



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

BANGLADESH: COLD WAVE

13 March 2003

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Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) Allocated: CHF 50,000

The Situation

From 15 December 2002 to early February 2003, a severe cold spell swept Bangladesh, a country with a tropical monsoon climate where winters are generally mild and short. Single figure temperatures were recorded throughout the country. The Meteorological Department reported that the temperatures dropped to 4 degrees Celsius in some areas, and to 8-11 Celsius in others. According to the same source this was one of the coldest waves since 1968. Although the northern and north-western districts were most affected, the Cold Wave hit many areas. Thick fog also added to problems. Agriculture was also severely affected..

The wind from the north over the northern and south-western part of the country intensified the cold. Temperatures were perceived as severe cold by the general population, who are used to much warmer weather, even in winter. It caused extreme hardship for undernourished and underweight people, including those who lost their homes and possessions during the floods 2002. Thousands of people suffering cold-related diseases (cold, fevers, pneumonia, asthma, respiratory complications) and sought treatment. There were more than 750 cold-related deaths during this period.



The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) and the Federation closely monitored developments. In early January, once the situation deteriorated, the death toll increased and requests from Districts Units (via assessment reports) started to come in, in response to the emergency. The BDRCS, from its own emergency stock, distributed 4,000 blankets, 1,500 items of second hand clothing and some high protein biscuits to 5,500 beneficiaries in the northern-northwestern districts of Thakurgaon, Nilphamari, Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Dinajpur, Gaibandha, Sirajganj, Panchagar and an orphanage in Jamalpur district.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

In Dhaka, since 3 January, twelve teams of four Red Crescent Youth (RCY) and volunteers were involved in the collection of secondhand clothing through door-to-door visits in prestigious parts of the capital, including many schools. The response to RCY appeal for warm clothing in Dhaka city was very good. More than 21,000 pieces of secondhand clothing were collected. All collected materials were distributed as per needs of the most underprivileged population in the affected districts.



BDRCS volunteers assisting in packing blankets at CHT collection point for delivery to cold-affected districts

During the 1st Phase of this relief operation, the BDRCS and the Federation utilized the disaster relief emergency funds of CHF 50,000 for procurement and distribution of 5,500 blankets in the fifteen districts in the north and northwest (Panchagar, Thakurgaon, Dinajpur, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Gaibandha, Nilphamari, Rangpur, Joypurhat, Sirajganj, Jamalpur, Naogaon, Chapai-Nawabganj, Rajshahi, Natore and Pabna). Immediately after Information Bulletin No 1. was published, the Swiss

Development Corporation through the World Food Programme (WFP) donated high protein biscuits to BDRCS to distribute along with 5,500 blankets.

The blankets were procured in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) from the Bangladesh Red Crescent supported income generation and community development programme. This programme supporting tribal people has been financially backed through International Federation funding for the past six years. Weaving blankets is one of the programme's many projects. The International Federation and the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society provide monetary support, enabling the people to buy wool for weaving the blankets that they sell in the market. During the Phase I a total of 5,500 blankets were procured from those tribal communities ensuring further sustainability of the income generation and community development projects and in addition, distributed to the most vulnerable people affected by cold wave. During the Phase II, a total of 7,060 blankets were locally procured in accordance to Federation procurement procedure and immediately distributed to the most affected population in the southwestern districts of Bangladesh.

Rapid and generous contributions for the Phase I and II - Cold Wave relief intervention provided by the Swiss Red Cross (CHF 21,000), Australian High Commission (BDT 329,500 or AUD 10,000) in Bangladesh, German Red Cross (CHF 10,000), Danish Embassy in Bangladesh (CHF 60,000 - for procurement of 7,060 blankets for Phase II) HSBC Bank in Bangladesh (BDT 100,000), as well as a donation of 14.7 metric tonnes (MT) of high protein biscuits provided by Swiss Development Corporation through WFP (distributed during both Phase I and II), enabled the BDRCS to assist a total number of 24,260 families or approx. 97,000 beneficiaries. From the onset of the cold wave and during the Phase I and Phase II, a total of 16,560 families each received a blanket, 1 kg of high protein biscuits and in addition 7,700 families received some secondhand clothing items. A total of 25 districts in the north, northwest, central and north east of Bangladesh were assisted.



A tribal woman in CHT weaving blankets in a traditional way

All BDRCS and Federation objectives for the 1st and 2nd Phase were achieved. BDRCS/Federation successfully:

- Delivered emergency assistance to the 25 most affected districts - target areas with most urgent assistance needs and relatively high death toll recorded.

- Immediately assisted a total of 24,260 families or approx. 97,000 beneficiaries in 25 targeted districts in the north, northwest, southwest and central Bangladesh by providing a blanket per family, warm clothing and High Protein Biscuits.
- Completed the relief assistance within ten days / per phase from the moment funds were received.

Conclusion

This emergency assistance initially supported by the Federation's Disaster Relief Funds (DREF) and consequently by generous donations of Swiss Red Cross, German Red Cross, Danish Embassy in Dhaka, Australian High Commission in Dhaka, HSBC Bank in Dhaka and private donations covered the most immediate needs of more than 24,000 affected, underprivileged and suffering families. As this was one of the coldest and most prolonged cold waves experienced in Bangladesh, all funds received were utilized for procurement of blankets that were immediately distributed to the suffering population. It is important to mention that this success would have not been possible without the generous support of donors, in particular those based in Bangladesh who responded rapidly and ensured necessary recourses were available to alleviate suffering of the vulnerable population.

For a full description of the National Society profile, see www.ifrc.org or www.bdracs.org

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All International Federation Operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

For support to or for further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal.

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