

BANGLADESH: FLOODS

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situation report no. 2

period covered: 19 August - 8 September 1996

Flooding in Bangladesh is moving slowly southwards, inundating new areas and leaving tens of thousands of families in desperate need of food and clean water. Despite a very low response to the Federation's appeal which has forced it to reduce the number of targeted beneficiaries, the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society has already distributed basic relief supplies to 5,000 families and is preparing a second distribution to another 8,500 families.

The Context

Heavy monsoon rains over the subcontinent in July caused severe flooding in large areas of Bangladesh, as the country's main rivers drained water southwards. River embankments were breached in many places, forcing hundreds of thousands of families to evacuate their homes and seek temporary shelter on roads, in boats and on embankments. Thousands of acres of crops were damaged, roads and bridges washed away and wells destroyed. Lack of clean water and food is creating serious problems for the affected population.

Latest events

The flood situation has changed considerably in recent weeks. Heavy to moderate rain has fallen in the catchment areas of the great rivers that wind through Bangladesh. Water has slowly receded in the north, while new areas have been flooded in central and southern Bangladesh. The strong current in the rivers has caused severe erosion. The Brahmaputra and Padma (Ganges) rivers are still flowing above the danger level but the rivers in the Meghna Basin have dropped below the danger mark.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) has completed Phase 1 of the relief operation. Funds of CHF 150,000 made available from the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) financed this phase, which reached 5,000 families, instead of the 6,500 indicated in the appeal's plan of action. Staff and volunteers distributed food, water purification tablets and clothing to the families who are located in the 17 worst affected districts, including Dhaka City. The ration for each family consisted of 30 kg of rice, 5 kg of lentils, 42 water purification tablets and 1 saree. The food is sufficient for an average family of five for 14 days. The distributions were completed by 31 August. Federation delegates monitored distributions in nine districts.

The BDRCS is now planning Phase 2 of the operation, which will be financed by donor funds. Since response to the appeal is low, 8,600 families will be assisted, rather than the 13,000 targeted by the appeal. They are being identified in the 20 districts which are at present the most affected. Of these, 10 are newly flooded: Barisal, Bhola, Chandpur, Chapainowabgonj, Kustia, Narshingdi, Naogaon, Natore, Pauakhali, and Rajshahi. The same ration will be distributed in Phase 2 as in Phase 1.

The BDRCS launched a National Appeal in the Bangla newspapers and the monthly BDRCS magazine *Message*. While an earlier appeal after a tornadoes disaster brought a good response, the public has so far shown little interest in the flood situation. However, results are not yet conclusive.

Other agencies' action

The Government of Bangladesh has completed its distributions of 3,000 metric tons of food and other emergency relief supplies. In addition, BDT 3 million (CHF 90,000) was given to District authorities for relief supplies and BDT 7 million (CHF 212,000) was provided for housing.

Few if any international NGOs are currently involved in flood relief. OXFAM, working through a local NGO, provided some relief aid but has now shifted to rehabilitation. Some local NGOs ran small relief operations in the north.

Outstanding needs

The situation in the affected areas has improved, but large areas remain flooded. Many families are returning to damaged houses after weeks in temporary shelters and a large number lost their harvest and food stocks. Landless labourers will have problems finding work to provide for their families and will face difficulties long after the water has receded. Beneficiaries need food, clean water and clothing and the current plan of action is considered both appropriate and adequate for providing these items to the 8,600 families targeted in phase 2. However, contributions to the appeal so far are inadequate to cover needs.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The flood situation continues to be closely monitored by the BDRCS and the Delegation. In the meantime, flood victims clearly remain in need of the assistance outlined in the Federation's appeal. Cash is urgently needed to continue this operation, the only significant flood relief operation serving the most vulnerable of the 5 million people affected. Donors are therefore urged to respond rapidly and generously, to enable the operation to take place as planned.

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