

INDIA: FLOODS

20 October 1998

appeal no. 27/98

situation report no. 2

period covered: 2 - 15 October 1998

The effects of widespread flooding affecting 12 states in India are still being felt despite the receding flood waters in many areas. The International Federation and the Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS) have targeted 20,000 families in the four worst affected states - Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Assam and West Bengal - with relief assistance. As these areas are so vast and spread out, the focus of this report is on the states of Bihar and West Bengal whereas the previous situation report covered the state of Uttar Pradesh.

The context

The exceptional heavy monsoon rains flooded 12 states in northern India, affecting over 23.6 million people and leaving up to 8 million people homeless. The situation is particularly grim in the four states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Assam and West Bengal. An estimated 22,000 villages have been inundated. Nation-wide, a total of 4.76 million hectares of agricultural land have been flooded.

Branches of the Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS) have been providing assistance to the flood victims from the beginning. An initial plan of action has been developed to provide assistance to 20,000 of the most vulnerable families in the four worst affected states, for which an Appeal was launched by the International Federation on 9 September 1998.

Latest events

The Assistant Director of the IRCS and the Federation's Relief Co-ordinator conducted a field trip between 6-11 October to the states of Bihar and West Bengal to assess the situation and prepare for the continuation of the Red Cross relief operation.

The water in the flooded areas continues to recede, but some pockets of land are still submerged. Many people are still in temporary camps on embankments and along the roads, but quite a number have returned to their communities and are in the process of resettling.

The floods have caused heavy damage to buildings, huts, standing crops and drinking water facilities. In some villages visited, up to 90% of the homes have collapsed, and wells have been contaminated. The number of waterborne diseases is increasing due to the contamination of drinking water facilities.

In Mushidabad District, West Bengal, the river Padma has changed its course and consumed 4-5 km of farming land, and the erosion is still ongoing.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

The IRCS began the procurement process for the local purchase of relief items identified in the Appeal. Many responses have been received in response to advertisements in two newspapers. In order to speed up distribution to the flood victims, the tenders will be opened on 21 October, and orders will be placed immediately.

Most of the relief items sent from the National Society's headquarters, are reported to have been distributed by the various Red Cross Branches.

The procurement of mobile telephone sets (4) to enhance a smooth relief co-ordination, has been carried out.

The IRCS/Federation have decided to distribute the total target of 20,000 families, covered by the appeal, as follows :

Uttar Pradesh	mainly in Gorakhpur district	6,000 families
Bihar	mainly in Muzaffarpur district	4,000 families
West Bengal	mainly in Maldah and Murshidabad districts	5,000 families
Assam	in five worst affected districts	5,000 families

Uttar Pradesh •

The report from the State Branch on relief items that have been distributed is still awaited.

Bihar •

On 6 October the IRCS/Federation relief team visited Muzaffarpur District, in Bihar state, and met with Red Cross officials both from the State Branch as well as from the District Branch. One of the worst flood affected areas, Barari Kothi village, was also visited. The water has receded, but the standing crops were damaged and the water sources contaminated. The people have no source of income and are facing hardship to meet their everyday needs. According to the Government in Bihar, the total population affected in Muzaffarpur District is 144,000 families. The Muzaffarpur District Branch has conducted distribution of the relief items received from the National HQ, as well as from their own sources. The Branch will start feeding centres for 10 days beginning from 7 October. The Branch is also running a medical centre which was constructed through the Federation/IRCS Disaster Preparedness Programme in 1980-81. This medical centre is the only medical facility available to the population in the entire area. The drugs are mainly supplied by the Government, hence the Red Cross has been able to continue providing services free of charge even after the Disaster Preparedness Programme was finalised. In addition to Muzaffarpur, the districts of Sitamarhi, Darbhanga and Purnia have also been affected by the recent floods.

West Bengal •

From Patna the relief team continued to Calcutta and met with the West Bengal State Branch. The district of Maldah and Murshidabad were visited. In Maldah the team met with the District Magistrate, who is the president of the District Branch, and other Red Cross officials. Villages around 40 kilometres away from Malda city were visited, and heavy damages to crops and homes were observed. The water level during the floods was reported to have reached 4 metres above normal level. Even though the water has receded, quite a huge area is still submerged under about .5 metre of water. Most of the affected people are still living in temporary shelters on the embankments and along the roadsides. The Red Cross has provided tarpaulins for these shelters, and the Government has started reconstruction of some of the damage bridges and roads connecting Maldah with other parts of West Bengal.

The Maldah Red Cross Branch has carried out distribution of cooked food in 6 locations to a total of 299,928 people. The food distribution was conducted for a period between 4 to 11 days. In addition, the Branch has distributed dry food rations to 5,500 people, and recently the Branch has started two (2) Medical Relief Centres in the flooded areas.

In Murshidabad District, the team visited three heavily affected areas, namely Bhagwangola, Lalgola and Alaiepur. In a locality known as Virendera Colony of Bhagwangola Town, almost 100% of the homes were completely destroyed and the area is still surrounded by water. The population of 160 families are residing in temporary shelters in the streets of the town. A Red Cross first aid post is providing emergency assistance to the population and conducts distribution of water purification chemicals. In Lalgola, 400 families are receiving emergency assistance from the Red Cross. Only 35 houses were reported to have collapsed due to the flood, and the general situation seemed to be a bit more favourable than in other parts of the flooded area.

Alaiepur and other areas visited by the team have been affected by deadly erosion of the rivers Padma and Bhairab in the east parts of the district bordering Bangladesh. In interviews with the villagers in Alaiepur, the team was informed that the river Padma has changed its course and consumed 4-5 km of farming land. The team observed that heavy erosion is ongoing, and within a few days, a small village located at the present river side will be swept away by the water.

The team had the opportunity to meet and brief the Governor of West Bengal, who was on a visit to the area.

To meet the urgent need of food assistance to vulnerable victims of the floods, 11 MT Rice were released by the IRCS National Headquarters from its warehouse in Calcutta.

On the return to Calcutta, meetings were held with the officers of the National Headquarters warehouse in Calcutta. The warehouse was found to be well-kept and well-managed. This is one of the six warehouses, directly managed by the headquarters, which were established through the support of the Federation in the early 1980s.

Outstanding needs

In order to speed up the operation, there is a need to place the procurement orders of relief items as soon as possible after the opening of tenders on 21 October. CHF 300,000 have been sent to the delegation and donors are urged to quickly transfer their pledges.

To enhance a smooth co-ordination of the operation and to facilitate the relief team's regular contacts with other agencies, one (1) of the vehicles included in the Appeal should be locally purchased as soon as possible.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The Government continues to provide relief assistance to the flood victims in all the states and their affected districts. The IRCS/Federation Relief team has had the opportunity to brief Government officials at the state and district levels on the Red Cross operation, and to discuss the present situation and the future plans. The Government officials have been very co-operative and ensure the Red Cross all their support to run a smooth operation.

Meetings have also been held with WFP and EC representatives. A field trip to the Red Cross operational areas in Bihar will take place on 16 October together with the EC representative .

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The rapid emergency response by the Indian Red Cross Society, releasing relief material from its warehouses, has helped to alleviate the needs of flood victims. The IRCS warehouse, visited in

Calcutta, is now nearly empty and support from donors is needed for the Society's Disaster Preparedness Programme.

Even though the water has receded in most of the flooded areas and no major malnutrition has been observed, there will be a need of assistance for at least a period of 3 months and probably even longer. The cases of waterborne diseases are expected to increase since most of the drinking water facilities are contaminated by the flood water.

The Red Cross District Branches visited have been found to be well-organised and staffed with devoted officers and volunteers, which will allow the relief operation to be carried out in a smooth and timely way.

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