one month's food supply. A further 45,000 people have received an emergency ration for one week.

Outstanding needs

As a result of the recent disaster on the western border of Bangladesh, there is an immediate need for thousands of tons of food to feed over 1 million people living in precarious temporary shelter with no prospects of earning a living and a bleak future ahead. Polythene sheeting is also needed to provide shelter. The prospect of outbreaks of disease is further increasing following the recent disaster and

there is an immediate need for water purification tablets, oral rehydration salts and anti-diarrhoeal medicines.

In view of the recent flooding in the western districts, the preliminary appeal will be revised to include disaster victims in the Districts which have recently been hit by flood waters. The appeal will be submitted to donors early next week. The BDRCS has emphasised that there will be significant longer-term needs for rehabilitation since the winter season is fast approaching and hundreds of thousands of people are in need of building materials, particularly corrugated iron sheeting. Requests for rehabilitation aid have been received from District Commissioners, the Executive Committees of BDRCS Units, various religious missions and the affected people themselves.

In addition to the recent flooding, river erosion is intensifying. Urgent food support is equally badly needed to help keep these disaster victims who, in many cases, have migrated from rural areas to the city slums, until agricultural work becomes available in December.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

A Federation-funded video film depicting the severity of river erosion in Bangladesh was completed on 21 September and will be premiered next week to the diplomatic community and international organisations, in co-ordination with the Federation Secretariat in Geneva. This gathering in Dhaka will be used as a information and advocacy event, with the aim of promoting further international support. The BDRCS and Federation have attended a number of flood co-ordination meetings facilitated by the Minister of Disaster Management and Relief, the WFP and the Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh. The Federation and the BDRCS have kept diplomatic missions, the UN and international organisations well informed of Red Crescent action.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The humanitarian disaster in Bangladesh requires immediate and substantial funding for the local purchase of rice, dhal, medicines, plastic sheeting and water purification tablets. With recent flood waters from India moving first west and now flowing in a southerly direction, further districts are being affected and more detailed information will be provided on a regular basis.

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BANGLADESH - FLOODS 2000						ANNEX 1
APPEAL No.20 /2000		PLEDGES RECEIVED				09/29/00
DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE	COMMENT
CASH						
REQUESTED IN APPEAL CHF ----->				3,293,146		TOTAL COVERAGE 20.4%
BRITISH - RC		45,000	GBP	113,400	25.08.00	
CANADIAN - RC		20,000	CAD	23,068	15.09.00	
FINNISH - RC		33,637	EUR	52,864	24.08.00	
ICELANDIC - RC		200,000	ISK	4,295	22.09.00	
JAPANESE - RC				162,000	24.08.00	
KOREA, REPUBLIC - RC				20,000	25.08.00	
SWEDISH - GOVT/RC		1,250,000	SEK	233,875	18.08.00	FLOOD RELIEF OPERATION
SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED IN CASH				609,502	CHF	18.5%
KIND AND SERVICES (INCLUDING PERSONNEL)						
DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE	COMMENT
IRANIAN - RC		37,169	USD	63,652	23.09.00	TENTS, BLANKETS, RICE, TEA, OIL, CLOTHES, SLIPPERS, SOAP
SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED IN KIND/SERVICES				63,652	CHF	1.9%
ADDITIONAL TO APPEAL BUDGET						
DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE	COMMENT
SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED				0	CHF	