

INDIA: FLOODS

24 March 1999

appeal no. 27/98

situation report no. 4 - Operation extended to 9 February 1999

period covered: 1 December 1998 - 10 February 1999

A good appeal response and competitive prices for relief items has enabled the Indian Red Cross Society branches to increase the number of beneficiaries from 20,000 to 26,000. However transport problems and difficulties with rice purchases slowed down distributions which are still in progress. The operation has therefore been extended from December 9th to February 9th, 1999.

The context

Exceptionally heavy monsoon rains in mid-1998 flooded 12 states in northern India, affecting over 23.6 million people and leaving up to eight million people homeless. The situation was particularly bad in the four states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Assam and West Bengal. An estimated 22,000 villages were inundated and nation-wide, 4.76 million hectares of agricultural land were flooded.

The Indian Red Cross Society's Branches have been providing assistance to the flood victims from the start. A Federation appeal was launched on 9 September, 1998, targeting 20,000 families in the four worst affected states and the restocking of the National Society's emergency stocks.

Latest events

The weather was very cold in December and early January and the entire Deccan Plateau was covered by heavy fog for several weeks, delaying the transport of relief items for the flood operation by approximately two weeks. In addition, the trucks carrying the relief goods to Assam were held up at the border crossing into Assam, causing a further delay. After action by the IRCS/Federation the trucks were released.

Many of the flood victims not only lost their crops in the flood, but are unable to farm their land since it was covered by sand, and are now entirely dependent on daily labour opportunities.

In some the worst hit villages visited in Murshidabad, West Bengal, many families are still living in temporary shelters, and reconstruction of homes is held up by lack of funds.

In mid January, the Government of India decided to increase the prices of essential commodities including rice. Since IRCS is buying rice from FCI (Food Corporation of India, a Government of India undertaking), this decision by the Central Government, and the State Governments' reluctance to implement the decision, meant that Red Cross Branches were unable to obtain delivery of orders of rice, even when these had been paid for. This situation caused considerable delays.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

When the initial orders were placed end November for the relief items in the packages for 20,000 families, the funding situation and the needs were re-assessed. Thanks to very competitive prices obtained from the suppliers, as well as satisfactory donor support, the number of families could be increased from 20,000 to 26,000 and the quantities of blankets, oil and rice in the family package could be adjusted. The revised targets are as follows:

	Assam	Bihar	Uttar Pradesh	West Bengal	Total	Appeal Target
New target (Families)	9,000	5,000	6,000	6,000	26,000.00	20,000.00
Revised quantity						
Rice (25 kg/HoF)	0	125mt	0	150mt	275mt	240.00
Oil (3 ltrs/HoF)	0	15,000	0	18,000	33,000	40,000
Blanket (3pcs/HoF)	27,000 pcs	15,000	18,000	18,000	78,000.00	40,000.00
Tarpaulin (1/HoF)	9,000 pcs	5,000	6,000	6,000	26,000	20,000
Kitchen set (1 set /HoF)	9,000 sets	5,000 sets	0	6,000 sets	20,000	20,000
Mosquito nets (2/HoF)	18,000 nets	0	0	0	18,000.00	0.00
Chlorine tablets	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	900,000.00

The State Branches in Assam and Uttar Pradesh clearly stated that sufficient food commodities have been distributed by other sources, hence no food items are included in the relief package for these two states. In Assam, mosquito nets were found to be in common use, and therefore two mosquito nets have been added to the relief package there.

The additional orders for blankets, tarpaulins and kitchen sets according to the revised target were placed mid December, and delivered by the first week of January 1999. The Assam Branch has placed orders for mosquito nets, and the final delivery is expected soon. Cooking oil has been purchased and delivered to the District Branches. Since water purification tablets were no longer needed, this item was dropped.

Due to the Central Government's decision to increase the price of rice, and the State Governments' reluctance to implement this decision, the local food control department has not been in a position to release the stock even though Red Cross Branches have paid in full. This has resulted in serious delays in completing distributions.

Assam (target 9,000 families)

The Branch received all the relief items purchased by the National Headquarters, although they arrived late due to the problems encountered at the border. The distribution started on 24 January in the presence of the State Governor and the Federation Relief Co-ordinator. This event was well covered in the newspapers and the local TV news.

Since the total beneficiaries target for the State of Assam was increased from 5,000 to 9,000 families, District Branches were instructed to identify additional beneficiaries simultaneously with the distribution to beneficiaries already listed.

Based on the local needs assessment, the Assam State Branch reduced the number of blankets from three to two per family, and only one mosquito net per family. The balance of blankets and mosquito nets will be distributed by the Branch among other vulnerable families affected by the floods in other sub-divisions.

Location	No of families	Blankets	Tarpaulins	Kitchen sets	Mosquito nets
Nalbari	500	1,000	500	500	500
Dhimaji	500	1,000	500	500	500
Dhuburi	500	1,000	500	500	500
Sonitpur	500	1,000	500	500	300
Kokrajhar	500	1,000	500	500	500
Goalpara	500	1,000	500	500	500
Kamrup	500	1,000	500	500	500
Lakhimpur	500	1,000	500	500	500
Marigaon	500	1,000	500	500	500
Darrang	500	1,000	500	500	500
Dhakuakhana	500	1,000	500	500	500
Majuli	400	800	400	300	400
Total	5,900	11,800	5,900	5,800	5,700

Due to limited truck capacity, the districts of Sonitpur and Majuli could not take away the total consignment from the central warehouse, and will move the balance in the near future. The balance of relief packages for 4,100 families is being distributed and reports are expected soon.

Bihar (Target 5,000 families)

To avoid extra transport costs the relief items purchased by the National Headquarters were sent directly to the District Branch of Muzzafarpur. The purchase of rice and oil was heavily delayed due to the reasons mentioned above; distributions could start only on 4 February and are still going on.

Based on a detailed assessment, the Branch decided to distribute a full family package to all families of four or more members, while smaller families receive a reduced package.

Location	No of families	Rice (kg)	Oil (ltrs)	Blankets (pcs)	Tarpaulin (pcs)	Kitchen set (sets)
Gayghat	362	8,380	968	986	362	333
Dih Kodai	172	4,300	516	516	172	172
Gosain Tola	48	870	96	96	48	33
Total	582	13,550	1,580	1,598	582	538

Uttar Pradesh (Target 6,000 families)

The distribution started on 30 December in the presence of the Federation Relief Co-ordinator. The initial distribution was reported in two of the newspapers, mentioning funding by ECHO.

Since the State Government had distributed sufficient supplies of other commodities, the Branch reduced the package to blankets and tarpaulins.

Location	No of families	Blanket (pcs)	Tarpaulin (pcs)
Grakhpur district	2,000	6,000	2,000
Kushinagar	500	1,500	500
Maharajgang	500	1,500	500
Deveria	1,000	3,000	1,000
Total	4,000	12,000	4,000

The Branch has not yet submitted reports on the distribution to the remaining 2,000 families.

West Bengal (target 6,000 families)

The Federation Relief Co-ordinator and the IRCS Assistant Director visited the West Bengal State Branch and the District Branches of Malda and Murshidabad to finalise the procurement of oil and rice. During visits to distributions in both Districts the IRCS/Federation relief team noted that while the Red Cross volunteers were very committed, they were in need of some training in organising relief distributions, and reporting. The team gave some on the job training.

Malda District (Target 4,000 families)

The Malda District Branch has completed the distribution of all items except rice and oil. Procurement of oil was made in Calcutta and sent to the district. The rice price revision has delayed the delivery of the Branch's purchase. Once it becomes available, the Branch will complete the distribution of rice and oil to the same beneficiaries who received the other commodities.

Location	No of families	Blanket (pcs)	Tarpaulin (pcs)	Kitchen set (set)
Majampur	395	1,185	395	395
Alipur-1	255	765	255	255
Maharaj Pur	225	675	225	225
Harekrishna Konar	95	285	95	95
AKG Colony	257	771	257	257
Byaspur	260	780	260	260
Alipur-II	1,090	3,270	1,090	1,090
Manjkchalk	442	1,326	442	442
Nawda Jadupur	507	1,521	507	507
Khasimari	219	657	219	219
Piyasbari	255	765	255	255
Total	4,000	12,000	4,000	4,000

Murshidabad (Target 2,000 families)

The Murshidabad Branch faces the same problems as in Maldain. Distribution of rice will take place as soon as the stock is released. Other items have been distributed as indicated below.

Location	No of families	Blanket (pcs)	Tarpaulin (pcs)	Kitchen set (set)	Oil (ltrs)
Bhagwangola	250	750	250	250	750
Lalgola	250	750	250	250	750
Mahesail	250	750	250	250	750
Samsorganj	250	750	250	250	750
Chadnichak	250	750	250	250	750
Raipara	150	450	150	150	450
Gajdharpara	100	300	100	100	300
Chaltia	100	300	100	100	300
Jhillera	100	300	100	100	300
Beldanga	100	300	100	100	300
Kandi	200	600	200	200	600
Total	2,000	6,000	2,000	2,000	6,000

Replenishment

To replenish the IRCS stock of relief items distributed in the emergency phase, orders have been placed for the following items, which will be stored in the central relief warehouse in Delhi as disaster preparedness stock.:

Blankets	34,500 pieces
Tarpaulin	3,300 pieces
Kitchen set	500 sets
Oil	5,500 liters
Rice	110 Mt.

Others

To enhance the visibility of the Red Cross and, when applicable, the EU, Red Cross and EU stickers have been printed and displayed on the various relief items distributed. Red Cross pinafores were also made and used extensively by volunteers at distribution points.

To strengthen communications capacity between the National headquarters and the branches, three fax machines have been purchased with ECHO funds, and one telephone has been installed in the Murshidabad Branch office.

Transport costs of relief items are higher than anticipated in the budget, but these will be covered by savings in costs for warehousing.

Outstanding needs

The appeal has been fully covered, and it is expected that funds will be available to assist more affected families in other states. However, the replenishment of stock that has taken place as part of this operation falls far short of what is needed for the society to respond to a similar emergency. More support for disaster preparedness would certainly be a sound investment. Although the IRCS managed to assist over 22,000 families in the emergency phase with its own resources, the time that elapsed between the emergency period and the actual distribution of a complete family package -- over six months -- underlines the necessity of having sufficient stock at hand. The IRCS has enough warehouse capacity throughout the country and relief items can be procured locally at very competitive prices.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

In meetings with the Federation Relief Co-ordinator both the Governor of West Bengal and the Governor of Assam pledged their full co-operation and support to the IRCS/Federation flood programme.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The procurement process has been very strict, but time consuming and factors beyond the Society's control added to delays. A number of solutions are being considered, including a yearly agreement with identified vendors, diversification of suppliers, and the design of a standard IRCS relief package that can be used in most relief operations.

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