

PAKISTAN: CYCLONE

17 August 1999

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The massive relief effort, which mitigated the worst effects of the cyclone, is almost over. To help the most seriously affected through the difficult period preceding the November harvest, the Pakistan Red Crescent is supplying them with food packs, domestic kits and hut construction materials and making medicines available for the next three months to its mobile medical teams.

The context

The cyclone that struck the south-east coast of Pakistan, in the vicinity of the Indus delta, on 20 May caused massive destruction to housing in the coastal towns and villages of the two districts of Badin and Thatta in Sindh province, and to agriculture and the fishing industry. At least 600,000 people in 5,200 villages were affected and 191 people, mostly fishermen, were killed. Several hundred persons remain missing and are presumed dead. Over 75,000 houses were destroyed and some 59,000 damaged. 400,000 acres of agricultural land were inundated with salt water and 28,000 head of livestock perished. 675 fishing boats were destroyed. Much of the infrastructure of the two districts -- roads, communications systems and electrical lines -- was damaged.

Latest events

Through a major effort by the Pakistan government, the armed services and the Pakistan Red Crescent (PRCS) in association with the Federation, the situation in the disaster area has improved, and in some villages is returning to normal. Roads have been rebuilt, electricity restored and canals dredged. Building material has been supplied, food provided and the essentials of life given to many of the

affected families. The government has made cash settlements to those families who can confirm loss of a family member or whose home was destroyed or damaged. This assistance by the government, the armed services, PRCS / Federation and local NGOs has made a major difference in restoring normality in the disaster area. At this time, most of the other agencies have scaled back or ceased their relief efforts entirely.

Some people have nevertheless slipped through the social safety net provided. These are generally people living on single family plots of land away from villages or towns. The further away from the main transportation routes victims are located, the less likely they will be to have received adequate assistance. Some 400 families are still without permanent shelter as they have not received compensation from the government due to their family members still being considered "missing". Another approximately 5,000 families in the two districts affected are still forced to rely on borrowed or inadequate domestic utensils.

Many of the people in the disaster area are suffering from medical problems derived from the unsafe drinking water and from the dust. Dysentery, diarrhoea, skin infections and eye irritations are widespread. As the monsoon season has started, malaria is becoming a serious problem.

Although there are no critical food shortages, many people lack the resources to purchase food as a result of losing their crops or fishing boats. Assistance is required to help tide these people over until the next harvest, expected in November.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Initial Action

The PRCS/Federation was among the first to respond to the cyclone. Donations of food and clothing were immediately delivered to the disaster area, often by helicopter or boat. Approximately 6,000 food parcels and 1,000 domestic kits were distributed in this manner. The extensive need of medical attention was quickly identified and the PRCS organised a series of mobile clinics in response: doctors, other medical staff and medicines were taken directly into the villages. This work is still ongoing and constitutes a real success story for the PRCS.

Identification of Beneficiaries

Parallel to its relief activities, the PRCS has spent the last month identifying families most in need of assistance through an extensive family survey. Nearly 7,000 families have been interviewed to determine their present needs and their resources prior to the cyclone. Specifically, this aimed at identifying the 400 families who will receive shelters and shelter materials. In addition, approximately 5,000 families were identified to receive further supplies of domestic utensils and food.

Tendering and Distribution

Contracts have been signed to purchase the final supply of goods needed for the above beneficiaries. Tendering is under way for the 13 items of the domestic kits: total value CHF 111,964. (850 Domestic Kits at a cost of CHF 24,973 have already been purchased and distributed.)

Purchasing of 14,452 Food Packs - each sufficient for one family for one week and containing wheat flour, rice, sugar, dal channa, salt and cooking oil, for a total value of CHF 100,726, has begun. (1550 Food Packs at a cost of 20,757 CHF have already been purchased and distributed.)

Hut construction material, sufficient for 400 huts, value CHF 90,909, and sufficient medicines for one mobile clinic per day for three months, value CHF 102,885, is also in progress. (Twenty-seven mobile medical clinics have been conducted at a cost of 21,212 CHF.)

The per unit costs vary between what already has been purchased and what is presently being tendered, largely due to the comprehensive tendering process which has brought the prices down to a very competitive level. In addition, the content of the domestic, food and medicine purchases have varied, in order to reflect the updated and changing needs. The final distribution of domestic kits will be tailored to the specific needs of separate villages and, if necessary, to specific households.

Distribution

Distribution of these goods is taking place throughout August. By the end of the month, all earmarked and time constrained donated money will have been spent and the goods distributed.

Outstanding needs

It is expected that when the present goods have been distributed, 100% of shelter needs in the area will have been met. Additionally, the most needy will have received an additional three weeks of food along with basic domestic items. The food requirement will continue until the harvest in November, but sufficient food stocks exist from other sources so that, although food may be in short supply, there is no danger of starvation. It is expected that the medical needs of the Thatta and Badin people will continue after this appeal is completed. Any further requirements will be identified by the PRCS, and as far as possible, included in its other medical programmes.

Emergency Preparedness

The capability of the PRCS to respond to natural disasters and other calamities needs to be augmented. In the immediate aftermath of the cyclone, most of the tents and domestic goods despatched to the disaster area were sent from Islamabad. Some of these items were not immediately needed and were held in storage in Sindh province. In the meantime, the national society had ordered replenishments for its stocks, amounting to CHF 19,745 for tents and CHF 2,663 for kerosene stoves. Any original items which were not distributed, including small quantities of tents and kerosene stoves, will be added to the national contingency stocks for emergency use. No earmarked funds were used for this purpose. A small contribution to building the local disaster preparedness capacity and experience is also foreseen at the end of this programme, but again no earmarked or time constrained items will be used for this purpose.

Contributions

See annex 1 for details

Conclusion

The immediate action of the Pakistan government, the army, NGOs and PRCS had a significant impact on meeting the initial needs of the most vulnerable. The distributions now being undertaken by the PRCS will help to bridge the gap in coverage between the end of significant emergency assistance and the November harvest.

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