

India : Floods

31 May 1999

appeal no. 27/98

situation report no. 5 (Interim final report)

period covered: 9 September 1998 - April 1999

This report provides a description of activities through the April, 1999 period. However, because expenditures incurred in 1999 are still being accounted for the full financial report will be issued as a separate document in the coming weeks. After assisting flood victims from its own resources in the immediate emergency phase, the Indian Red Cross Society, supported by the Federation appeal, gave further assistance in the form of food, blankets, household items and tarpaulins to 26,000 families in the four worst hit States.

The context

Exceptionally heavy monsoon rains in August 1998 flooded 12 states in northern India, affecting over 23.6 million people and leaving up to 8 million people homeless. The situation was particularly bad in the four states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Assam and West Bengal where an estimated 22,000 villages were inundated. Nation-wide, a total of 4.76 million hectares of agricultural land was flooded.

Many of the flood victims not only lost their crops in the floods, but also the use of their land, which was covered by sand and silt. Months after the floods many of the farmers were still dependent on daily labour opportunities. A large number of families are also still living in temporary shelters: reconstruction of houses is a slow process due to lack of financial resources.

The Indian Red Cross Society's Branches provided assistance to the flood victims from the very beginning. During the first emergency phase the Society distributed relief material from local warehouses to over 22,000 families. As demand greatly exceeded existing stocks an international appeal was launched on 9 September, 1998, for CHF 1,632,000 to provide assistance to an additional 20,000 of the most vulnerable families in the four worst affected States. The State Branches of the Indian Red Cross Society identified their respective target populations, and the National Society, in close co-operation with the Federation, completed the local procurement of relief items and their subsequent distribution.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Following the positive response to the Appeal, initial orders were placed at the end of November for the relief items included in the 20,000 family packages. Thanks to very competitive prices obtained from the vendors, as well as the quick response to the Appeal, the number of families to be assisted could be increased from 20,000 to 26,000. It was also possible to increase the number of blankets and the quantity of oil and rice in each family package. Thus the revised beneficiary figures and relief items were as follows:

	Assam	Bihar	Uttar Pradesh	West Bengal
New target (families)	9,000	5,000	6,000	6,000
Relief items				
Rice (25 kg/HoF)	0	125 Mt	0	150 Mt
Oil (3 ltrs/HoF)	0	15,000 ltrs	0	18,000 ltrs
Blanket (3pcs/HoF)	27,000 pcs	15,000 pcs	18,000 pcs	18,000 pcs
Tarpaulin (1/HoF)	9,000 pcs	5,000 pcs	6,000 pcs	6,000 pcs
Kitchen set (1 set /HoF)	9,000 sets	5,000 sets	0	6,000 sets
Mosquito nets (2/HoF)	18,000 sets	0	0	0

Because needs varied from state to state, the composition of the relief packages was adjusted accordingly. The State Branches in Assam and Uttar Pradesh clearly stated that sufficient food commodities had been distributed by other sources, and so no food items were included in the relief packages for those two states. In the case of Assam, due to serious problems with mosquitoes, two mosquito nets were added to each relief package.

The additional orders for blankets, tarpaulins and kitchen sets according to the revised target were placed in mid December 1998, and the supplies were delivered by the first week of January 1999. The mosquito nets were purchased locally by the Assam Branch. After an initial delay, cooking oil was purchased from a Government controlled organisation and subsequently distributed.

In mid January the Indian Government decided to increase the price of several essential commodities, including rice. This directly affected the relief operation since the IRCS had placed its order for rice with the Food Corporation of India, FCI, a Government of India undertaking. Several of the State Governments objected to the price increases and were reluctant to implement the Central Government's decision, which meant that the local food control departments were not in a position to release the stocks, even though the Red Cross Branches had paid for the entire supply of rice. The stocks of rice could not be accessed until the end of February, and in the case of Murshidabad not until the first week of March, causing delays in completing the distributions. Once the rice arrived the District Branches started the distribution immediately. As the price had increased, the quantity purchased had to be decreased, and rations were reduced from 25 Kg. per family to 20 Kg. and in some cases to 15 Kgs. per family.

The identification of beneficiaries was in most cases carried out by Branch volunteers in close co-operation with the district administration, while in one case the identification was carried out by the Branch independently.

Since the waters receded before the operation started, water purification tablets were no longer needed. Since the shelf life of this type of chemicals is very short the IRCS will hold the funds allocated in the budget and enter into a contract with a supplier to procure such items at a future date.

• **Assam (Target 9,000 families)**

All the relief items purchased by the National Headquarters were received by the Branch, although after some delay due to problems encountered at the state border crossing. The distribution started on 24 January, 1999, in the presence of the State Governor and the Federation Relief Co-ordinator. The event was well covered by the newspapers and the local TV news.

The Assam Branch purchased mosquito nets from two local vendors. It also purchased some storage trestles, a typewriter and some office furniture to ensure the smooth running of the operation.

Location	No. of families	Blankets	Tarpaulins	Kitchen sets	Mosquito nets
Nalbari	600	1,200	600	600	600
Dhimaji	600	1,200	600	600	600
Dhuburi	600	1,200	600	600	600
Sonitpur/Biswanath Chariali	600	1,200	600	600	600
Kokrajhar	600	1,200	600	600	600
Goalpara	600	1,200	600	600	600
Kamrup	600	1,200	600	700	700
Lakhimpur	600	1,200	700	600	600
Marigaon	600	1,200	600	600	600
Darrang	600	1,200	600	600	600
Dhakuakhana	600	1,200	600	600	600
Majuli	500	1,000	500	500	500
Total	7,200	14,400	7,200	7,200	7,200

Based on the local assessment, the Assam State Branch reduced the number of blankets from three per family to two and the mosquito nets from two to one. The balance of items were distributed to additional vulnerable people affected by the floods. Details are given below :

	District	Blanket	Tarpaulins	Mosquito Net	Kitchen set
1	Dhemaji	1,400	200	1,200	200
2	Tinsukia	1,400	200	1,200	200
3	Newgaon	1,400	200	1,200	200
4	Marigaon	1,400	200	1,200	200
5	Jehat	1,400	200	1,200	200
6	Sibsagar	1,400	200	1,200	200
7	Golaghat/Rangia	1,400	200	1,200	200
8	Kokrajhar	1,400	200	1,200	200
9	Majholi	1,400	200	1,200	200

• **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. However, due to the reasons mentioned above, the purchase of rice and oil was badly delayed and the distribution could only start on 4 February 1999.

The Branch decided, based on a detailed assessment, to distribute a full family package to all families of four members or more. Families of three members and below received a reduced package.

Distribution Table

Location	No. of families	Rice (kg)	Oil (ltrs)	Blankets (pcs)	Tarpaulin (pcs)	Kitchen set (sets)
Gayghat	362	72,400	986	986	262	333
Dih Kodai	172	4,300	516	516	172	172
Gosain Tola	48	870	96	96	48	33
Satha	311	7,775	933	933	311	311
Harkhanti	74	1,390	148	148	74	54
Bhawanipru	287	7,175	861	961	287	287
Barari	105	1,475	164	164	59	53
Garepur	215	5,375	645	645	215	215
Madhopura	39	780	78	78	39	39
Sonpaur/Katre	89	1,100	131	131	42	38
Balua Katra Block Barari Kothi	1302	29250	3446	3446	1191	1143
R.C. Office, Muzaffarpur	477	8890	1027	1027	363	337
Amrai Block	1,494	38,230	4,448	4,448	1,492	1,485
Merskharai Block	91	910	91	91	91	18
Sakra Block	81	810	81	-	81	15
Sahibganj Block	128	1,370	140	18	128	32
TOTAL	5,275	116,940	13,791	13,588	4,955	4,565

As the distribution by the branch in Muzzafarpur was organised according to family size it was possible to increase the number of beneficiary families to 5,275.

• **Uttar Pradesh (Target 6,000 families)**

The distribution started on December 30 1998 in the presence of the Federation Relief Co-ordinator. The initial distribution was covered by two newspapers and ECHO funding was mentioned in the articles.

Since the State Government had distributed sufficient supplies of several commodities, the Branch advised that only blankets and tarpaulins were needed, leading to the reduced package.

Distribution Table

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

• **West Bengal**

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. Several distributions in both the Districts were also observed. The Red Cross volunteers were found to be devoted but in need of some training in organising relief distribution. Some on the job training was carried out by the IRCS / Federation team.

Malda District (Target 4,000 families)

The Malda Branch has completed the distribution of all items.

Distribution Table

Location	No. of families	Rice (kgs)	Oil (Ltr.)	Blanket (pcs)	Tarpaulin (pcs)	Kitchen set (set)
Majampur	395	7,900	1,185	1,185	395	395
Alipur-I	255	5,100	765	765	255	255
Maharaj Pur	225	4,500	675	675	225	225
Harekrishna Konar	95	1,900	285	285	95	95
A.K.G. Colony	257	5,140	771	771	257	257
Byaspur	260	5,200	780	780	260	260
Alipur-II	1,090	21,800	3,270	3,270	1,090	1,090
Manjkchalk	442	6,630	1,326	1,326	442	442
Nawda Jadupur	507	10,140	1,521	1,521	507	507
Khasimari	219	4,380	657	657	219	219
Piyasbari	255	5,100	765	765	255	255
Total	4,000	77,790	12,000	12,000	4,000	4,000

Murshidabad (Target 2,000 families)

The Murshidabad Branch has completed distribution of all articles.

Distribution Table

Location	No. of families	Rice (kgs.)	Blanket (pcs)	Tarpaulin (pcs)	Kitchen set (set)	Oil (ltrs)
Bhagwangola	250	5,000	750	250	250	750
Lalgola	250	5,000	750	250	250	750
Mahesail	250	5,000	750	250	250	750
Samserganj	250	5,000	750	250	250	750
Chadnichak	250	5,000	750	250	250	750
Raipara	150	3,000	450	150	150	450
Gajdharpara	100	2,000	300	100	100	300
Chaltia	100	2,000	300	100	100	300
Jhillera	100	1,500	300	100	100	300
Beldanga	100	1,500	300	100	100	300
Kandi	200	3,000	600	200	200	600
Total	2,000	38,000	6,000	2,000	2,000	6,000

• Replenishment

To replenish the IRCS stock of relief items distributed during the emergency phase the IRCS purchased the following items:

Blankets	34,500 pcs
Tarpaulin	3,300 pcs
Kitchen set	500 sets
Oil	5,500 litres
Rice	110 Mt

• Other

To enhance the visibility of the Red Cross and when applicable, the EU, Red Cross stickers and EU stickers were printed and attached to the various items. Red Cross pinafores were also produced and

used extensively by volunteers at the distributions. The IRCS, from funds allocated in the ECHO budget, purchased two cars to be used for relief co-ordination. In addition some minor purchases of office and warehouse equipment took place. To strengthen the communications capacity between the National Headquarters and the branches three fax machines were also purchased out of ECHO funds, and one telephone was installed in the Murshidabad Branch office. The transport costs of the relief items were higher than anticipated in the budget, but the minor costs for warehousing covered these increases.

• Lessons Learned

The procurement process was strict, but time consuming. To avoid similar delays in the future it has been suggested that the IRCS should enter into one year agreements, renegotiable on a yearly basis based on the inflation rate, with the vendors identified in this operation. IRCS could also design a standard relief package to be used in future relief operations.

The problems encountered with the purchase of rice were mainly caused by the complicated procedures required when purchasing from governmental sources, as well as by the Central Government's sudden decision to revise the prices. IRCS might explore the possibilities of purchasing these types of commodities from other sources.

Water purification chemicals are an essential item for any flood relief operation during the first emergency phase, but are of limited use later, once the waters have receded, and cannot be kept in store.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The contract with ECHO was revised and extended for one month i.e. until 13 February, 1999. A special report on the utilisation of the funds allocated by the German Government through the German Red Cross Society was submitted, and the German Embassy in Delhi duly informed. In meetings with both the Governor of West Bengal and the Governor of Assam, full co-operation and support to the IRCS/Fed. flood programme was given.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

Even though the IRCS managed to assist over 22,000 families out of their own stocks in the emergency phase, the time that elapsed between the emergency period and the actual distribution of a complete family package -- more than six months -- underlines the necessity of having sufficient stocks on hand. India is a vast country with many disaster prone areas, but IRCS has sufficient warehouse capacity throughout the country and relief items can be procured locally at very competitive prices. A Community-Based Disaster Preparedness and Response Programme to promote training and planning has been included in the Emergency Appeal 1999, under Programme 01.28/99.

Peter Rees-Gildea
Director
Operations Funding and Reporting Department

Hiroshi Higashiura
Director
Asia Pacific Department