

Meeting of the DER Sub-Group

18 August 2004

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

MAIN POINTS COVERED AT THE MEETING:

- The Chair referred members to the Action Points to the previous meeting of the DER Sub-Group on 11 Aug 04. No changes were requested and the minutes were adopted.
- CEGIS River Situation maps show rises at points along the Ganges/Padma over the three previous consecutive days. It has not caused flooding yet but it should be watched. The MFDM Sitrep of 17 Aug repeated a comment by Mr. Selim Bhuiyan, Director of FFWC, that “the situation for the next 7 days would be normal and nothing to worry about”.
- Updates from the chairs of each DER sector working group:

Health and Nutrition

[Dr. Kazi Akram, WHO]

- In the last 24 hours there have been about 6,000 cases of watery diarrhoea, but no deaths. Since floods started (12 Jul), there have been about 182,000 cases with 81 deaths, and 31,000 cases of dysentery with no deaths. These very low case fatality rates reflect good awareness and successful treatment regimes.
- Dengue has been growing over the last 3-4 years. The present outbreak started in Mar 04, with about 2,100 cases with 5 deaths reported by GoB. During the floods, breeding opportunities for mosquitoes were limited, but as the floods recede, leaving stagnant water behind, the dengue caseload may increase.
- GoB has assessed health infrastructure losses (THC) at about US\$ 5 million. Other rapid assessments of health sector damage and needs have also been made (by the Institute of Epidemiology Disease Control and Research – IEDCR).
- US\$ 70,000 worth of emergency medicines ordered by WHO will arrive next week.
- The working group had not met since the last DER meeting, but it would do so on 19 Aug. The group still plans to produce a detailed work-plan and to discuss further assessment requirements, monitoring and implementation mechanisms. ICDDR-B joined the group last week and all NGOs working in health care are welcome.

Water and Sanitation

[Mr. Paul Edwards, UNICEF]

- The group met this morning – participation is good with many relevant agencies from government departments, INGOs, and NGOs.
- As people move back to their homes, disinfection of tube-wells is the main issue. About 72,600 government tube-wells have now been disinfected but 131,000 remain.

At a rate of about 3,000 per day this will take another 1½ months. As there are eight times as many private as government tube-wells, the overall task is enormous.

- Constraints include damage to the village road network hampering access, shortage of skilled manpower for disinfection and spare parts for repair (which will be provided for free for government tube-wells but not for private tube-wells). Latrine production facilities are out of action so temporary latrines may need to be installed.
- Bleaching powder has to be used for tube-well disinfection because, in the short-term, safe water is the highest priority, people understand how to use it, and there is little else easily available. But in the longer term the Water and Sanitation Group should look for alternatives that are less damaging to the environment. This would include measures to ensure that new tube-wells have spouts that are raised above likely flood levels.
- In the absence of chemical disinfection the recommendation is for owners of tube-wells to pump them for at least 2 hours to expel the contaminated water.
- More awareness-raising is needed, as the slow process of disinfecting, repairing and installing tube-wells and latrines proceeds. UNICEF has prepared a booklet on water and sanitation measures for health-workers and a short leaflet for household level.
- In terms of information needs, DPHE, NGO Forum and UNICEF are looking at conducting a specific assessment for water and sanitation, but it will take a few weeks.
- Other concerns are the lack of funding and the need to prepare for further flooding in September, particularly along the Ganges where it has not yet flooded, as the previously flooded areas are probably already quite prepared.

Food and Agriculture

[Ms. Rehana Banoo, WFP]

- The DER *haor* flood assessment in June revealed that farmers in the northeast could not harvest their standing crops in April. The DER quick assessment in July indicated that many households have little remaining food-stocks, and no sources of income to buy food as long as the water persists and stagnates, because the inundation has damaged and closed so many small businesses.
- Up to 18 Aug over 60,000 MT had been distributed to 8.3 million families (= 40 million people). GoB has covered 90% of this population with 79% of the total rice allocated, whilst the NGOs/UN agencies and the international community have covered the worst-affected 10% of people with 21% of the total rice allocated. 840 MT of high-energy biscuits have also been distributed to 620,000 people).
- GoB is now planning its Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) programme, which should start next week and continue until the next harvest when rural livelihoods start to recover. The Government is trying to maximise its support to the poor in all flood-affected districts with a ration of 10 kg rice per family per month, and its stocks should be sufficient to meet these needs until the end of the year, whilst WFP and its implementing partners are trying to maximise the nutritional benefit by providing a larger ration of 30 kg per family per month, targeted at only the most needy.
- As the water has now receded, farmers are preparing their land for cultivation. In many areas transplantation is taking place but the general observation is an acute shortage of seeds and seedlings. Prices are four times higher than normal, and the problem of needs versus availability of seeds has yet to be quantified. However, GoB has now just started its free seed distribution programme.

- Options for quick recovery include homestead gardening using early varieties of rapid-growing vegetables, supply of cattle feed and vaccines, and renovation of fish ponds under Food-For-Work schemes.

Shelter and Non-food Relief

[Ms. Dilruba Haider, UNDP]

- The last meeting of the group was on 15 Aug to discuss issues raised by the DER Secretariat; assessment needs of the sector and possible responses to further flooding.
- The group identified information that would guide interventions in the housing sector. It includes information on the house-designs and building materials in the worst-affected areas, the number of female-headed households amongst those who have lost their homes, and practices for flood mitigation in different parts of the country.
- The use of Corrugated Iron (CI) sheeting for roofs is also not always appropriate, nor safe during cyclones and tornadoes but, again, there are few available alternatives. To some extent the provision of CI sheets will be appropriate in some areas but not others, and the locations will have to be determined through assessment.

Education and Protection

[Mr. Nawshad Ahmed, UNICEF]

- A total of 25,500 educational institutions have been damaged and currently 400 schools are being used as shelters (out of 2,332 formerly). Out of 17,000 primary schools more than 14,000 are functioning again, but 75 were destroyed and 1,700 badly damaged.
- The Ministry of Primary and Mass Education will start an assessment of damage in the sector. It will decide on funding requirements and the Special Adviser for Primary Education will present its findings to the Primary Education Development Programme (PDP2) Consortium headed by ADB. This should cover the costs of repair and reconstruction for government primary schools over the coming months, but assistance will still be needed for immediate interventions to restart education, such as the provision of textbooks and school supplies.
- GoB has said that the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examination will proceed as planned for those institutions that can cope, otherwise it can be delayed until Sep 04. The Government may also have to consider exempting or delaying the payment of boarding school fees in Nov.
- An assessment of protection issues in the remaining shelters is now being planned, and UNICEF has engaged a consultant to carry it out and produce a plan of action. Interventions so far have included the provision of information, and recreational opportunities to children in 70 shelters. 15 minute programmes with advice on childrens' and adolescents' health will be broadcast twice weekly on local radio stations from 22 Aug. The main challenges are the lack of funds and experience in this area, as well as some institutional weaknesses (too few specialist agencies, lack of special legal provisions, lack of knowledge amongst the legal profession and the police).
- The Education and Protection Working Group is scheduled to meet again on 23 Aug.

Economic Recovery and Infrastructure

[Ms. Dilruba Haider, UNDP]

- The group identified the need for information on the number of families which had lost their homes and assets through river erosion; the number and present locations of

families which have been displaced within their localities or forced to migrate to cities; details about the pre-existing livelihoods of these people; strategies for increasing flood resistance; and ideas for how to prioritise/target them for economic recovery assistance. INGOs could be asked to gather this kind of information through their local partners.

- One of the key features of assistance provided in this sector must be emphasis on the need to reduce future vulnerability and protect the newly-created assets. An example is the request of weavers that their handlooms should be raised above ground level.
 - ILO will soon field an extensive economic recovery assessment.
 - In terms of infrastructure, embankment repair is an urgent priority but it must take into account the need for drainage when floods are high in future.
- The floor was then opened for discussion of general issues raised in the sectoral updates:
 - As women-headed households will have been disproportionately affected by the floods, all sectors were urged to keep a gender dimension in their planning and interventions, and especially to get and use gender disaggregated data where available.
 - At the UN-DMT meeting on 16 Aug the UN Resident Coordinator had urged all sector groups to coordinate with each other, for instance Health/Nutrition with Wat/San, and Wat/San with Shelter/Non-food, to ensure that overall efforts were coordinated.
 - Whilst everyone is concerned with potential further floods in Sep, the DER Group should also be looking at the mid-term (3-5 years) to determine how best to mitigate flood impact and reduce peoples' vulnerability.
 - GoB was looking at how to improve its capacity to manage future disasters, and the MFDM-CDMP representative asked NGOs to inform him whether Disaster Management Committee meetings had actually taken place at union, *upazila* and district levels, and whether they followed the specified action plan. WFP had asked its Regional Offices to report this, and would send a summary report to MFDM.
 - **Sector Working Groups**
 - The Chair congratulated the DER Group on establishing effective sectoral working groups, as it had wanted to do for a long time. The challenge was now to sustain this sectoral coordination beyond the emergency phase, so that work could continue on preparedness such as contingency planning and longer-term risk reduction, and the disaster management community will not have to reinvent the wheel every few years. It was encouraging that WFP was strengthening the DER Secretariat, so that lessons being learnt in this year's flood will not have to be re-learnt again, and the Group should maintain more continuity between disasters, even if meeting attendance falls off.
 - The secretariat distributed generic Terms of Reference (ToR) for the sector working groups. The groups were encouraged to use these ToR and make them specific to the needs and activities of their sector. Although the lifetime of the current DER Sector Working Groups may be 6 months or less, one way to keep them extant in the future was to incorporate their chairs into an expanded DER Facilitation Team.
 - Their relationship with the relevant LCG Sub-Groups (especially Agriculture, Education, Food Security and Nutrition, Health and Population, Water Supply and Sanitation, Women and Gender Equality) was raised, and the chairs of the DER Sector Working Groups were asked to make linkages with the respective LCG Sub-Groups,

especially to ensure that their deliberations were given a disaster risk reduction dimension. Another challenge was to ensure that GoB is a more active participant in the LCG process, especially at higher policy level, so that it could benefit from improved coordination in disaster planning.

- The current membership of the seven sector working groups was reviewed. They should include all the main government and non-government actors in each sector. DER Member Agencies should proactively come forward and participate in their work.

- **The Need for Further Assessment**

- The meeting revisited the question of whether and how to proceed with further assessment, bearing in mind that this did not imply that current relief and rehabilitation operations would be suspended. The Chair pointed out how much the donors had appreciated the DER Assessment Report dated 28 Jul 04 since it demonstrated an excellent level of coordination and comprehensiveness, and how it had been the starting point for work on the Flash Appeal and WFP's EMOP. With "the piggy-bank almost empty" the requirement to restate the relief and recovery needs could not be overstated, especially with other crises now competing for international attention and funds.
- The Group discussed the merits of conducting a second assessment, asking how long might take and what information it would provide. It was clarified that it was to quantify urgent relief and recovery needs, not the damage to infrastructure, and it would have to be done under the guidance of the sector working groups, since these groups which need the information in order to plan the detail of their sectoral interventions.
- As the DER Group had already completed one assessment it should be possible to generate a second, this time giving better information about the needs. A number of agencies including a donor supported the proposal, since the first assessment report had been a strong tool for advocating further action. DER Member Agencies were urged to make their own assessment reports available to be uploaded on the DER web-page, if they were suitably comprehensive and country-wide.
- The meeting endorsed the suggestion that its 'Multi-Agency Multi-Sectoral Assessment Team' should meet on Mon 23 Aug at 2 pm to decide how the DER Group should tackle the question of further needs assessment.
- The working groups chairs were tasked to provide guidance to the 'Assessment Team' by COB Sun 22 Aug, in terms of specifying what information they need in order to conduct their sector-specific planning and implementation, and also how they would go about filling these information gaps.
- The 'Assessment Team' will present an agreed approach or mechanism for conducting further assessment to the DER Group at its next meeting.

- ***Any Other Business***

- The Chair stated for the record that the US\$ 7 billion figure for flood damage and losses did not originate with the UN. In any case, at this stage all damage estimates are highly provisional until GoB completes its full assessment. Furthermore the figure for losses should not be confused with the amount appealed for in the Flash Appeal (US\$ 2 million). The UN was not seeking to make up all the losses from the flooding. What it is trying to do is meet the most urgent needs of the ultra-poor who have been worst

- affected by the floods. This is within the capability of the UN System and its implementing partners in Government Departments and NGOs to tackle, providing it receives the necessary funding. Raising such funds was the key issue right now.
- The Chair gave a brief update on the progress of the Flash Appeal. Fundraising was moving ahead but slowly, because of the many competing demands at the moment. Australia, EC, Norway, Singapore, UK, and USA had all come forward, but much more was still needed. Meanwhile UN Agencies' reserves for immediate response were becoming depleted. And if the floods return the needs will increase dramatically.
 - As the UN Resident Coordinator had requested at the UN-DMT Meeting on 16 Aug, one way to increase donor interest in the appeal was to take them to the field to see for themselves the acute needs and the relief work that is underway. All agencies were asked to identify suitable opportunities for field visits by donor representatives, and to send details to the DER Secretariat to coordinate them.
 - The seed shortage was being presented as absolutely critical, but was this correct? FAO clarified that the Ministry of Agriculture claims to have seeds, and has not made any request for assistance, so FAO cannot move to provide them. GoB states that it has made arrangements to provide farmers with 1,700 hectares output of seedlings but the press says that this is not adequate. And, even if there is enough seed across the country, some farmers are facing a crisis because seed may be unavailable locally or the prices may be being kept artificially high in some districts. The quality of the seeds is also generally poor. Another factor is that for every day after 1 September that planting is delayed, the total *aman* crop yield reduces by 100,000 MT.
 - FAO was asked to give a special presentation on the seed situation at the next meeting.
 - At the next DER Meeting the Joint DFID-UNDP-WFP Project Selection Committee would make a statement on the utilisation of the DFID £10 million emergency grant.
- The next meeting of the DER Sub-Group will be on Thursday, 26 August 2004¹, at 1400 hrs in Meeting Room 1 on the 3rd floor of the IDB Bhaban Building. The agenda will be disseminated shortly, but suggestions from DER Sub-Group Members are very welcome.

DER Sub-Group Secretariat
22 August 2004

¹ If another *hartal* is called on this date, the meeting may have to be postponed until Sun 29 Aug 04.