

BANGLADESH: FLOODS

Preliminary Appeal

no:20/2000

18 August 2000

THIS PRELIMINARY APPEAL SEEKS CHF 3,239,213 IN CASH, KIND AND SERVICES TO ASSIST 200,000 BENEFICIARIES FOR TWO MONTHS

Summary

The monsoon season that began some six weeks early has caused serious flooding in Bangladesh. Torrential rains and water run-off from India, combined with heavy infrastructural damage to embankments and roads, have caused over one million people to leave their homes and seek shelter elsewhere. The flooding has destroyed housing, farmland and roads and caused considerable economic damage. The flooding of farmland has exacerbated unemployment amongst agricultural day labourers.

Water from the recent severe floods in the five Indian States of Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Arunachal Pradesh is now exiting into Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) has been preparing for the crisis for the last two months and is now working closely with the local authorities to provide urgently needed relief assistance to flood victims. The International Federation Delegation in Bangladesh, together with the BDRCS, has already responded to immediate needs and has also undertaken an extensive series of surveys and updated an Operational Framework for flooding.

The Disaster

The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society community based disaster preparedness programme (CBDP) units report that, as of 11 August, 41 sub-districts were flooded. These reports cite that approximately 1.26 million people have been affected thus far. The severe flooding has affected the following three areas:

(1) The Brahmaputra/Jumuna Basin

In the Brahmaputra/Jumuna basin the worst affected districts are Lalmonhirhat, Nilphamari, Kurigram, Gaibandha, Bogra, Sirajganj, Jamalpur and Tangail. Continuous rains and flooding in the past two months in these districts has left over 100,000 families homeless.

(2) The Ganges (Padma) Basin

In the Ganges (Padma) Basin the worst affected districts are Chapai-Nawabganj, Rajshahi, Pabna, Kushtia, Rajbari, Faridpur, Manikganj and Shariatpur. This year, annual monsoon began six weeks early causing unusually severe flooding in the Ganges river basin. Tens of thousands of families have been

displaced, with the districts of Kushtia, Manikganj, Faridpur and Shariatpur particularly affected. Large areas of farmland have been flooded and caused a serious economic loss.

(3) The Meghna Basin

The worst affected districts in the Meghna river basin are Narayanganj, Munshiganj, Comilla, Chandpur, Noakhali and Bhola as well as four districts in the Sylhet Division. The latest reports indicate that the situation has worsened in Comilla and Chandpur districts where the embankments are hardly holding, hence potentially affecting more than 100,000 families.

Flooding resulting from the monsoon is causing severe river erosion. Erosion occurs throughout the year but can reach disaster levels just after annual monsoon floods, hence, the worst of the current erosion is still to come. Hundreds of thousands of people are displaced every year and attempt to rebuild their homes with the possessions they manage to save; they migrate to already heavily populated villages, overcrowded cities or become embankment dwellers. Many set up shelters on the sides of the embankment roads with little or no access to clean water or proper sanitation, as a result, the number of embankment dwellers increases year by year.

The Response so far

Government Action w

There have been sporadic and loosely coordinated activities by district authorities in order to provide relief to the flood victims. The assistance includes food and shelter material to those most vulnerable. The engineering units of the Bangladesh Army have been engaged in shoring up the threatened embankments.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action w

The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, with support of the Federation, updated its Operational Framework in response to floods in mid-June 2000. The framework takes into account current personnel and material assets as well as financial and public relations resources. The framework defines the BDRCS and the Federation responsibilities in a major flood disaster in the areas of food, clothing and health. Regional relief support system was organized for these three areas. Each unit is designed to support 10,000 families or 50,000 people. The Food Unit keeps 200 mt of rice and 40mt dal for 10,000 families. Similarly, the Clothing Unit provides 10,000 saris for women, 10,000 lungis for men and 10,000 sets of children's clothes while the Medical Unit provides a wide range of medicines and other medical items relevant to a relief operation. The Operational Framework approach supports flexibility in accommodating the different needs at different times in different places.

After an initial assessment, the BDRCS headquarters dispatched limited stocks of food to affected areas while the local Red Crescent branches have distributed food from local stocks. The local branches at Kishoreganj, Tangail, Sunamganj and Laxmipur have each received and distributed around 5 MT of food rations while the Kurigram local branch has sent out 10 teams to further assess the situation in their area as well as to collect donations.

Other Agencies' Action w

So far, only a few local NGOs have distributed relief items to some affected areas. No action is currently being undertaken by other international NGOs.

Co-ordination w

Finally, the BDRCS and the Federation are in constant contact with Government authorities, local and international NGOs, and umbrella organizations such as the Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Disaster Forum (a network of local and international relief organizations). The National Society and the Federation are regularly updating the donors in Bangladesh as well as the participating National Societies on the situation.

The Intended Operation

Assessment of Needs •

The BDRCS, supported by the Federation, has been monitoring the evolving emergency since the beginning of the unusually early heavy monsoon rains in early June. The first assessments were conducted in mid-June. When the floods affecting north-east India (Assam) have reached Bangladesh, an assessment team was sent to the most threatened areas in the northern part of the country. The assessment has covered the major river basins affected by flooding.

The assessment findings show that approximately 1.2 million people have been displaced by flooding and river erosion. The majority of those affected are daily labourers, small fishermen and farmers. The assessment concludes that the National Society should provide emergency complementary food rations for the next 2 months, the emergency medical care for the next month and that, with support of the Federation, it should play an advocacy role in encouraging other NGOs to carry out rehabilitation work.

Immediate Needs •

The Federation is today releasing CHF 200,000 from the Disaster Relief Emergency Funds (DREF) for the immediate procurement of relief supplies.

This Preliminary Appeal will meet the urgent food and health needs of 200,000 of the most vulnerable people. The BDRCS and the Federation will continue to closely monitor the situation. A rapid donor response to this Preliminary Appeal will enable the BDRCS and Federation to assist those affected in a timely manner.

Anticipated Later Needs •

Monsoon rains and flood waters from India are expected to continue to pour into Bangladesh. It is expected that the current situation might worsen in the coming 2 to 3 weeks.

Red Cross Objectives •

This Appeal has two main objectives. The first is to distribute 3,840 mt of supplementary food supplies to 200,000 people. This is equivalent to 320g of food per person per day for 60 days. The second objective is to deploy 20 medical teams for a period of 30 days to the affected areas to deal with waterborne diseases.

National Society/Federation Plan of Action

Emergency Phase: August to October, 2000 •

In line with the Operational Framework, the BDRCS, supported by the Federation, intends to carry out a two-month emergency relief operation supporting 200,000 of the most vulnerable people with food and health care in the worst-affected districts. The relief operation will concentrate on the distribution of rice and dal and the provision of the basic emergency health care.

The beneficiary selection will be carried out by the BDRCS life members, the Red Crescent Youth and CBDP volunteer squads. There are some 34,000 well-trained CBDP members in 33 districts.

Where possible, food will be procured locally and transported to district Units for local distribution amongst the displaced population. Relief distributions will be carried out in coordination with the local authorities to ensure that the BDRCS relief efforts are complimentary to those of other organizations. Delegates already deployed by the Federation will assist the BDRCS in carrying out this operation.

Contrary to the original intent of the Operational Framework, it has now been decided to include the services of 20 medical teams for at least one month to provide basic health services due to waterborne diseases like diarrhea, respiratory infections and the possibility of dengue fever. Each team will consist of a doctor, a paramedic and a paramedic volunteer. If the situation warrants, the BDRCS will later deploy other medical teams to provide further medical assistance.

Capacity of the National Society •

The BDRCS has 34,000 well-trained CBDP volunteers and a membership of more than 350,000 people. It has extensive experience in responding to flood emergencies and can rely on technical support from the Federation Delegation in Bangladesh as well as other Federation resources.

Present Capacity of the Federation in Bangladesh •

The Federation Delegation in Bangladesh comprises of five delegates (HoD, Relief, CBDP, Health, Finance/Admin) who have been closely following the situation. Four bilateral delegates (Health and CBDP) from the Japanese (2) and German (2) Red Cross Societies have assisted in the monitoring of the situation in the field. Experienced local staff and two BDRCS delegates who recently returned from their Red Cross missions abroad also add considerably to the capacity of the Federation in Bangladesh.

Evaluation •

So far, the evaluation of the emergency situation has been presented in five Federation Information Bulletins. Following this Preliminary Appeal, the situation in the field will be further evaluated through regular Federation Situation Reports.

Budget summary

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

Heavy rains are expected to continue, in addition to the advance of flood waters from India into Bangladesh. Already the floods and river erosion have seriously affected over 1.2 million people. These vulnerable people now add to the large number of those already affected by floods in previous years.

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This and other reports on Federation operations are available on the Federation's website: <http://www.ifrc.org>