

BANGLADESH : FLOODS

16 March 1999

appeal no. 23/98

situation report no. 5

period covered: 29 December -15 February

The fourth phase distribution of over 4,000 tons of rice and dal in 51 districts is underway, providing families with a valuable food supplement in the current pre-harvest lean season. In parallel, sarees and water containers have been given to 62,000 families. The operation should be concluded by the end of March.

The context

Between June and October last year, Bangladesh experienced the worst flooding in its history. Floods that started in the north and north east soon after engulfed two thirds of the country, causing over one thousand deaths and extensive damage to standing crops, human habitats and development infrastructure. About 30 million people in 52 of the country's 64 districts and four metropolitan areas were directly affected, many being left homeless. Serious outbreaks of diarrhoea occurred in many places.

The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) and its branches launched immediate rescue and relief operations. Assisted by the Federation, the BDRCS developed a Plan of Action (PoA) which formed the basis of the International Appeal for CHF 2,743,000 launched by the Federation on 30 July, 1998. When the situation deteriorated further, a revised appeal was issued on 10 September, increasing the amount sought to CHF 10,075,000.

Envisaged activities under the PoA included distributions of: (a) dry food items such as chira (flattened rice) and gur (molasses) to marooned people; (b) rice and dal (lentils); (c) packages of winter vegetable seeds; (d) water containers and sarees (women's clothing); as well as the provision of medical services through an estimated 100 mobile medical teams. The target beneficiaries were initially 500,000 of the most vulnerable among flood victims in the flood affected districts, including the capital. The target population was increased to 1.5-2.0 million in the revised appeal. Vegetable seeds were distributed among 100,000 families. Medical services were planned for about 450,000 patients.

The food relief distribution is expected to continue throughout February and March 1999. February to April is always a time when the very poorest and the landless are most at risk from food scarcity problems due to lack of purchasing power.

All the relief materials were procured by the Federation delegation in Dhaka. Distributions have been effected by local units of the Society and in accordance with the established rules of the Society. Monitoring of the operations is being done regularly by the Federation delegation.

Latest events

The government's Vulnerable Group Feeding programme (VGF), initiated in October 1998, under which 40 million families across the country are entitled to 16 kg of food grains each, is continuing. However, because of elections in 140 municipalities of the country, VGF operations have been suspended for about two weeks. BDRCS has also been asked by the Election Commission to suspend its relief operations in municipal areas during this period. As a result, no transportation or distribution of relief goods was made before 25 February. The open market sales operation of food grains at reasonable prices is also continuing through government outlets in the cities, including Dhaka.

Other routine activities are continuing, although they have been hampered by one 60 hour, one 72 hour and one 36 hour Hartal (general strike), called by the opposition in January and February.

The Parliament voted a Bill in late November authorising the imposition of additional taxes, amounting to BDT 3 billion, as part of internal resource mobilisation efforts to overcome the effects of the floods.

A UNICEF-sponsored study released on 30 January confirmed the reappearance of rickets, a crippling disease in growing children, in some parts of the country. One in every three children tested was found to have been affected by the disease in one way or another. Researchers attributed the disease to nutritional deficiencies which were aggravated after the floods of 1998. However, the lack of purchasing power of the rural poor, rather than the quality of the food items supplied appears to be the root cause.

Work on the proposed 60 km circular road cum embankment to protect the capital from future floods has begun. Most of the flood damaged infrastructures have been renovated. The construction of an internal road and parking lot at the NHQ of BDRCS, which was severely damaged by the floods, has been tendered for and work is expected to start shortly.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Procurement

All procurement of relief items has been done locally by the Federation Delegation in accordance with standard Federation procedures. During the period the following procurement has taken place, with all goods received, inspected and cleared for distribution :

Phase 3 balance	750 MT Rice	13 January 1999
Phase 4	3,500 MT Rice	08 February 1999
Phase 4	700 MT Dal	07 February 1999

Receipt of the Phase 3 rice was delayed due to the Holy Month of Ramadan and the holding of the Annual General Meeting of BDRCS. In order to ensure quality specifications were adhered to, all relief goods procured in this period were subject to independent inspection by professional agents.

Storage

After the despatch of the sarees, buckets and third phase rice, the rented warehouse in Dhaka was vacated following a decision to receive the 3,500 MT fourth phase rice in the BDRCS Chittagong warehouse. This resulted in considerable effort on the part of the Federation and BDRCS staff, working around the clock for six days, but ensured that the rice could be received faster and at a slight cost saving.

Allocation

750 MT of rice was allocated and despatched to 17 out of 51 districts to cover part of phase 4. The total phase 4 allocation is about 3,480 MT of rice and 696 MT of dal.

Distribution

No.	Category	District	Allocation (mt)		Allocation (pcs)	
			Rice	Dal	Saree	Water Container
1	A	Kurigram	90	18	1,700	1,700
2		Sirajganj	100	20	1,700	1,700
3		Lalmonirhat	70	14	1,200	1,200
4		Rangpur	70	14	1,200	1,200
5		Jamalpur	80	16	1,700	1,700
6		Madaripur	80	16	1,700	1,700
7		Sunamganj	50	10	1,000	1,000
8		Mymensingh	80	16	1,500	1,500
9		Brahmanbaria	80	16	1,700	1,700
10		Gaibanda	90	18	1,700	1,700
11		Bogra	90	18	1,500	1,500
12		Rajshahi City	30	6	600	600
13		Feni	30	6	500	500
14	B	Dhaka City	70	14	1,700	1,700
15		Shariatpur	90	18	1,500	1,500
16		Narayanganj	80	16	1,500	1,500
17		Chandpur	90	18	1,500	1,500
18		Gopalganj	90	18	1,700	1,700
19		Naogaon	70	14	1,200	1,200
20		Joypurhat	50	10	1,000	1,000
21		Pabna	90	18	1,500	1,500
22		Narsingdi	90	18	1,700	1,700
23	B	Chapai-Nawabganj	80	16	1,700	1,700
24		Tangail	90	18	1,500	1,500
25		Kishoreganj	90	18	1,500	1,500
26		Netrokana	70	14	1,200	1,200
27		Rajbari	90	18	1,700	1,700
28		Kushtia	70	14	1,200	1,200
29		Dhaka Dist	70	14	1,200	1,200
30		Sylhet	30	6	600	600
31		Nilphamari	50	10	1,000	1,000
32	C	Manikganj	70	14	1,200	1,200

34		Faridpur	70	14	1,200	1,200
35	D	Sherpur	70	14	1,200	1,200
36		Barisal	70	14	1,000	1,000
37		Narail	30	6	700	600
38		Jessore	50	10	1,000	900
39		Satkhira	50	10	1,000	1,000
40	E	Rajshahi Dist	70	14	1,200	1,200
41	F	Magura	30	6	700	600
42		Gazipur	70	14	1,200	1,200
43		Comilla	90	18	1,500	1,500
44		Noakhali	50	10	1,000	900
45		Laxmipur	50	10	800	800
46		Chuadanga	30	6	600	600
47		Bagerhat	50	10	800	800
48		Pirojpur	50	10	700	700
49		Natore	70	14	1,200	1,200
50		Panchagarh	30	6	700	600
51		Habiganj	30	6	600	600
Total			3,420	684	62,400	61,900

Distribution

Rice and dal: the phase 3 distribution of rice and dal started on 5 November and is still continuing

Water containers: the water containers have been distributed in 51 districts (64,000 families). The distribution started on 13 January 1999 and has been completed in all but 5 districts.

Sarees: The sarees have been distributed in 51 districts (64,000 families). The distribution started on 13 January 1999 and is continuing.

Monitoring

A Relief delegate of the Federation visited Brahmanbaria, Chandpur, Noakhali and Comilla, 25-28 January, and Gaibandha, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Jaipurhat, Bogra and Sirajganj, 3-6 January, to monitor flood relief operations there.

Except for a few items damaged during loading and unloading, the quality of the distributed goods was reported to be satisfactory by branch officials and beneficiaries.

Some rice and dal was distributed during January. The branches ensured that there is no duplication with beneficiaries of the government's VGF programme.

A monitoring schedule for the next countrywide distribution is being worked out.

Outstanding needs

The country is now in the seasonal lean period of agricultural production preceding the harvest. The

be extremely poor due to late planting and other causes. The prices of staple food items are usually highest at this time in a normal year. This and the slow pace of government food assistance programmes make the BDRCS food distribution to the most vulnerable all the more important.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

An article written by the Federation Disaster Preparedness delegate linking rickets to malnutrition generated wide interest and a national daily has written an editorial on the topic. News about relief distributions, particularly those attended by the newly elected BDRCS Management Board officials, appeared in some newspapers. Floods are a major theme in the 1999 calendar published by the BDRCS.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The current seasonal lean period has made the ongoing distribution of food items to the most vulnerable particularly valuable. The seeds, sarees and household items such as water containers that have been distributed have been received with much appreciation by the women in the community. Child nutrition issues, especially in view of the reappearance of rickets in Bangladesh, deserve sustained attention, although the seed distribution has contributed positively towards improved nutrition among the recipient families.

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