

BANGLADESH: CYCLONE

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The Disaster

A severe cyclonic storm, 2B, hit the Southern coast of Bangladesh early on 27 September. The mainland areas of Potuakhali, Bhola, Sitakundu and Noakhali, plus the offshore islands of Hatiya and Sandwip and the many chars of the river Megna estuary, were hardest hit. More than 1,500 people were injured, 27 were killed, while 71,800 houses were destroyed and 70,600 damaged. Much of the affected area is highly exposed and not easily accessible.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

In a review of the situation it was decided that the relief operation should not be expanded beyond the initial response of 1,500 family supplementary food rations (Federation supported) and the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) issue of buffer stock items of plastic sheeting, clothing and dates to a further 1,500 approximately families.

This decision was made for a number of reasons :-

The assessed need of the affected people was for shelter. Due to logistic and other operational reasons, a relief distribution of the appropriate housing materials for the area (bamboo poles and thatch) was not considered a viable option. Distribution of food was considered as compensatory relief; however due to the high costs of transportation and distribution to a widely scattered and isolated affected community, it was decided that this also was not appropriate. BDRCS was still involved in the May Cyclone relief operation through the erection of wind resistant huts and it was considered inadvisable to engage in a further relief operation, given that another more devastating cyclone might occur over the next month or so. However, thanks to a donation from the Singapore Red Cross, which included funds for transportation, 11,250 kg of Chira (compressed rice) based supplementary food were distributed to 900 families in Bhola Unit, and 3,750 kg of Gur (sugar) given to 600 families in Laxmipur Unit.

Cyclone 2 B again demonstrated the need for maintaining CPP in a high state of operational readiness. It was found that three VHF radios in Char Fasson off the Bhola coast were not operational due to battery charging problems and this emphasised the need for more investment in maintenance and the need for funding.

The cyclone also demonstrated that training of CPP volunteers in damage assessment must be enhanced, so that in future damage criteria and means of collection and reporting are clear. An investigation is being made into why the Bholia BDRCS Unit (Branch) CDBP Squad did not become operational during the emergency and report accordingly.

The need for institutional development and decentralisation of DP and Relief within the CDBP programme strategy has been reinforced by this cyclone experience.

Conclusion

The limited relief operation for cyclone 2 B is now nearing completion and this bulletin should be considered as the final one, since no further relief intervention is planned.

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