

BANGLADESH: FLOODS

12 January 1999

***appeal no. 23/98 : REVISION -- operation extended until the end of February
situation report no. 4***

period covered: 28 September - 28 December

Because of transport problems early on due to the extent of the flooding, the duration of the operation has been extended until the end of February. The first two phases of food distributions have been completed, the third phase is underway and procurement for the fourth is in progress. Vegetable seeds have been distributed to 100,000 families. During three months of activity, one hundred medical teams handled a caseload of over 677,000 patients in flood affected areas.

The context

From June to September 1998, Bangladesh experienced the worst floods in its history, affecting more than two thirds of the country. The floods were triggered by heavy monsoon rains and water from the mountains and river catchment areas in neighbouring countries. Towards the end of August, 52 of the country's 64 districts, including major metropolitan areas, were badly flooded. Over 30 million people were affected, of whom over 1 million were made homeless.

The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) and the Bangladesh Delegation of the International Federation closely monitored the deteriorating flood situation from the beginning. A Plan of Action was developed, and the Federation was the first organisation to launch an International Appeal on 30 July, seeking 2,743,000 CHF to assist 500,000 beneficiaries for a period of three months.

As the situation worsened, the Appeal was revised on 10 September, seeking CHF 10,075,000 to assist 1.5 to 2 million flood-affected people, in phases:

- * Provision of 10 kgs of Chira (flattened rice) and 2 kgs of Gur (molasses) to 20,000 marooned families without cooking possibilities;
- * Providing 80,000 families with 30 kgs of rice and 5 kgs of dal (lentils);
- * Providing 280,000 families with 20 kgs of rice and 4 kgs of dal;
- * Providing basic medical assistance to an estimated 450,000 patients through 100 mobile medical teams;
- * Distribution of a water container and saree to 50,000 families;
- * Distribution of 100,000 family packages of various vegetable seeds for homestead vegetable growing.

Flooding was so extensive at the start of the operation that it was almost impossible to transport relief goods to distribution points. The time scale of the operation has therefore had to be extended. It is now expected to be completed by the end of February.

Latest events

Statistics on flood damage throughout the country, including those of the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) indicate a death toll of 1,050, with 1.56 m hectares of crops damaged, 900,000 houses destroyed, and 300,000 tubewells damaged

A UNDP assessment has put the loss in financial terms at US \$ 2 billion. A World Bank report predicts the floods will cause a fall in the GDP growth rate from 5.6% in 1997 to around 3% in 1998. Industrial and agricultural production for export has also been seriously affected.

The Head of a visiting EU parliamentary delegation expressed satisfaction over the "systematic and organised distribution" of food to the flood victims by the GoB. In a press briefing on 2 November, the Foreign Minister said that "Bangladesh has received positive responses to her call for assistance to the flood victims, from the international community, UN agencies, friendly nations, donor agencies, the International (Federation of) Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and expatriate Bangladeshis".

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Procurement •

All procurement of relief items has been done locally by the Delegation in accordance with standard Federation procedures.

- a) The procurement of the 7 selected varieties of seeds (a total of 7,700 kgs. of Radish Leaf, Amaranth Spinach, Kang Kong, Tomato, Pumpkin and Knorkhol) was completed by 8 November. The contracts were signed on 30 September, with quality control ensured through the use of the FAO Dhaka office.
- b) Purchase orders for 64,000 water containers (buckets and mugs) were issued on 12 and 15 November. The delivery of these items was completed by 19 December.
- c) A purchase order for 64,000 sarees (women's clothing) was issued on 29 November. Delivery was completed by the supplier between 9 and 17 December with quality control carried out by professional inspection agents.
- d) The second phase procurement of rice and dal has been completed, while that of the third and fourth phase is ongoing. Quantities were as follows:

Rice: 1,350 MT (2nd phase), 1,550 MT (3rd phase), 3,500 MT (4th phase)
Dal : 225 MT (2nd phase), 310 MT (3rd phase), 700 MT (4th phase)

The third phase rice and dal purchase orders were signed on 11 November with delivery continuing until 31 December. Due to the lack of space in the central warehouse at the NHQ, additional space has been rented at convenient locations in Dhaka.

Quality control has been ensured through the use of professional inspection agents for phase 3 and phase 4 procurements, while phase 2 rice and dal procurement was inspected jointly by the Federation and BDRCS. Although some of the rice and dal had to be rejected because of quality deficiencies, the delivery schedules were generally maintained.

Distribution •

The relief items are received in Dhaka and then despatched to BDRCS units throughout the country for distribution to the beneficiaries. The BDRCS "*Disaster Relief Field Manual*" and "*Relief Field Kits*" had been sent earlier to the branches to help efficient distribution.

Rice & Dal

The transfer of the 2nd phase of rice and dal (for 75,056 families) from the NHQ to 50 district branches started on 9 September. The distributions were completed between 4 October and 27 November, and almost all of the branches have submitted their reports on the distribution and fund utilisation to the

NHQ. The delivery from the NHQ and distribution by the branches of the third phase of rice and dal is now going on, and the fourth phase is expected to continue until the end of February.

Vegetable seeds

The vegetable seeds have been distributed in 40 of the 52 affected districts (100,000 families). The districts were divided into two categories, A & B, depending on the degree of devastation, land use patterns and coverage by other agencies. Under category A, 20 districts were identified, each covering 3,000 families. In category B, 20 districts were selected, each covering 2,000 families. The seed distribution was completed by 30 November. The seeds were packed in small bags printed with the BDRCS emblem and name, a picture of the vegetable and directives for planting.

Medical Services

Basic medical treatment and information on flood related health issues was provided by 100 Red Crescent mobile medical teams working in 33 of the most affected districts between 31 August and 8 December. Each medical team consisted of one medical doctor, one paramedic, one local Red Crescent Youth volunteer, and one female volunteer from the community and 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 consulted on an average 130 patients per day, mostly for diseases such as diarrhoea, respiratory infections, skin diseases and malnutrition. Co-ordination and monitoring of the teams was done by the NHQ Health Division. A total of 677,883 patients benefited from the programme.

Monitoring •

The joint BDRCS/Federation monitoring teams have visited a majority of the 52 affected districts and many BDRCS relief distributions have been attended by the Head of Delegation, two Relief Delegates and one Disaster Preparedness Delegate. In addition to observing whether the Branches implemented the distributions in accordance with the guidelines in the "*BDRCS Disaster Relief Field Manual*", the joint monitoring teams also discussed problems related to the operation and made proposals for improvement. Separate monitoring visits were made to the districts covered by the seed distribution programme, and the teams observed that most of the beneficiaries had made satisfactory use of the seeds as soon as they received them. A Medical Relief Delegate monitored the medical relief operation for a period of 6 weeks. The medical activities were also covered by other Federation Delegates while monitoring food and seed distributions.

Outstanding needs

Thanks to the timely response from the Federation and PNSs, BDRCS, with support from the Delegation, will be able to carry out most of the planned activities, supplementing the efforts of the GoB and other agencies.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

News about Red Crescent relief activities continues to appear in the regional and national press as well as on national television and radio. The Federation Delegation has also provided information to the international media including the BBC, CNN and Reuters.

During this period delegation and BDRCS representatives continued as usual to attend co-ordination meetings with GoB and UN agencies, the NGO Disaster Forum and district administrations.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

During the disaster, many development programme components, both at the NHQ and the branches, could not be carried out because of the very severe floods. However, field visit reports by the Federation and by senior BDRCS officers and Management Board members reveal that branches benefiting from institutional development and disaster preparedness programmes performed better than other branches in the flood relief operation. They distributed faster and more accurately and followed the instructions of the BDRCS Relief Manual better. BDRCS members, trained volunteer Core Groups and CBDP squads helped to raise local funds and collected relief materials from their local population and from the local Government administration. In some districts they also started local production of Oral Rehydration Salts (ORS) for free distribution to people suffering from diarrhoea.

The flood waters have receded, but the effects of the floods remain and now the cold winter is making the situation of the affected people worse. The GoB, with support from WFP, has expanded its food assistance to vulnerable groups. BDRCS distribution of food, seeds, water containers, and clothes and the work of the medical teams has been extremely helpful, and at times life saving, but continuing support for rehabilitation is equally important. People have returned to their homes, but the seeds distributed to them will not bear crops until January or February. Continued distribution of food by BDRCS in early 1999 will be important, helping the affected population to stretch further their very limited resources and in time return to normal life.

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