

Meeting of the DER Sub-Group

26 September 2004

The meeting was chaired by Mr. Douglas Casson Coutts, WFP Representative.

MAIN POINTS COVERED AT THE MEETING

- **Minutes of Previous Meeting (16 Sep 04)**
 - Mr. Masood Ahmed requested that the \$ 1 million support provided by UNICEF to Dhaka WASA, DSK and CUP be added to the update for the Water and Sanitation Sector.

- **Current River Situation and Weather Forecast**
 - Since there were no technical experts present from the Flood Forecast Warning Centre or Bangladesh Meteorological Department, the group discussed the situation presented in latest River Flood Situation Map dated 25 Sep 04. Monitoring points along the Jamuna indicate rising water levels, partially due to the severe depression of the previous week now impacting the Indian States of Assam and Meghalay.
 - The severe flooding in the Southwest was continuing but press reports that the sluice gates in West Bengal have been opened were unfounded, although this remained a possibility.
 - It was clarified that the River Flood Situation Maps were forecasts of the river water levels, not of flooding, and they show only whether the water level is going to rise or fall at that point.

- **Discussion of the Ongoing Flood Situations**

Eastern Bangladesh (Comilla)

- GoB has already taken the initiative to provide food under VGF and to equip shelters. Some families are still in the shelters as their houses have been damaged. Local MPs are distributing relief whilst the army is supporting the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) to repair the breached embankments.
- CARE has provided food relief including high-energy biscuits, and also bleaching powder, and BRAC has also undertaken relief activities in this area.
- Members decided that assessment or other efforts by the DER Group as a whole were not needed, as GoB has the situation under control, but support to rehabilitate housing in the area will probably be needed.

Southwest Bangladesh (Jessore, Satkhira, Magura, Khulna, Kushtia, and Chuadanga)

- There is still 5-6 ft of water in parts of Satkhira and Jessore. Three upazilas of Jessore have been water-logged for over a week, 95 primary schools are closed and 60 flood shelters have been opened. 2,000 people in Satkhira have been affected.

- Early vegetable and flower (a major cash-crop)-growing areas have been affected by flooding, so any assessment should take into consideration the affect on farmers and their incomes.
- District Disaster Management Committee coordination meetings have started taking place. GoB is providing assistance in the form of rice and cash, utilising Gratuitous Relief (GR) rather than Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) as it is less rigid and has a broader reach – VGF is covering only 1,600 families per union. The Ministry of Health has sent supplies to the Civil Surgeons of Jessore and Satkhira, and UNICEF has supplied materials to DPHE. DPHE is working with the Wat/San Sector Group, and they have requested relief materials from Dhaka. Medicine and WPT are needed in one *upazila* in Narail and UNICEF may be able to provide this.
- Instead of conducting a field assessment of the area, the DER Group decided that a meeting of relevant agency’s locally-based staff should be scheduled for 1400 hrs on Mon 27 Sep 04 in Jessore, to compare notes and decide how serious the situation is in these districts. It may be that the areas are waterlogged rather than flooded and, with a spell of good weather, this water will gradually recede. The results and conclusions of this meeting will be circulated amongst DER Members.

The Secretariat subsequently organised the meeting on 27/28 Sep 04 at the WFP office in Jessore, with the participation of representatives of BDRCS, Bhumija, BRAC, CARE, PSKS, SA, USS, Uttaran, and WFP. Reports on 6 districts were submitted on 29 Sep 04 and they will be disseminated shortly.

- **Presentation of findings of the DER Post-Flood Needs Assessment, 05-14 Sep 04**

[Mr. Charlie Higgins, DER Secretariat]

- Most district and *upazila* formats completed have been reviewed. The summary report is drafted and most district and *upazila* sheets will shortly be on the LCG web-page.
- The highest impacts, needs and recommendations were collected separately and will be included as Annex E in the report. Some of the most critical items identified were: livelihoods and how to regenerate them, particularly for the poorest people (FFW ?); damage to infrastructure; the need for more support to agriculture; greater emphasis on Wat/San; and an increasing concern about food (as people will be short of food until the next harvest). More thought and work is required to reduce vulnerability and increase resilience at household and district levels.
- The assessment data will be helpful for anyone working at the *upazila* level in any of the districts under the 8 zones. The assessment summary report will be useful for donor members and also anyone outside the DER group concerned with the emergency.
- The members of the sectoral working groups will be asked to review the assessments and comment on the district summaries and *upazila* reports. They provided some of the questions and now they will be asked to look at the results, analysing and commenting on the respective sections of the district summary reports, reverting to the DER Secretariat within one week.
- GoB is currently rebuilding damaged schools but not necessarily due only to flooding, as an assessment is yet to be carried out. There is concern as to whether houses can be rehabilitated, and sanitation is also bad. In FGDs the people prioritised strengthening embankments to protect against river erosion and rehabilitation of the fisheries sector.
- Mr. Masood Ahmed distributed a summary of the ‘Rapid Assessment on Socially Excluded and Vulnerable Women and Children’ conducted by UNICEF in August, which will be annexed to the DER Post-Flood Needs Assessment Summary Report.

- **Presentation of the current situation in Agriculture Sector**

[Mr. Subash Dasgupta, FAO]

- A comprehensive PowerPoint presentation was given on the agriculture situation, taking into account flooding caused by the heavy rainfall 10-16 Sep 04 . A copy of this presentation is available on the DER website at www.lcgbangladesh.org
- GoB has informed FAO that availability of rice seed will not be a problem. BADC has sufficient seeds and the private sector is also importing seeds. Vegetable production, however, will be a problem, as many seedbeds were damaged by the recent rainfall.

- **Presentation of the first version of the DER Relief Database**

[Mr. Sameer Abd. al-Wahid, Mr. Malik Kabir, Mr. Moshfequul Haque - UNDP]

- The concept and purpose of the DER Relief Database was explained using a PowerPoint presentation and a mock-up of the web-page interface as it will appear when the database is finished. A two page handout was also distributed.
- DER members suggested enhancements to the way data is presented, such as a column showing population as well as number of families and another showing the ration level per family. The same is true of medical supplies where the relief should be presented as the amount of assistance going to a certain number of patients. In the longer term we should seek to include data on needs, but this is much harder than on relief provided.
- The database will be accessible on the internet and the MS Access-based architecture will be made freely available to DER members including GoB. It will not include Government data directly, but will be set up to be compatible and complementary to any future Government database.

- **Any Other Business**

- The chair mentioned the problem of dilution of the VGF rice ration. 10kg is already low – WFP has set its Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) ration at 30kg per family. The dilution may not necessarily be due to corruption or any malicious act, but simply a question of spreading the relief more widely because resources are scarce. He asked for any reports from the field that corroborate this.
- Another problem with the food relief was that there were reports of some DER members following the ration scale but deviating from VGF beneficiary selection criteria, and distributing the relief to their own members. Again, any reports of this occurring should be passed back to WFP so that it can take the necessary action.
- As a point of clarification, VGF is the GoB feeding programme with cards issued to families that are valid for one year, whilst VGD is a joint GoB-WFP development activity. The ration scales are different but they use the same selection criteria.

- The next meeting of the DER Sub-Group will be on Wednesday 6 October 2004 at 1400 hrs in the UN meeting room on the 17th floor of the IDB Building.

DER Sub-Group Secretariat

2 October 2004