

BANGLADESH: FLOODS

16 October 1998

appeal no. 23/98 (revised)

situation report no. 3

period covered: 3 September - 27 September

On 10 September the International Federation revised its Appeal to reflect increased needs in Bangladesh as a result of flooding which has lasted since June and has affected more than 30 million people, or a quarter of the population. As flood waters have begun to recede in some areas, the National Society has begun the challenging tasks of distributing post-flood relief, rehabilitation and epidemic control throughout the country.

The context

The long lasting floods, the worst in the history of Bangladesh, have started receding over the last three weeks and most of the rivers have registered sharp falls in water levels. The monsoon rains triggered flash floods in the north of the country in June. Torrential rains and on-rush of water from mountainous areas across the border in July brought in further floods which gradually engulfed over two thirds of the country. The floods have caused 918 deaths, destroyed crops, and inflicted heavy damages to property and infrastructure. In this nation of 120 million people, over a quarter have been directly affected.

Relief works continue unabated in the flood-hit areas including the capital. All NGOs and various national organizations/associations carry out relief operations and raise funds on their own.

Procurement of food and provision of medical relief have been the immediate priority of the government, as well as the restoration of road and railway communication disrupted during the floods. Massive programmes for rehabilitation of agriculture, re-establishment of communication networks and rural income generation have been announced by the government. Donor response has been encouraging. Government and UN agencies have ruled out the possibility of famine or outbreak of epidemics, but the rapid spread of diarrhoea and other waterborne diseases remain a major health concern.

On 10 September, a revised Appeal of CHF 10,075,000 was launched by the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS)/Federation. The first Appeal was more than covered by Participating National Societies and some responses to the revised Appeal have already been received. The National Society, with active support of the Federation is preparing for the challenging tasks of post-flood relief, rehabilitation and epidemic control throughout the country.

Latest events

The Government reported 322,000 cases of diarrhoea by 24 September, of which 336 had died. The number of people affected by the floods has increased to 30,916,000 and more than 1 million have sought shelter in schools and public buildings. 980,000 houses, 15,927 km of roads 6795 bridges and culverts have been damaged beyond repairs. Crops on 1,423,320 acres of land have been destroyed. So far, over BDT 57 million (approximately CHF 1.8 million) in cash and 90,000 MT of rice and 650 MT of wheat have been distributed by the government to the flood victims. The leading NGOs in the country have announced a BDT 1 billion (approx. CHF 31.6 million) relief and rehabilitation programme for the flood affected, implementation of which is already underway. The European Community has finalised a USD 33 million aid package for Bangladesh.

In 44 of the 52 affected districts, the waters have mostly receded and road links between the major cities have been restored. Due to the poor condition of the roads, the journey times have doubled or tripled for the majority of the inter-district travels. On 19 September, the government announced a relief and rehabilitation programme of USD 879.5 million. The government will soon start Open Market Sales and Food For Work Programmes in order to stabilise the food prices and to generate rural employment. The rehabilitation programme, due to start in October, will include a project for sinking tube-wells across the country. The government has also extended the duration of its mobile medical teams in flood affected areas for another month. The Prime Minister has ordered the initiation of construction works for a 60 km circular embankment to protect the capital from future floods.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

On 31 July, the first truck loads of food items, procured with funds from the initial Appeal, were sent from the Central BDRCS warehouse to local warehouses in the districts. At that time, many of the BDRCS branches in the affected districts had already started emergency food distribution from funds raised locally. As road communication gradually came to a virtual halt, boats had to be chartered to transport the goods along the river routes to flooded districts and distribution points, and the BDRCS district branch volunteers faced serious difficulties reaching the beneficiaries with the food.

The first phase procurements have included the following food items:

Rice	:	822 MT
Lentils	:	137 MT
Flattened Rice	:	400 MT
Molasses	:	80 MT
Biscuits	:	3 MT

In order to provide basic medical treatment and counselling, 22 mobile medical teams, out of 60 planned, were sent out by the BDRCS to the affected areas on 31 August. The remaining 38 medical teams were dispersed from Dhaka on 21 September. Each team comprises a physician, a paramedic, a local female volunteer and a youth volunteer, and is supplied with basic medicines. Some BDRCS Branches have prepared oral saline for free distribution to people affected by diarrhoea.

Another 1350 MT of rice, 225 MT of lentils, 30 MT of flattened rice and 6 MT of molasses is being procured to complete the first phase activities, and 14 districts have been supplied to date.

The food distributions are being carried out by the local BDRCS branches, in co-ordination with the local administration. Since the beginning of the floods, the majority of the branches have been involved in the collection and distribution of the relief items in their areas. All activities are being supervised and monitored by the International Federation's delegation in Dhaka, joined for the short-term by relief and information delegates. At BDRCS, the Chairman and the Secretary General, assisted by Departmental Heads including the two deputy secretary generals, have permanently co-ordinated the relief operations. For information and co-ordination purposes, a Control Room has been set up at the headquarters of the ONS.

Outstanding needs

The immediate needs of the flood victims remain food and health care, particularly in the remote areas of the country. Intensifying curative and preventive measures to stop the outbreak of an epidemic of diarrhoeal diseases is urgently needed. Reconstruction of the destroyed infrastructure and rehabilitation of housing and agriculture are other immediate tasks.

The coverage of the remote areas with food, clean water and medical assistance has been a very difficult and expensive task due to disrupted communications. Widespread malnutrition over the next few months, particularly among women and children is feared. Intervention in this field may soon turn out to be an immediate need. The BDRCS and the Federation are presently consulting with other organisations, like Radda Barnen, to address this need.

Adequate funds for the procurement of food supplies, vegetable seeds and medicines is required to ensure a timely distribution. Some vegetable seeds have already been procured by the International Federation in co-operation with the Food and Agriculture Organisation, and will soon be distributed on a priority basis.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The BDRCS Chairman and the Head of Delegation have met with the High Commissioners and Ambassadors of several countries based in Dhaka, to brief them on the flood situation and the relief operation of the BDRCS and the Federation. Frequent field visits to branches in the remote districts, along with the Vice-Chairman, senior BDRCS staff and representatives from the GTZ, ECHO, UNDAC, BBC and local media (including the national TV) have also been undertaken. Intense interagency contacts continued as usual during the reporting period.

Bangladesh TV, radio and press have given extensive coverage to the BDRCS relief operation and the support from the International Federation. Regular press releases are issued by the BDRCS information department. Representatives of the BDRCS and the delegation have been interviewed by the different TV services, CNN, CNBC, Swedish, Dutch, Australian and Middle East TV as well as by VOA, Finnish, German, French, British and Swedish radio stations, Reuters and other news agencies. Articles on the floods by DP and Information delegates are appearing in the local press and shared with sister National Societies through the Secretariat's Media Service.

Health-related brochures, reprinted BDRCS Relief Field Manuals and other printed material have been distributed to the BDRCS Branches for sharing with the affected population and for the volunteers.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

With the rapid recession of the flood waters, the situation has stabilised in most of the affected areas, but the effects and extent of damages have now become most apparent. The government, the BDRCS and the NGOs, supported by the public in Bangladesh and the international community, are now engaged in an enormous and unprecedented relief and rehabilitation operation. Most of the BDRCS branches have managed to distribute the relief goods to beneficiaries in the worst affected areas. However, it is clear that the branches where the International Federation has supported institutional development and disaster preparedness programmes have performed better. Those branches have responded more rapidly, raised resources by themselves, and provided aid to the more remote areas, and mobilised more volunteers.

The needs of the millions of affected people are still huge, and efforts need to be intensified to reach the most vulnerable among them. The threat of malnutrition and disease will continue for a long time, especially to children, elderly and disabled persons in rural Bangladesh. Therefore, the International Federation urges its member National Societies to continue their generous support to the revised Appeal.

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