

05 November 1999

INDIA : ORISSA CYCLONE

*appeal no. 28/99 (Preliminary)**situation report no. 1**period covered: 1 - 5 November 1999*

A violent cyclone, the second in 12 days, has created widespread devastation on India's eastern coast, seriously affecting well over 1 million people. Indian Red Cross teams immediately took part in the relief efforts and a joint Federation / Indian Red Cross assessment team is completing a rapid assessment of the area. This assessment has been coordinated with the Government and all other major organisations in the field. A Federation relief delegate is assisting with the programme, and a medical team will be on site in order to monitor the immediate health situation. The initial Appeal is to support 50,000 families. It is already clear that the number of beneficiaries will exceed this initially planned figure. A full Appeal is expected to be launched in the coming week.

The context

A violent cyclone hit India's eastern coast on Friday 29 October, crossing the coast at approximately 600 km south (east of the port of Paradeep in Orissa State), Paradeep port was very heavily damaged. Winds of up to 260 kph (155 mph) and 20 foot tidal waves flattened homes, trees and electricity utility poles, causing massive destruction and forcing the evacuation of tens of thousands of families in the districts of Ganjam, Jagatsinghpur, Kendrapara, Puri and Bhubaneshwar. The vast stretch of rural Orissa, from Paradeep to Balasou (the rice bowl of the State, has been totally destroyed). The Indian Government has stated that in total over 15 million people have been affected by the cyclone, with millions of families losing their homes or experiencing severe damage to their homes. Firmer figures on the numbers killed are now being gathered, although in the fishing communities there are still considerable numbers of people who are unaccounted for. Even in areas outside Orissa, for example, the Midnapore district of West Bengal at least 200 fishermen are missing and feared killed. The latest estimates of people killed range from 5,000 to 7,000, but this figure will take some time to confirm.

Nearly all of the semi-concrete and thatched structures have been washed away or reduced to rubble. Communications systems have broken down and travel is still difficult due to flooding and infrastructural damage, although the water levels are now receding significantly and many of the vital communications are now being restored.

Rescue operations were initially hampered because of difficulties in reaching the affected areas, but relief supplies from different parts of India are now arriving although some of the more remote areas are still being investigated. Helicopters are now in operation, and the railway network is also being used for the operation. The Food Corporation of India is sending 2,200 metric tonnes of rice from Calcutta to Balasore, bleaching powder, and halogen water purification tablets are also being sent to Bhubaneshwar and Paradip from Delhi.

Latest events

The main concerns in the areas are food security, shelter and public health. Food stocks were already running low as the next harvest was due in around 45 days. Many people lost all their remaining stocks and will therefore need assistance for at least the next 2 months. Due to contamination by salt water the villagers estimate that they will be fortunate to achieve even a 30% yield from their rice crop.

Several people are drawing water from canals as their tube wells have been contaminated by salt water. The hygiene and water supply aspects are being addressed by a number of agencies and the Government have sent in a large number of medical staff to the area. The health situation will need to be monitored closely, already some cases of gastro enteritis have been registered.

It is generally considered that the early warning system worked well. All the Red Cross cyclone shelters were used well beyond their designed capacity. Many people can now return to their homes, but are only able to carry out makeshift repairs to their homes. In the longer term they will have to rely on straw from the rice harvest to re-thatch their roofs which will not be available for three months.

Economically the consequences of the cyclone along the coastal belt will certainly be felt for the next few years, mainly due to the high saline content in the paddies.

A Red Cross disaster team helped to deliver three babies that were born during the cyclone in one of the Red Cross shelters.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

Red Cross teams are already in the field, many still on assignment in response to the cyclone that occurred eleven days earlier. Red Cross volunteers assisted the evacuation effort and are helping to distribute emergency food, shelter material and clothing. The Indian Red Cross immediately sent emergency buffer stocks, including blankets, emergency rations, assorted clothing, cloth sheeting, plastic sheeting and water purification tablets, from its warehouse in Calcutta. Volunteers from local Red Cross branches are providing emergency food to over 3,000 people in 6 Red Cross centres for this distribution. Programme offices are visiting all the affected areas. In total there are 21 shelters in the most affected areas -- each shelter can accommodate between 1,500 and 2,000 people, with some even exceeding these numbers. The distribution of these shelters is as follows: 9 in Kendrapara, 5 in Bhadrak, 3 in Jagatsinghpur, 3 in Puri, and 1 in Baleswar.

The Federation immediately released CHF 200,000 from its Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) for the operation. This money has already been spent mostly on food items. A further amount has now been released based on the first pledged donations.

The Headquarters of the Indian Red Cross have already released the following relief materials to meet the immediate and ongoing needs:

- Blankets 1,000 units
- Emergency food ration 2,000 Kgs.
- Assorted clothing 4,000 Kgs.
- Cloth sheeting 2,000 metres
- Plastic sheeting 9,600 sq. metres
- Calcium hypochloride (water purification) 500 Kgs. (for an initial 4.5 million litres of water).

The Red Cross has now purchased additional food, water purification items, plastic sheeting and other domestic items. These are now being delivered to the affected areas, using the 21 cyclone shelters as a base. Additional villages are now being surveyed - these are areas closer to the sea which have been impossible to reach until now. The already purchased supplies will also now be extended to reach these new areas.

Co-ordination w

The Government maintains overall responsibility for the operation. The Indian Red Cross Society is working alongside all other parties in the affected areas. There are daily coordination meetings in the field - all the major agencies and the government attend these meetings. In Delhi a system of regular coordination meetings has been set up, assisted by the Federation.

Outstanding needs

Assessment of Needs ●

A joint Indian Red Cross/Federation rapid assessment team was one of the first in the field, after a first assessment by the local branch of the Indian Red Cross a much fuller assessment is now possible.

Immediate Needs ●

Many supplies are already arriving in the area from Indian Red Cross stocks located in Calcutta and elsewhere. A system of local purchase has been established, as most of the required items are available in the State. The following needs have been identified:

Shelter Materials: Tarpaulins and plastic sheeting are required

Food: Family food stocks have been washed away or spoilt and markets and shops have also lost their stocks, causing a severe shortage of food in the immediate area. The immediate food needs which the Red Cross will cover are rice, dal and cooking oil. These basic items will be supplemented with beans, lentils and other foodstuffs as necessary.

Medicines: The Indian Government is covering the medical needs

Domestic items: Families in need will be supplied with clothing, cooking utensils, water containers, lamps, blankets, bed linen, ground sheets and plastic sheets.

Water purification: The drinking water system has been completely destroyed in many places, creating a threat to health. The Government is addressing the problem, but the Red Cross will continue to monitor the situation, and in the short term will provide bleaching powder and water purification tablets. Included in the Federation operation is a small quantity of ORS for an emergency buffer stock.

Selection of beneficiaries ●

An initial selection of the most vulnerable has been conducted by the joint Indian Red Cross/Federation rapid assessment team. A detailed village to village evaluation will be conducted as part of this operation.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The coordination with the Government, both at State and National level, with the UN and all other NGOs is extremely positive. All the major operators meet on a daily basis in the field, and also regularly in Delhi.

There has been a great deal of media coverage for both the Federation and the Indian Red Cross.

Contributions

A Contributions List will be provided in the next Situation Report.

Conclusion

The Indian Red Cross, assisted by the Federation, has started emergency relief support to victims of the cyclone. Initial distributions have started and procurement is underway to provide more relief items. The operation is already exceeding the initial plan of action established in the Preliminary Appeal. Once assessments are completed a full Appeal for a larger operation will be launched in the coming week.

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