

BANGLADESH: Floods

7 July, 2000

appeal no. 23/98

situation report no. 7 (final report)

period covered: July 1998 - February 2000

In response to the worst mid-year floods on record in Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society and the Federation carried out a relief operation that in just over 18 months provided assistance to 3.5 million victims. Relief ranged from immediate distributions of food and medical assistance rendered by 100 mobile medical teams, to later distributions of clothing, water containers and vegetable seeds and the construction of 350 homes.

The context

Although floods in the delta plains of Bangladesh are an annual event, in 1998 the country faced the worst flooding in its history. The floodwaters engulfed two thirds of the country and affected an estimated 30.9 million people. At least 1,050 flood related deaths were recorded while 15,000 km of roads, 4,506 km of embankment, 979,000 houses and crops on 1.56 million hectares were damaged during the floods, which started in mid-June and lasted until the end of September.

The government was initially anxious to handle the disaster on its own, but confronted by a fast deteriorating situation it was compelled to seek international aid. A joint UN Appeal was launched on 5 September, 1998 seeking US\$ 223.02 million.

The Federation was the first international agency to launch a world wide appeal -- on 30 July, 1998. (It was preceded by the issuing of two Information Bulletins on 8 and 20 July, followed by an Alert on 27 July and the allocation the same day of CHF 200,000 from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF).)

The Appeal sought CHF 2,743,000 to assist 500,000 beneficiaries with food and medical services for a period of three months. The Appeal was revised on 10 September 1998, increasing the amount to CHF 10,075,000 to assist 1.5- 2 million beneficiaries. The final amount received from various donors was CHF 7,763,511 in cash and CHF 31,446 in kind and services.

Although the flood waters had receded by end September, the after-effects were enormous. The country was left facing a food deficit of 2.3 million MT. Restoring damaged infra-structure and the rehabilitation of agriculture were major priorities . A UNDP assessment put the loss in financial terms at US\$ 2 billion. A World Bank report predicted that the floods would cause a fall in the Gross Domestic Products (GDP) from 5.6% in 1997 to around 3% for 1998.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Objectives and Plan of Action •

Based on initially assessed needs, a Plan of Action (PoA) was prepared in mid-July by the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS), in consultation with the Federation Delegation in Bangladesh. Its major objectives were incorporated in the Federation's Emergency Appeal. They were to :

{ Provide emergency food rations to 100,000 most vulnerable families (500,000 beneficiaries) for three months in two phases.

-- In the first phase, distribute a ration of 10 kg *chira* (flattened rice) and 2 kg *gur* (molasses) among 20,000 families within a month of launching the appeal.

-- In the second phase, one month after the completion of the first distribution, distribute 80,000 food rations consisting of 30 kg rice and 5 kg *dal* (pulses) as a two weeks ration to 80,000 most affected families.

{ Provide emergency medical services to about 250,000 beneficiaries in the flood hit areas through 60 mobile medical teams, each comprising of a doctor, a paramedic, a BDRCS volunteer and a female support staff. The medical services were to run parallel to relief activities.

The PoA also included capacity building of BDRCS branches, monitoring and evaluation.

In view of the fast deteriorating flood situation a revised appeal was issued on 23 September 1998. It contained a revised PoA covering 1.5-2 million beneficiaries.

Its main objectives were :

{ Provision of rations consisting of 20 kg rice and 4 kg lentils (*dal*) to 280,000 families (1.4 million beneficiaries)

{ Supply of vegetable seeds to 100,000 families (500,000 beneficiaries) to supplement family diets and income

{ Provision of medical services to an estimated 450,000 beneficiaries in the flood affected areas, focusing on respiratory infections, water borne gastro-intestinal and skin diseases, through 100 medical teams

{ Provision of plastic water containers to 50,000 families

{ Provision of 100,000 *sarees* (women's item of clothing) to the most needy families.

When a sum of around CHF 251,000 remained un-spent from the medical budget, the donor (ECHO) generously agreed that the money could be spent on a housing programme involving the construction of 380 low-cost houses for destitute people in the districts of Bogra, Chandpur, Kurigram, Gopalganj, Jamalpur, Kurigram and Sirajganj which were badly affected by river erosion during the floods. Each house was built on a mud foundation prepared and raised above the average flood level. The four walls were made of framed bamboo fencing.

Achievements

The operation came to an end in October 1999, with the exception of the housing programme, which ended in mid-March 2000. It provided relief aid to about 2,883,800 flood affected people and medical services to about 668,500 people. Besides, 380 low-cost houses were built between December 1999 - March 2000, benefiting over 2,000 people, with money left from the ECHO funded medical relief operations. The total number of beneficiaries thus stood at over 3.55 million.

Procedures •

Units were given the responsibility of selecting beneficiaries who were most vulnerable, defined in the Society's "Disaster Relief Field Manual" as "Those who are unable to survive and recover and whose suffering cannot be alleviated without external assistance". The list was checked by the joint monitoring team of the Federation Delegation and BDRCS.

Procurement of all relief goods was made locally by the Federation Delegation in accordance with standard Federation procedures and through open bids. Strict quality checks were made at receiving points. Suppliers included the government owned Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) and several private firms.

Allocations of food relief materials were made to the flood affected districts according to assessed needs and requisitions made by units. Fresh allotment lists were prepared for the relief items before each phase of distribution .

All distributions were made directly to the selected beneficiaries through the local units. The committee members and RC Youth took part in the distributions. Efforts were made to avoid duplication with the on-going government and NGO relief activities. Collaboration from the local administration was drawn on throughout.

Distributions were effected at public places at an appointed time and date by officials and RCY/CPP/CBDP volunteers, in the presence of unit officials and members. The recipients put their thumb impressions in the register containing the beneficiary list.

The majority of the 52 affected districts were visited by the joint BDRCS/Federation monitoring teams, joined by the HoD, Delegates and Programme Officers. A Medical Relief Delegate monitored the medical relief operation for 6 weeks.

The emergency control room at the BDRCS remained open round the clock at the peak of the floods. A special format was developed and used by the monitoring team for spot evaluation of the performance of units in relief operation and management.

A 6-member central project committee, with a representative from the Delegation, was formed to oversee the housing operation. A joint BDRCS/ Federation monitoring team led by a relief delegate sponsored by the Korean (Rep.) RC continuously monitored progress. They verified the beneficiary list and checked documents. In some places, local landowners donated land to beneficiaries who did not own any land.

Food Relief Operation •

Procurement

In all, 7,222 MT Rice, 1,375 MT *Dal*, 400 MT Chira, 80 MT *Gur*, 64,500 water containers (Buckets & Mugs), 64,950 Sarees and 9.7 MT seeds were procured in phases, July 1998 - February 1999.

Chira and Gur were procured in two phases during August and September, 1998. Procurement of 822 MT rice and 137 MT *dal* were made in early September. A additional 2150 MT rice and 535 MT *dal* was

procured during September-December 1998. The last consignment of 4250 MT rice and 700 MT *dal* arrived by 8 February 1999.

Allocation

Chira and *gur* were the items of choice for immediate food relief to the flood victims. Quantities varying from 1500 kg - 6500 kg of *chira*, 300 kg - 1300 kg of *gur* were sanctioned to 39 affected districts/ metropolis, grouped in 5 categories. Total allocation stood at 200 MT of *Chira* and 40 MT *Gur* during the first phase.

In the second phase, 29 districts received allocations ranging from 5,750 kg - 11,750 kg *chira* and 1,150-2350 kg *gur*.

804 MT rice and 134 MT *dal* were allotted to 28 districts during the first phase of the operations. Amount varied from 21 MT to 36 MT rice and 3.5 MT to 7 MT *dal* per district.

During the second phase, allocations of 1,350 MT rice and 225 *dal* were made to 50 districts with quantities varying from 12-36 MT of rice and 2- 6 MT of *dal*. During the third phase, 800 MT rice and 160 MT *dal* were sanctioned to 20 districts/ city units, each receiving 40 MT rice and 8 MT *dal*. In the fourth phase, allocations of 3,420 MT rice and 684 MT *dal* were made to 51 districts/ units while another 848 MT rice and 169.6 MT *dal* were made to them in the fifth phase. The allocated amount varied from 30-100 MT of rice and 6-18 MT of *dal* per unit during the 4th phase and 10-68 MT of rice and 2-13 MT of *dal* during the 5th phase.

The allocated relief materials were despatched to the units in five phases during July-August, September and November of 1998 and January and April of 1999.

Distribution

The allotted *Chira* and *Gur* were distributed in two phases, the first 7-27 August and the second 14 September - 27 November, 1998.

The first to fifth phase distribution of rice and *dal* were carried out 8 September- 19 October, 10 October-27 November 1998 , 7 January- 25 April, 3 July-12 August and 29 September- 29 October 1999.

Medical Relief •

Basic medical treatment and information on flood related health issues were provided by 100 Red Crescent mobile medical teams working in 33 of the worst affected districts from 31 August to 8 December 1998. Each medical team consisted of one medical doctor, one paramedic, one local Red Crescent Youth volunteer, and one female volunteer from the community. The team was equipped with basic medicines. Each team worked for an average period of 50 days. With the exception of the one team in Dhaka, the teams were temporarily based in health centres at Union level, worked at each location for about 10 days and saw on an average 130 patients per day, mostly for complaints such as diarrhoea, respiratory infections, skin diseases and malnutrition. Co-ordination and monitoring of the medical teams was done by the NHQ Health Division. A total of 668,500 patients benefited from the programme.

Non-food Relief •

Procurement

Orders for procurement of 64,000 buckets, 64,000 mugs and 64,000 sarees were placed with suppliers 12-29 November and the delivery was completed by 17 December, 1998. To compensate for possible loss due to quality, the manufacturer provided an additional 1,880 pieces.

The procurement of 9.7 MT of seven selected varieties of seeds (Radish, Leaf Amaranth, Spinach, Kang kong, Tomato, Pumpkin and Knorkhol) was made in October. The Dhaka office of FAO checked and approved the samples.

Allocation/Distribution

The seeds were allotted to 40 districts. The quantity of the allocation varied from two to three MT per district.

64,950 sarees and 64,500 water containers were allocated to 51 districts/units. The number of the articles varied from 600 to 1700 per district.

All the seeds were distributed in November 1998. The water containers (plastic bucket and mug) and sarees were distributed in April 1999.

Rehabilitation (Housing) Programme •

The contract for the fabrication and erection of the 380 houses was awarded in November 1999 by the Federation on the basis of open tender. The following Table shows the completion dates of the houses in the respective districts.

Completion of House Construction

District	Date	Number
Kurigram	18.02.2000	50
Gaibandha	24.02.2000	60
Bogra	24.02.2000	50
Sirajganj	20.02.2000	50
Jamalpur	20.02.2000	60
Chandpur	27.02.2000	60
Gopalganj	15.03.2000	50

Media and Publicity •

BDRCS and Federation relief activities got very good coverage in the local press and media, including national radio and television. An appeal for help was broadcast at regular intervals on national television for several days. At least 31 news items and photographs on BDRCS activities appeared in the local press during the period. Interviews/statement of the Chairman and Secretary General of BDRCS appeared in the local and international press during and after the floods.

Copies of the Federation Appeal were sent to all diplomatic missions, bilateral and international agencies. Two information delegates from the regional office were sent to Dhaka to assist the BDRCS and Delegation in launching the Appeal and other media related activities.

The HoD and DP/Relief delegates were interviewed by the international media including BBC Radio and TV, CNN, Swedish and Dutch TV, VOA, Radio Finland and Singapore based CNBC Television.

The relief materials were packed in specially marked packets/sacks with logos of BDRCS, Federation and specific donors to ensure better visibility. Banners and flags were put up at distribution sites and the volunteers and staff wore aprons with RC markings during relief activities.

Intensive inter-agency contacts, especially with the Disaster Management Bureau of the government, the UNDP and Disaster Forum continued during the entire period. The Federation and National Society have been involved in the on-going process of formulating a National Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme by a UNDP Mission launched in 1999.

Constraints

General •

The 1998 floods affected over 30 million people, the majority of whom live below the poverty line. The necessity of turning away many of the 'most vulnerable' was a difficult task.

BDRCS had a governance problem during the first half of 1999, and was being run by an acting Chairman and an acting Secretary General during the second half of the year, which affected the decision making process.

A quickly deteriorating and fast changing flood scenario made the planning of activities difficult, as was evident from the revision of the Appeal.

Relief Operation •

Access to the flood affected areas was difficult as many road links were severed and journeys took longer which increased costs of transportation. At times boats or motor launches had to be used.

Units were not provided with funds for handling /carrying relief materials sent from NHQ for the first phase distribution. However, some allocations were made later.

Procurement of such huge amounts of relief materials locally was quite challenging and at times difficult. One consignment of rice from India was held at the border due to a temporary ban on Indian rice exports. Inspection of goods by a small number of delegates/ local staff was also difficult. Major quality checks were therefore done by external inspectors.

The absence of a functional executive committee at unit level in few districts caused problems in distribution as only the unit committees are entitled to receive and distribute relief materials.

Maintaining a strict operational schedule for relief and rehabilitation is not always possible because of external factors such as suppliers' failure to deliver each and every item in desired quality, quantity and on time, bad weather, disruption of communication, non-availability of required transport, and hartals (strikes). These called for revisions of contracts at different levels.

Failure to produce operational reports and documents on time was a common problem with most of the units.

Medical operation •

The recruitment of qualified doctors for a short period (up to 50 days) was difficult. Selection of sites for medical camps was at times influenced by different local groups. There was a tendency to keep the camps close to the Thana/District headquarters.

Storage of medicine was difficult as most camps had no access to refrigerators. Co-ordination was difficult as the camps were mostly without any tele-communication link with NHQ. (Many normal telecom facilities did not work during the peak of the flooding.)

Housing Programme •

The number of houses was too small compared to the number of destitute people and selection was therefore difficult. In some units, beneficiaries were selected from remote places, thus making monitoring extremely difficult. Dispersion of sites also posed problems for the contractors in transporting materials, which affected the price and also supervision.

The condition that the beneficiary had to own the land where the house was to be constructed was a difficult one for the most destitute. The 100% verification of the beneficiaries and documents, and quality checks of

building materials and construction called for repeat visits by the delegate and his team, which raised the indirect costs of the operation.

Several hartals and many holidays, including the two Eid festivals, hampered the work of the contractors, causing delay in implementation.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

Careful observation of the fast changing flood scenario and correct analyses of the gathered information enabled BDRCS and the Federation to accurately assess the gravity of the situation and led to the launching of an International Appeal by the Federation, well ahead of all other organisations. The massive relief operation benefited over three and a half million flood victims - over one and a half million more than was originally planned. The increased coverage was possible due to increased amounts for the costs budgeted and in some cases to decreased family quotas.

The inclusion of a small housing programme prolonged the operation but it brought about the realisation of a life time dream for at least some of the destitute. The non-food relief items have been very effective. The seeds supplemented much needed calories and provided some income for the poor, while the buckets helped safe water collection and storage. Sarees gave much needed mobility to many women who were left with only one or two items of clothing to wear. The medical operations were equally beneficial and at times life-saving.

The operation offered good opportunities for dissemination of the Red Cross principles and promoting the image of the donors, the National Society and the Federation.

Spot evaluations of units by the monitoring teams showed that they operated at between 52% - 80 % efficiency. This underlines the need for further capacity building of some units. The relief/rehabilitation activities were carried out more effectively where there was a strong presence of RCYs and CBDP/ CPP volunteers and local level support from units, government administration, NGOs and the community was available.

The experiences have been diverse and lessons learned have been many, some of which were shared with other international agencies afterwards.

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This and other reports on Federation operations are available on the Federation's website: <http://www.ifrc.org>

**District/Unit allocation and distribution of
chira, molasses, rice, dal, vegetable seeds, buckets and sarees with family and beneficiary numbers**

District	Name of the Unit	Total allocation in kg				Vegetable seeds pkts	Buckets pcs	Saree pcs	No. of Family	No. of beneficiaries
		Chira	Molasses	Rice	Dal					
1.00	Panchagar			77 000	15 000		680.00	780.00	5 110	25 550
2.00	Nilphamari	1 500	300.00	95 000	18 000	2,000.00	1,050.00	1,050.00	8 500	42 500
3.00	Lalmonirhat	5 000	1 000	130 000	24 500	2,000.00	1,250.00	1,250.00	10 750	53 750
4.00	Rangpur	5 000	1 000	115 000	22 000	2,000.00	1,250.00	1,250.00	9 750	48 750
5.00	Kurigram	6 500	1 300	228 000	43 000	3,000.00	1,760.00	1,760.00	17 270	86 350
6.00	Gaibandha	5 000	1 000	228 000	43 000	3,000.00	1,760.00	1,760.00	17 270	86 350
7.00	Joypurhat	4 500	900.00	81 000	15 500	2,000.00	1,040.00	1,040.00	8 230	41 150
8.00	Naogoan	5 000	1 000	104 000	20 000	2,000.00	1,240.00	1,240.00	9 580	47 900
9.00	Chapai-Nawabganj	5 000	1 000	190 000	36 000	2,000.00	1,750.00	1,750.00	14 500	72 500
10.00	Rajshahi District	10 250	2 050	155 000	30 000	2,000.00	1,250.00	1,250.00	10 775	53 875
11.00	Natore			115 000	22 000		1,250.00	1,250.00	7 750	38 750
12.00	Bogra	5 000	1 000	210 000	40 000	3,000.00	1,550.00	1,550.00	16 100	80 500
13.00	Sirajganj	14 500	2 900	238 000	45 000	3,000.00	1,760.00	1,760.00	18 570	92 850
14.00	Pabna	13 000	2 600	210 000	40 000	3,000.00	1,560.00	1,560.00	16 920	84 600
15.00	Kustia	4 500	900.00	95 000	18 500	2,000.00	1,240.00	1,240.00	9 430	47 150
16.00	Chuadanga			55 000	10 500		640.00	640.00	3 780	18 900
17.00	Magura	5 750	1 150	58 000	11 000		640.00	740.00	4 555	22 775
18.00	Jessore	5 750	1 150	75 000	14 500		940.00	1,040.00	6 055	30 275
19.00	Narail	5 750	1 150	55 000	10 500	2,000.00	640.00	740.00	6 455	32 275
20.00	Satkhira	5 750	1 150	75 000	14 500		1,040.00	1,040.00	6 155	30 775
21.00	Bagerhat			75 000	14 500		840.00	840.00	5 180	25 900
22.00	Pirojpur			75 000	14 500		740.00	740.00	4 980	24 900
23.00	Barisal	5 750	1 150	100 000	19 500	2,000.00	1,050.00	1,050.00	9 425	47 125
24.00	Gopalganj	16 750	3 350	140 000	27 000	2,000.00	1,760.00	1,760.00	13 695	68 475
25.00	Madaripur	14 500	2 900	196 000	37 000	3,000.00	1,740.00	1,740.00	16 630	83 150
26.00	Shariatpur	14 500	2 900	210 000	40 000	3,000.00	1,550.00	1,550.00	17 050	85 250
27.00	Faridpur	7 500	1 500	144 000	27 000	3,000.00	1,260.00	1,260.00	12 570	62 850
28.00	Rajbari	12 500	2 500	204 000	39 000	3,000.00	1,750.00	1,750.00	17 050	85 250
29.00	Manikganj	7 250	1 450	144 000	27 000	3,000.00	1,260.00	1,260.00	12 545	62 725
30.00	Dhaka District	6 500	1 300	134 000	25 000	2,000.00	1,240.00	1,240.00	10 930	54 650
31.00	Gazipur	8 000	1 600	115 000	22 000	2,000.00	1,250.00	1,250.00	10 550	52 750
32.00	Narsingdi	13 000	2 600	210 000	40 000	3,000.00	1,760.00	1,760.00	17 320	86 600
33.00	Narayanganj	14 500	2 900	206 000	39 000	3,000.00	1,560.00	1,560.00	16 770	83 850
34.00	Munshiganj	12 250	2 450	228 000	43 000	3,000.00	1,560.00	1,560.00	17 445	87 225

36.00	Jamalpur	6 500	1 300	200 000	38 000	3,000.00	1,760.00	1,760.00	9 650	48 250
37.00	Sherpur	1 500	300.00	115 000	22 000	2,000.00	1,250.00	1,250.00	10 400	52 000
38.00	Mymensingh	14 500	2 900	206 000	39 000	3,000.00	1,560.00	1,560.00	16 770	83 850
39.00	Netrokana	5 000	1 000	115 000	22 000	2,000.00	1,250.00	1,250.00	10 250	51 250
40.00	Kishoreganj	13 000	2 600	211 000	40 000	3,000.00	1,540.00	1,540.00	16 830	84 150
41.00	Sunamganj	6 500	1 300	102 000	19 000	2,000.00	1,040.00	1,040.00	9 130	45 650
42.00	Sylhet	7 750	1 550	61 000	11 500	2,000.00	640.00	640.00	6 755	33 775
43.00	Hobiganj	10 750	2 150	66 000	12 500	2,000.00	650.00	650.00	7 325	36 625
44.00	BrahmanBaria	12 250	2 450	206 000	39 000	3,000.00	1,750.00	1,750.00	16 925	84 625
45.00	Comilla	12 250	2 450	264 000	53 000	3,000.00	1,560.00	1,560.00	19 445	97 225
46.00	Chandpur	14 500	2 900	216 000	41 000	3,000.00	1,550.00	1,550.00	17 250	86 250
47.00	Laxmipur	5 750	1 150	102 000	19 000	2,000.00	840.00	840.00	8 955	44 775
48.00	Noakhali	5 750	1 150	98 000	18 500	2,000.00	950.00	1,050.00	9 225	46 125
49.00	Feni	6 500	1 300	58 000	11 000		590.00	540.00	4 680	23 400
50.00	Chittagong district	6 500	1 300	0.00					650.00	3 250
51.00	Cox's Bazar	5 000	1 000	0.00					500.00	2 500
52.00	Rajshahi City			66 000	12 500		640.00	640.00	4 230	21 150
53.00	Dhaka City	12 250	2 450	156 000	29 000		1,760.00	1,760.00	1 225	6 125
	Total	400 000	80 000	7 222 000	1 375 000	100 000	64 500	64 950	576 760	2 883 800