

BANGLADESH: FLOODS

9 December 1999

appeal no. 24/99

situation report no. 1

period covered: 24 September - 8 December

With the approach of the cold season in Bangladesh, the provision of housing, blankets and food to those affected by the floods is essential. The timely response from donors has enabled the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS), with support from the International Federation, to initiate planned relief assistance activities, supplementing the efforts of the government and other organisations.

The context

This year's monsoon arrived early in Bangladesh, and from late June onwards flooding and river erosion caused significant damage to 41 of the country's 64 districts. Victims of the 1998 floods (poor village day-labourers, farmers and fishermen) were just beginning to recover economically, but are now once again struggling with the loss of their livelihoods. Embankments, bridges, roads, railways, ferry terminals, houses, communications and power facilities, and arable land have been washed away. Reports, compiled by local units of the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) and verified by the media and Federation inspection activities, state that the number of flooded districts stands at 41 while the number of people affected has swollen to 3.5 million, a large number of whom have been rendered homeless.

The particularly disturbing aspect of this year's flooding is the extensive river bank erosion which has affected millions of acres of land and swept away houses. Much of the land lost was highly fertile, and the flooding and erosion has deprived farming day labourers and local fisherman of their sources of income. These workers have had to turn to relatives, friends and neighbours, themselves with limited resources. Other people who earlier had offered help eventually also became victims of the floods. While the government is providing some emergency food and NGOs have been attempting to cope with the situation, there is a confirmed need for relief assistance.

Latest Events

Sporadic but heavy rains continued through the middle of October. Due to heavy rains as well in India, water levels and the rate of flow in the Padma (Ganges), Brahmaputra and Jumuna rivers remained

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high until the end of October. The result was that the serious erosion of river banks continued, destroying fertile farmland and forcing the evacuation of thousands of families. Rainfall has been at moderate levels recently though weather depressions continue to form in the Bay of Bengal, with the distinct possibility of cyclones affecting the area.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The Delegation and BDRCS immediately organised a needs assessment with the assistance of a Relief Delegate assigned by the Republic of Korea National Red Cross who visited six of the worst-affected of Bangladesh's 64 districts. The main results of the assessment indicated that many families, denied their farmland and the chance of being employed as agricultural day-labourers, have resorted to coping mechanisms such as selling their cattle and household goods. Farmers and daily labourers are flocking in droves into the towns in fruitless efforts to find work; but there are no obvious signs of disease. With access to land cut off and no possibility of casual work until the end of the year, it is feared that the cold season will severely affect evacuated families as the combination of a marginal diet and cold weather particularly affects vulnerable groups.

Relief w

To immediately respond to the situation, the Federation released CHF 100,000 from the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF), and another CHF 170,000 from other National Societies, funds which allowed the timely procurement of relief assistance consisting of 300 mt of rice and 60 mt of dal. With this funding available, the BDRCS units carried out an initial distribution of compressed rice to displaced people in the hardest hit areas, serving 10,000 families.

This was followed by the distribution of 60 mt of rice, 15 mt of dal, 15.5 mt of flour and a quantity of aluminium drinking cups, rolls of plastic sheets, vegetable oil, buckets, and clothing from stocks available in the BDRCS warehouses. On 25 October, the Federation began the delivery of 500 mt of rice and 100 mt of dal to the BDRCS. Procurement of a further 500 mt of rice and 100 mt of dal as well as 10,000 blankets is underway. With ECHO funding now available, the provision of houses to 750 families living in 15 of the worst affected districts is proceeding as planned.

External Relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

Coordination w

The Delegation and BDRCS representatives have actively participated in co-ordination meetings with governmental and UN agencies, the NGO Disaster Forum and district administrations.

Media w

The Federation Delegation has facilitated the dissemination of information to the international media, including the BBC, CNN and Reuters. Media reports covering the Red Crescent relief activities continues to appear in the regional and national press as well as on national television and radio.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

For further information please contact Kentaro Nagazumi, Desk Officer, Tel: 41 22 730 4273 (email: nagazumi@ifrc.org) or Bob McKerrow, Head of Delegation Bangladesh, Tel: 88 02 8315 401 (email: ifrcbd@citechco.net).

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