

# **BANGLADESH: FLOODS**

31 August 1998

*Appeal no. 23/98*

*situation report no. 2*

*period covered: 10 - 24 August*

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*Bangladesh's worst floods since 1954 are now affecting 30 million people and still spreading, forcing the government to appeal for international aid. The BDRCS/Federation relief operation has completed its first round of food distributions and is beginning the second. Because of the rapidly growing needs, plans are under way to considerably enlarge the scope of the operation.*

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## ***The context***

The floods in Bangladesh are still spreading, engulfing new areas and seriously affecting increasing numbers of the population. They have now caused damage that surpasses the great deluge of 1988 and matches that of 1954.

The monsoon rains in June triggered flash floods in the north, and torrential rains in July brought further floods throughout the south-east. The situation has worsened since mid-July: vast areas of crop lands, human habitats, roads and railway lines are now under water. Widespread erosion is occurring along the banks of the great rivers.

The flood waters show little sign of receding, and are likely to remain until at least mid September. Further monsoon rains and water from melting snow in the Himalayas are aggravating the situation (92% of the water comes from catchment areas outside Bangladesh totalling 1,5 million square km, or eleven times the size of the country). The effects of the flood, in particular on the health and economic conditions of the population will persist long after the water recedes, with the worst period being until the next crop has been harvested.

## ***Latest events***

As of today, about 30 million people are affected by the floods. Three quarters of a million hectares of agricultural land are currently submerged and most of the autumn rice crops are ruined. Many of the poorer flood-affected people are falling prey to diseases and, with road communications severed in many parts of the country, prices of food are soaring. Agricultural activities in the country have come to a virtual standstill and work is becoming scarce. Army personnel have been deployed to save collapsing dikes and eroding roads. Low lying parts of Dhaka, mostly slum areas, are inundated. Even the yards of the BDRCS National Headquarters are partly under water, affecting the ongoing relief operation.

In view of the rapidly deteriorating situation, the Government of Bangladesh on 24 August formally appealed for relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction assistance from other governments, international agencies and development partners. The President and the Prime Minister have expressed their appreciation of the action taken so far by the BDRCS and are urging the Society to increase and intensify its relief activities.

The government has so far allocated 67,562 mt rice, the equivalent of CHF 1 million in cash, 233,800 pcs of clothes and some other items for the flood victims.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent action***

The BDRCS, supported by the Federation, has distributed 198,5 mt of flattened rice and 39.7 mt of molasses to 38 BDRCS Units ending 20 August. (The Federation is responsible for procurement of foodstuffs and medicaments.) The first phase of the operation covered 19,850 families (99,250 beneficiaries). Monitoring of the operation was done through two joint Federation/BDRCS field missions. Using their own resources, some BDRCS district branches have distributed additional emergency food.

The delivery of 822 mt of rice and 137 mt of dal (lentil) for the second distribution phase commenced on 22 August and is expected to be completed on 4 September. The allocated food was despatched to the first branch on 23 August and will continue to the districts in accordance with the prioritised list drawn up by the BDRCS and the Federation. The food is sufficient for 27,400 families of the planned 80,000 families, the ration being 30 kg of rice and 5 kg dal per family.

## ***Outstanding needs***

In view of the fast deteriorating situation and the increasing needs, the scope of the BDRCS relief activities needs to be expanded. The BDRCS plans to target up to 500,000 families (2,5 million beneficiaries). This will call for a revised needs assessment and Plan of Action (PoA).

As insufficient provision was made for local transport costs in the PoA, some branches were compelled to distribute relief in areas close to the towns. Additional funds or alternative transport arrangements may be needed for distributions in remote areas. Since road links with flood affected areas are severed, river transport or even some air lifting of goods may have to be envisaged.

## ***External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media***

Liaison with the relevant government and other agencies continues. The Federation and BDRCS regularly receive information updates from authoritative sources. BDRCS relief efforts have been widely covered in local and national newspapers, and Red Crescent flags and banners are displayed in all distribution points. The local authorities have given their full co-operation to the relief operation.

## ***Contributions***

See Annex 1 for details.

## ***Conclusion***

All forecasts about the flood situation in the near future point to a further deterioration. The original PoA -- to distribute supplementary food to 100,000 families (500,000 beneficiaries) and provide 60 medical teams -- is insufficient, now that about twenty million people are affected by the floods. The threat of acute food shortages is looming steadily larger. BDRCS and the Federation are therefore considering a revised PoA which may require much greater support from the Federation and its member Societies.

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