

INDIA : ORISSA CYCLONE

8 March 2000

appeal no. 28/99

situation report no. 7

period covered: 19 January - 29 February 2000

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The context

A violent cyclone hit India's eastern coast on 29 October 1999. Winds of up to 260 kph (155 mph), lasting for over 36 hours, caused a 7 metre tidal wave which swept 20 km inland and brought massive destruction and death to coastal districts in the State of Orissa.

After the completion of the acute emergency relief operation (first phase), carried out by the Orissa State Branch of the Indian Red Cross immediately after the cyclone, the main relief operation began, with the support of the International Federation. This relief phase (second phase) was completed on 31 January 2000.

The rehabilitation phase (third phase), also supported by the Federation, began on 1 February. This phase will run for the next six months, ending by 31 July 2000.

Latest events

At their weekly co-ordination committee meeting held on 23 February, the representatives of the Government of Orissa, the United Nations system, international aid agencies, donors and other partners pointed out that although most of the NGOs and the government have reduced their food aid to Food-for-Work projects, field reports indicate there could be a serious shortage of food in the affected

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areas from the end of March onwards. The districts of Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Jajpur and Kendrapara were identified as the most at risk. The Red Cross is monitoring the situation.

WFP and FAO will prepare a report on the food security situation. A UN workshop on food security will be held in mid March to assess the situation, develop a strategy and draw up an action plan.

A separate meeting was held on disaster preparedness at micro-level. Representatives of UN agencies, the Red Cross and some NGOs agreed to advocate and play an active part in promoting community based disaster preparedness.

The representatives of the Orissa Remote Sensing Application Centre (ORSAC), Department of Science and Technology of the Government of Orissa, have presented a proposal to connect the community at all levels (district, block, GPs) in a “reach-out” network through modern technology including satellite monitoring and surveillance to support the work of the UN, international agencies and NGOs.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Relief •

The relief operation (second phase) has been completed. The Indian Red Cross relief distributions covered six districts, Balasore, Bhadrak, Kendrapara, Jagatsinghpur, Puri and Ganjam. In total, 50,000 families received 3,100 Mt. of food, 100,000 blankets, 4,800 kitchen sets and 100,000 pieces of clothing. In addition, 4,500 pieces of plastic sheeting, 2 million water purification tablets and 750 kg of bleach were delivered to the affected area, for future emergencies.

Rehabilitation •

The rehabilitation (third phase) programme is scheduled to run for six months i.e. from February through July 2000. It will primarily focus on the three most severely affected districts: Kendrapara, Jagatsinghpur and Puri. To a lesser extent, work will be also carried out in Cuttack and Ganjam.

The overall aim of the rehabilitation programme in the targeted area is:

- to build up household coping mechanisms
- to rebuild destroyed community assets
- to strengthen the capacity and structure of the Orissa State Red Cross Branch.

Specifically, the rehabilitation objectives are:

- to provide agricultural support to the most vulnerable 1,000 families by distributing “farmers kits”, comprising seeds, tools, fertilisers and livestock;
- to provide building materials for low-cost, cyclone resistant housing (i.e. core houses comprising of one room and flat concrete roofs) for 356 families in 5 villages;
- to support established credit saving schemes for micro income-generating activities in 56 communities in the vicinity of the Red Cross cyclone shelters;
- to construct 10 primary schools and 3 Red Cross clinics/dispensaries which will serve as multipurpose shelters during future cyclones;
- to renovate and upgrade the damaged Red Cross Maternity Hospital in Berhampur, Ganjam district;
- to renovate and upgrade the damaged Red Cross Blood Bank in Cuttack, the largest city in Orissa State;
- to provide school kits, based on a standardised list of items, for 300 schools;
- to construct or rehabilitate 135 tube wells;
- to provide food for 5,000 of the most vulnerable families who cannot take part in food-for-work projects, for another 3 months;
- to provide mosquito nets to 20,000 families in the coastal belt;
- to strengthen the capacity of the Orissa State Branch in Disaster Preparedness and Disaster Management.

At present, the Orissa State Branch has completed or is doing the following:

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- to support established credit saving schemes for micro income-generating activities in 56 communities in the vicinity of the Red Cross cyclone shelters;
- to construct 10 primary schools and 3 Red Cross clinics/dispensaries which will serve as multipurpose shelters during future cyclones;
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- to strengthen the capacity of the Orissa State Branch in Disaster Preparedness and Disaster Management.

At present, the Orissa State Branch has completed or is doing the following:

- Has finished the first distribution of food aid for 5,000 of the most vulnerable families in 3 districts. The ration per family for one month is: 50 kg of rice, 10 kg of lentils(dal) and 2 litres of cooking oil.
- Is building models of cyclone resistant houses in 3 villages in order to provide on the spot training for the villagers who will have to build their houses themselves. During the actual building phase, which will start in March, the Red Cross will provide one mason per village to assist and advise them.
- Has requested quotations in open bidding for the construction of the 10 schools and 3 Red Cross clinics.
- Has employed consultants and field workers for the implementation of the agricultural programme, and has finalised the contents of the agricultural kit and identified suppliers.
- Is finalising the contents of the school kits in close co-operation with UNICEF and the government.
- Has identified all sites for the 135 tube wells; is employing water & sanitation engineers to implement the project.
- Has requested quotations in open tendering for procurement of 20,000 mosquito nets.
- Has received cost estimates from consultants for the renovation and upgrading of the blood bank in Cuttack and the maternity hospital in Ganjam.

Staffing •

The rehabilitation phase started with the introduction of a new personnel structure within the Orissa State Red Cross Branch. At the same time, some of the local Indian Red Cross staff (originally from the Orissa Disaster Mitigation Programme) who were working on the relief phase were released. The Federation is assisting the process of identification of field officers and consultants.

The Federation senior relief co-ordinator is providing technical assistance for this part of the operation. The Federation has also seconded a programme co-ordinator for rehabilitation and a reporting delegate to assist the Branch.

Health •

The effects of reductions in the relief efforts of the international organisations on the food security situation could have serious consequences for the health of vulnerable groups. The State of Orissa has a long record of the highest infant mortality rate in India. Malnutrition, one of the main causes of death, was monitored through an established system of weight monitoring, but this has stopped because of the loss of equipment in the cyclone.

Although the cyclone did not provoke any major epidemics, the health surveillance reporting system is being re-introduced, allowing the local health authorities to monitor the health situation in general more closely.

Sporadic outbreaks of jaundice, cholera and measles have been reported in the districts of Jagatsinghpur and Kendrapara. Immediate action and the vaccination of children prevented these diseases from spreading. However, power has not yet been restored to some areas in the most affected districts, thus preventing health workers from re-introducing the cold-chain for vaccines.

The fast approaching dry season and the anticipated heat-wave are also a cause of concern, particularly since devastated palm groves (in some areas up to 80%) will not be able to provide any shelter from the heat.

Outstanding needs

The cyclone which hit Orissa on 29 October 1999 was termed the worst cyclone of the 20th century. However, that the coastal belt of Orissa is a disaster-prone region, experiencing cyclones, floods and heat-waves on a regular basis. Further support for the rehabilitation phase as described above is needed to enable the Indian Red Cross to reach its objectives and in particular reinforce the disaster preparedness capacity in the area..

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Support to disaster preparedness and management as well as assistance in capacity building efforts would further strengthen the National Society and make it even more effective in case of another disaster.

It has been agreed that the existing Relief Code in the State of Orissa should be revised, adjusted and brought up to date, using modern technology, in order to meet current requirements and respond adequately to future disasters.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

Weekly co-ordination committee meetings are held at Bhubaneswar level. The co-ordination between the UN, international agencies and NGOs functions extremely well. A representative (depending on the issue) of the Orissa Government also attends these meetings on a regular basis.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Peter Rees-Gildea
Director
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Hiroshi Higashiura
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Asia and Pacific Department

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