

CHINA: FLOODS

9 December 1999

appeal no. 17/99

situation report no. 6

period covered: 27 October - 30 November 1999

programme extension of 4 months to 28 February 2000

Now that the floodwaters have finally receded, many evacuees have returned home, to rebuild and cultivate their fields. In the four worst-hit provinces, the target of the Federation operation, people are too poor to rebuild. After completing the distribution of water purification supplies and a first round of 2,200 mt. of food, the Federation and the Red Cross of China are preparing to make a second distribution of 2,600 mt. of food and to provide quilts and warm clothing to some of the tens of thousands who will have to spend the winter in tents or disused buildings. The programme is being extended in order to include this winter aid.

The context

Sustained rainfall from the middle of June until late September caused extensive flooding along the upper and middle reaches of the Yangtze river in China. According to official figures, over 800 people died and 24,000 were injured as a result of the floods and 5.5 million were displaced throughout the country. Four provinces - Jiangxi, Hubei, Hunan and Anhui - were particularly badly affected by the recurrent flooding. In these provinces, Red Cross branches estimate some 60 million people were placed at risk, while 1.8 million had to be evacuated from their homes.

The International Federation and the Red Cross Society of China responded by identifying target communities within these provinces, and issued an international Appeal on 24 August seeking CHF 10.2 million in order to give more than 1 million people access to clean water and sanitation materials for 2 months, as well as to provide approximately 250,000 people with food.

The operation is preparing to supply 10,000 particularly high risk victims with an additional one month food ration as well as 20,000 people with quilts and clothing. It is now scheduled to end in early 2000.

Latest events

Water levels in the Yangtze river have returned to normal, and farmland is no longer flooded, except in a few places where local authorities have undertaken to pump the water out during the first half of December. Most flood victims have begun to rebuild their houses, and have started to work their fields, cultivating winter crops or preparing them for next year's rice harvest. However, thousands of people

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living in the worst affected communities, which have been hit by floods year after year, cannot afford governmental loan schemes available for rebuilding. These people face a bleak winter either in winterized tents provided by the government, or in other locations assigned by local authorities such as disused factories.

Food remains the main priority, as the government in most instances provided free rice during the first month of the disaster only. People appear to have had adequate access to water purification tablets and powder. River or lake water remains the sole source of water for consumption in many of the villages visited by Federation delegates, as wells have either been submerged by flood waste, or destroyed. In other instances, where people have been relocated, wells have not been installed in their new villages.

The outbreak of waterborne diseases has been avoided, although camps were surrounded by stagnant, polluted water for months, and sanitation conditions are far from ideal. Mobile Red Cross medical teams continue to serve the affected areas on a regular basis by making monthly visits to most villages.

In some provinces, local authorities have decided to shift whole communities to a safer place, as they have been hit time and again by floods. Obviously it will take a while to relocate people, but the reconstruction of villages is already underway. Flood victims in some provinces will furthermore be exempted from paying taxes on their land this year, and the government will provide most with free seeds for next year's harvest.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Local Red Cross branches in the four target provinces have identified 250,000 beneficiaries in the worst hit communities who will continue receiving assistance from the Federation and the Red Cross Society of China until at least the end of this year. Nearly 2,200 metric tonnes of rice have already been distributed in the 209 target villages in the four provinces and it is anticipated that a further 2,600 tonnes will be distributed to beneficiaries before the end of December. The distribution has been carried out by the local branches, and is monitored by field delegates from the Federation.

To date, the third Plan of Action has been completed, with the distribution of more than 1,750 metric tonnes of rice, water purification sachets, and 15 metric tonnes of sanitation materials in the four provinces. Federation field delegates were able to monitor the distributions of these materials in the target communities.

Mobile Red Cross medical teams continue to provide services to remote villages. Outbreaks of epidemics such as cholera and other waterborne diseases have been avoided, despite bad sanitation conditions; the most common ailments treated remain respiratory infections, skin diseases, and diarrhoea.

The fourth Plan of Action is underway, whereby more than 2,600 metric tonnes of food will be distributed. The operation will be extended until the end of February to ensure that this distribution of food, plus distributions of winter clothing, can be completed in early 2000, thus providing much-needed support to beneficiaries during the winter period until the first harvest.

The Hong Kong branch of the Red Cross Society of China is expected to continue its assistance in many of the other affected provinces, and local Red Cross branches have carried out relief operations in provinces recently struck by heavy rainstorms, typhoons and flash floods.

Provincial Red Cross branches have already taken measures to replenish disaster preparedness stocks in order to be ready for the next time the regions are hit by floods.

Hunan/Jiangxi provinces

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Hunan/Jiangxi provinces

Approximately 14 million people were affected by this year's floods in Hunan province and 135,000 were made homeless. The most severe flooding occurred in the north in the Dongting Lake area, where some communities suffered the worst losses of the last five years. The south of the province was also hit badly by out of season floods in August.

Water has now receded from villages and farmland, and dykes have been repaired. A few villages in Yiyang township in the north remain flooded, preventing people from working their fields or rebuilding their homes until next year. Those who have suffered the most severe losses are trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty: because they have lost their crops year after year they cannot provide any guarantees of repayment and are thus not eligible for governmental loans. This reality is shared with all the targeted flood victims in the four provinces. Around 50,000 people in 37 villages targeted by the Hunan Red Cross branch have received food assistance -- more than 390 metric tonnes of rice -- from the Federation.

In Jiangxi province almost 4 million people were affected by the floods and 160,000 made homeless. The rivers Changjiang, Le An, and Xinjiang in the north of the province were turned into lakes as dykes along the embankments burst in late July. Governmental schemes to relocate whole villages are already underway, as are plans to reconstruct and heighten dykes. To date, approximately 594 metric tonnes of rice have been distributed to the more than 75,000 beneficiaries in the 46 target villages identified by the local Red Cross branch.

Anhui/Hubei provinces

In Anhui, around 14 million people were affected by the floods, and 160,000 people were evacuated at the height of the disaster. People living on the plains along the Yangtze river and its branches suffered more severe losses in this year's flooding than in previous years. Local authorities have stated that more than 10,000 people will have to be accommodated in tents throughout the winter in Susong county alone (located in the south-west of Anhui): it can thus be deduced that further tens of thousands of people throughout the province will face winter in makeshift camps. More than 2,000 families in the worst affected villages will be relocated to higher ground.

The local Red Cross branch together with the Chinese Red Cross headquarters identified 75,000 flood victims in 53 villages as Federation beneficiaries. Already, more than 781 metric tonnes of rice have been distributed to the target communities.

This year's floods were most severely felt in Hubei province, where more than 19 million people were affected and some 570,000 people were evacuated. The local Red Cross has identified 50,000 beneficiaries in 73 target villages and to date has already distributed 387 metric tonnes of rice to them. Those who could move back to their homes have already done so, but despite major efforts many houses are beyond repair. Local authorities plan to provide the homeless with heavy duty winter tents or to accommodate them in, for example, disused factories. The government has also started a special loan scheme for food as of 15 October, as well as providing free food for the elderly, the disabled and children.

Outstanding needs

According to local Red Cross officials the biggest demand is for food, since the Chinese authorities provided emergency assistance only for the first month. Because thousands of people will remain in tents throughout the winter, warm clothing and quilts are also in great demand. Water purification tablets and disinfectants are, however, no longer needed.

The Federation still needs CHF 3.5 million in cash for the immediate procurement of food, blankets and winter coats.

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External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

Red Cross food distribution has received wide coverage in the local media, and every visit of the two Federation field delegates to the provinces has been covered by local TV stations as well as the newspapers. The information delegate was interviewed by Reuters and AP after the latest field trip to Anhui, and also did a live interview with Channel 2 Television in Iceland. Footage shot in the field by a Chinese Red Cross cameraman was fed to world wide subscribers of AP-TN and Reuters TV.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

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