

INDIA: FLOODS

4 October 1999

Information Bulletin N° 1

The Disaster

Many parts of India experience flooding during the seasonal monsoon rains which usually last from early June until late September. This year several states received poor rainfall during the normal peak monsoon season, but in the last week of September, West Bengal, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh experienced torrential rains which caused flooding in many districts of these states.

The flooding situation has gradually become more serious over the past two weeks. The situation in three states of north eastern India has developed to a point where the Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS) has increased relief and rehabilitation efforts.

In **Bihar**, more than six million people living in 3,605 villages in 22 districts were affected by the floods. To date, over 200 lives have been lost. In **West Bengal**, over 3 million people living in 15 districts (including the state capital) have been affected by floods, which have claimed 25 lives. In **Madhya Pradesh**, the Narmada river and its tributaries have flooded large areas of land, and as a result, substantial parts of eight districts are submerged under water.

At present, an Emergency Appeal will not be launched. Funds will be raised regionally from the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) in order to assist the IRCS with this operation. The experience and the capacity of the Indian Red Cross acquired from the floods in 1998 will be of great use for its response to the present situation.

The flood waters are now at their highest in the three states of West Bengal, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. The effects of the flood water have been felt particularly in West Bengal and Bihar. A joint International Federation/Indian Red Cross mission is currently assessing the situation in full co-ordination with the state government.

The table below gives a current evaluation of the flood situation in key states.

State	No. of districts affected	No. of villages affected	No. of people affected	No. of damaged houses/huts	Fatalities
Bihar	22	3,605	6,000,000	21,225	200
Madhya Pradesh	8	250	not yet available	1,700	-
W. Bengal	15	-	3,000,000	153,000	18

Government Action

The local state government has been assisting with the evacuation of the affected population to safer areas. The army has been called in to many places in order to provide immediate relief materials, and to assist with rescuing marooned people. Food drops have been organised for small quantities of food packets and other essential articles. In total 5,000 boats have been utilised in relief and rescue operations.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

State and district branches of the Indian Red Cross Society immediately sent relief items to the affected areas. The Society's national headquarters has already started an emergency response operation and has allocated relief supplies from its emergency buffer stocks, already available in its warehouses. The table below shows the details of items already dispatched by the Indian Red Cross:

Item	Unit	Bihar	Madhya Pradesh	West Bengal
rice	kg	8,200	6,000	13,500
cooking oil	litre	500	500	-
emergency rations	kg	3,000	-	4,080
blankets	piece	200	-	-
assorted clothes	piece	1,800	2,000	6,000
cotton cloths	metre	1,000	1,000	3,000
kitchen utensils	piece	-	50	-
PVC rolls	roll	5	-	14
water purification chemicals	kg	-	-	300

The Madhya Pradesh state branch has also sent a medical team with medicines and two trucks full of relief material including food, clothes, and cotton blankets .

Needs

A preliminary assessment done by local Red Cross Units has so far identified the potential need for blankets, kitchen utensils, tarpaulins, PVC sheets, milk powder, emergency rations, rice, clothing, water purification tablets and medicines. Cash assistance may be requested for relief distribution management.

Keeping in view the present situation and the experiences gained in last year's Flood Relief Programme, the IRCS plans to provide family packages to up to 6,000 of the most vulnerable families. Each family package will contain: 25 kgs of rice, two litres of cooking oil, two wool blankets, one kitchen set (containing 20 items), one plastic bucket, one plastic mug, clothing, and tarpaulins. The cost of a full family package will be RPS 1,600 or approximately CHF 57. A full household survey will be conducted in order to make sure that only required items will be distributed, the overall distribution will therefore vary by family.

The identification of target families will be decided in consultation with local Red Cross Branches, in full co-ordination with the individual state governments and with all other agencies operating in the area. Inter-agency meetings have already taken place in all three affected states.

The distribution will be carried out by the Red Cross branches with the assistance of Red Cross headquarters' staff and volunteers.

In addition, there will also be a need to replenish the emergency stocks of the Indian Red Cross.

Conclusion

The immediate response by the three state Red Cross branches in the affected areas has already reduced the suffering of the affected families in the flooded areas. A detailed household survey will be conducted as part of this continued operation in order to identify the most vulnerable.

The Federation has released CHF 50,000 from its Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) in order to ensure the continuation of this operation. All activities are being conducted in co-operation with the state governments and all other agencies operating in the area.

Further details will be available after the joint Federation/Indian Red Cross assessment mission to West Bengal is completed on 6 October.

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