

SOUTH ASIA: DROUGHT

*15 December
2000*

appeal no. 17/2000

situation report no. 1; Programme extension to 30 April 2000

period covered: 7 July - 11 December 2000

Major contributions in response to the appeal began to come forward only as of late August, delaying the launch of the operation to assist drought affected populations in India and Pakistan. However, the Indian Red Cross Society and the Pakistan Red Crescent Society have worked since the onset of the drought to complement government initiatives to assist the most vulnerable. A recent assessment in Gujarat and Rajasthan in India has shown that conditions are deteriorating and are likely to become critical in some 4 - 6 weeks' time. In Pakistan, an initial phase of distribution of food packages continues in the provinces of Sindh and Baluchistan and a second phase of distributions is planned as of the end of January. Given significant health needs in Baluchistan, four mobile health units are being set up. The implementation period of the operation has been extended to 30 April 2000.

The context

Since the beginning of the year, parts of India, Pakistan and Afghanistan in South Asia have been experiencing severe drought conditions. Although monsoon rains have now eased the situation in some areas, drought continues to prevail in many places, particularly in the province of Baluchistan in Pakistan and in some districts of Rajasthan and Gujarat in India.

The drought has affected the livelihoods of the affected population and also the health of women and children who, in parts of Pakistan, have been displaced to live in crowded government-run camps set

up for drought relief. The situation has been further compounded by the fact that the water-table has receded dramatically and traditional water catchments have gone dry.

Practising rain-fed agriculture has become increasingly difficult. Pastoralists and agriculturalists alike face a real threat to their food security and many who have lost everything are reduced to taking high interest loans from moneylenders, making their situation all the more precarious. The distress sale of livestock has been rampant - in India a cow that would cost about Rs 12,000 is available for a twelfth of the price. Similarly, in Pakistan, goat and sheep that would cost Rs 1,500 in normal times are now available for Rs 300. The drought has also led to considerable migration from villages and nomadic herdsmen have lost most of their cattle, the only source of their livelihood in these arid regions.

A joint assessment team of the Federation carried out an extensive survey of the situation in the Indian states of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh and in Baluchistan and Sindh provinces in central and south Pakistan. The assessment was followed by a joint appeal for CHF 5,603,930 launched on 6 July to directly assist 80,000 beneficiaries for six months in India and Pakistan and to monitor the situation of 3.5 million people in both countries, as well as in Afghanistan.

Latest events

India •

The drought in most areas of India was eased by the monsoon rains. However, the monsoon failed to make any significant difference to the situation in some areas, particularly the district of Kutch in Western Gujarat and certain districts in Western Rajasthan. The majority of food for work programmes or relief camps established by the state governments of Gujarat and Rajasthan closed at the onset of the monsoon. These sites provided drought victims with some employment on projects such as the construction of roads, entitling them to limited wages in cash and subsidised cereals. Many families have not benefited from the programme as a result of the large numbers of people affected by the drought. It is estimated that some 7,500 villages spread over 145 talukas (blocks) in 15 districts are severely affected this year. In the state of Rajasthan, drought has hit for a third consecutive year. According to the irrigation department, 16 districts recorded levels of rainfall between 20% and 59% lower than average. 29 districts received low rainfall, resulting in a poor millet crop. Farmers have been advised to plant mustard and other crops which require less water. Water in the Rana Pratap Sagar Dam and the Gandhi Sagar Dam has dropped to the lowest level in the last 20 years.

An assessment mission carried out in Gujarat and Rajasthan in early December has indicated that the drought situation continues gradually to deteriorate. Rainfall has been scarce and sporadic. The assessment team found that most farmers were exhausting their resources and that the situation would become critical in 4-6 weeks' time. A medical doctor was also a member of the team and identified slight malnutrition and vitamin D deficiency, especially amongst children.

Pakistan •

The South Western province of Baluchistan falls outside of the path of the south west monsoon in South Asia, and has received no significant rains for the past four years, although the central district of Zhob benefited from some rainfall during the monsoon this year. The state government established 35 relief centres for people affected by the drought, with the result that 23 of Baluchistan's 26 administrative districts were officially declared as calamity stricken. Relief activities in the affected districts are progressing smoothly with involvement of the Drought Crisis Control Centre (DCCC) of the Pakistan Army. In addition, district drought control committees have also been constituted to assist the drought affected population.

In mid October, the Federation's regional health delegate visited Baluchistan, reaching the conclusion that needs remain much at the same level. A further visit in early December by the relief delegate,

assigned in October 2000 for the operation, confirmed that the drought situation has not eased since localised rainfall in a number of districts has had little positive impact. It is estimated that the number of severely drought affected people stands at approximately 850,000. With regard to current and anticipated outbreaks of preventable diseases such as diarrhoea, fever, malaria, skin infections and measles, general levels of health knowledge in nomadic and village communities is limited. A similar review of the drought situation in Sindh Province took place in early December, concluding that the drought situation remains severe, particularly in the eastern districts of Sindh. Furthermore, air irrigation carried out in Tharpakar district had limited effects and the water table is down to 40 - 50 feet in many places.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

India •

The Indian Red Cross has undertaken limited relief activities in the Kutch and Churu districts of Gujarat and Rajasthan. The Indian Red Cross Society national headquarters (NHQ) has coordinated its relief operation work with the Rajasthan and Gujarat state branches, targeting primarily drought affected populations working at relief sites run mostly by the government.

Relief efforts have been directly facilitated through the district Red Cross branches in Churu (Rajasthan) and Kutch (Gujarat). In Kutch, food distributions were carried out through the Kutch branch to 2,000 beneficiaries who were identified in five administrative blocks, namely, Abadasa, Bhachau, Bhuj, Rapar and Lakhpat. Besides food distribution, it was also thought appropriate to undertake some degree of infrastructure development at the sites of the food-for-work programmes. These sites are not equipped to cater for the needs of women and children - there is no place for families to rest and drinking water is scarce. Under the circumstances, the Federation provided the Kutch branch of the Indian Red Cross with funding for 400 tents and 10 water tanks for the food-for-work sites.

Although fodder for cattle was not included in the initial appeal, the need to provide fodder was felt appropriate in Churu where cattle often represent the sole source of income for many people. Accordingly, the Federation has provided funding for fodder distributions in Churu. The section of the population dependent upon animals also needs some relief assistance in order to reduce vulnerability.

As the drought continues to unfold in areas such as Kutch, the Federation and Indian Red Cross operation is not limited to providing targeted relief assistance but is also concentrating on strengthening the existing capacity of local state and district branches, especially with regard to disaster preparedness.

Through the local Red Cross branches, the Federation proposes to continue monitoring the food security and nutritional status of the drought affected populace in those areas where the monsoon has had little or no impact.

The government and local authorities are concentrating on provision of drinking water supplied by tankers, and it is expected that a food for work relief programme will be implemented as of January 2001. The Red Cross intervention will be closely coordinated with this programme. A relief delegate was assigned to the operation in November. The Indian Red Cross Society/Federation will focus on food distributions between January and April 2001. However, it is recognized that beneficiaries will be in need of food support until July 2001, that is until the beginning of the monsoon period. In fact, it is expected that the period from April to July will be even more critical than that between January and March. As a result of the local customs as regards diet, it has been proposed that millet should be distributed to the beneficiaries, rather than rice which is not part of the staple diet.

Pakistan •

The Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS) has so far undertaken relief work in the Thar Pakar region of Sindh province and the Zhob and Mastung districts of Baluchistan. The National Society has been targeting drought affected populations with relief distributions of food to vulnerable populations who fall outside the ongoing government relief effort. The Pakistan Red Crescent Society is also making efforts to link the current relief programme to future longer term plans in other areas such as health.

All Red Crescent activities have been closely co-ordinated with the civil and military administration of the affected districts. In Baluchistan, wheat flour has been procured from the Drought Crisis Control Centre in Quetta and relief materials including cooking oil, sugar, dal (lentils), rice, tea and salt have been bought and distributed locally despite considerable logistical constraints.

Building and strengthening the capacity of local Red Crescent branches is a key component of the current appeal, particularly given that the drought is becoming a perennial phenomenon in provinces such as Baluchistan.

It has been necessary to modify the food basket proposed for the beneficiaries in Pakistan. The wheat requested in the appeal has been replaced by wheatflour after due consideration of the needs on the ground, especially in Baluchistan. The difficult terrain, scattered and nomadic populations, and the possible lack of milling facilities in many smaller communities, were the reasons behind this change.

Thus the food package includes wheatflour, rice, sugar, cooking oil, lentils and some tea and salt. The content of the food packages for Baluchistan and Sindh vary according to differing needs in the differing locations. These details are available on request. Some 60% of assistance is provided in Baluchistan, and 40% in Sindh.

The National Society is currently in the process of tendering for the procurement of an additional 31,000 food packs (14,000 for Baluchistan and 17,000 for Sindh). Capacity to manage the relief action is being strengthened with the hiring of personnel for a small logistics cell within the National Headquarters and relief personnel for Baluchistan provincial branch. This phase of drought relief action will run until the end of January when the next phase of the food distribution will commence. A relief delegate reached Pakistan in October to work closely with the National Society and to provide support to the operation. Identification of beneficiaries is carried out in coordination with local government authorities and an active NGO network and, as far as possible, aid is targeted through district branches. This, together with the health component, offers an opportunity to develop the capacity of the branches. In view of a recent assessment of health needs carried out by the regional health delegate, the health component of the operation in Pakistan will be reinforced. It is planned to establish four mobile health units in Baluchistan Province based in Nushki, Mastung, Quetta and one further location to be identified. These units will provide preventive health services, with some basic curative health care to drought-affected communities in selected villages and nomadic areas. In order to support the health component of the appeal, a health delegate was assigned to the programme in November 2000.

Afghanistan • A drought relief operation is proceeding in the worst affected areas of Afghanistan focusing on provision of food and non-food items, together with deployment of mobile medical teams. In November, a joint agreement was signed with the ICRC relating to the drought operation which is reported on separately in cooperation with the ICRC.

Outstanding needs

At present, the appeal is only 43.6% covered. Contributions are therefore urgently needed in order to continue essential food distributions to the most vulnerable until at least April 2000.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The Federation has maintained constant liaison and cooperation with OCHA in Geneva, has also been in consultation with ECHO in New Delhi and the regional ECHO office in Dhaka and is regularly called upon to attend the NGOs co-ordination meeting held at the office of the UN's resident representative in New Delhi. The Federation and the Indian Red Cross are also regularly participate in discussions with officials of the Ministry of Agriculture in New Delhi which is responsible for disaster preparedness and planning in the country.

The Pakistan Red Crescent Society continues to liaise and co-ordinate with partner organisations, including the government, UN agencies and NGOs.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

The initial phase of food distributions in Pakistan was implemented thanks to a significant contribution from the German Red Cross and other contributions from several PNS. The second phase of distributions to provide additional food packs will be carried out thanks to a donation from the Gates Foundation. The reinforced health component of the relief operation in Pakistan is funded through an ECHO grant.

Conclusion

A slow response to the appeal hampered the launch of the operation to assist the drought affected in India and Pakistan. However, both two relief delegates and a health delegate have now been assigned to the operation and food distributions are underway in Baluchistan. In the provinces of Sindh and Rajasthan in India, distributions are planned to commence in January 2001. The Indian Red Cross Society, the Pakistan Red Crescent Society and the Federation will continue to monitor the situation in both Pakistan and India and recommendations for future action will be put forward in order to assist the most vulnerable who are caught in the vicious circle of drought and poverty.

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South Asia drought						ANNEX 1
APPEAL No. 17/2000		PLEDGES RECEIVED			12/15/00	
DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE	COMMENT
CASH						
REQUESTED IN APPEAL CHF ----->				5,603,930		TOTAL COVERAGE 43.6%
Balance carried forward from 1999				0		
AMERICAN - PRIVATE		50	USD	82	26.07.00	
AMERICAN - PRIVATE		350,000	USD	620,725	05.10.00	
AUSTRIAN - RC		50,000	EUR	78,580	19.07.00	
CANADIAN - PRIVATE				56	27.07.00	
DANISH - RC		500,000	DKK	105,300	18.07.00	
ECHO		525,000	EUR	802,095	26.10.00	EC/IND/210/2000/01005
FINNISH - GOVT/RC		50,456	EUR	78,575	27.09.00	INDIA
FINNISH - GOVT/RC		50,456	EUR	78,575	27.09.00	PAKISTAN
GERMAN - RC		570,000	DEM	453,834	25.09.00	PURCHASE OF 31'000 FOOD PACKAGE
ICELANDIC - RC		200,000	ISK	4,473	07.07.00	
JAPANESE - RC				150,000	26.07.00	
MONACO - RC		80,000	FRF	19,168	06.07.00	
SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED IN CASH				2,391,463	CHF	42.7%
KIND AND SERVICES (INCLUDING PERSONNEL)						
DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE	COMMENT
SWITZERLAND	DELEGATE			50,000	29.09.00	
SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED IN KIND/SERVICES				50,000	CHF	0.9%
ADDITIONAL TO APPEAL BUDGET						
DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE	COMMENT
SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED				0	CHF	
THE FOLLOWING PROJECTS ARE LINKED TO THIS APPEAL:						
PIN530,PAF531						