

## JDC'S RESPONSE TO HURRICANE SIDR, BANGLADESH

### A RELIEF AND RECOVERY EFFORT IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE INTERNATIONAL BLUE CRESCENT

#### Progress Report

By Amos Avgar

#### The Disaster

On November 15, 2007, the deadly Tropical Cyclone Sidr hit an already impoverished Bangladesh, destroying hundreds of thousands of homes in the southwest of the country and ruining much-needed crops right before harvesting season. More than one million coastal villagers were evacuated. The Government of Bangladesh (GOB) reported the following estimated figures:

- 7 million people affected
- 10,000 people dead
- 34,708 residents injured
- Over 500,000 houses destroyed and another 875,710 houses partially damaged
- 1.8 million acres of crops damaged
- Extensive harm to roads and public buildings, including 1374 educational institutions destroyed and another 8,635 partially damaged

Coastal Bangladesh is a maze of waterways, creeks, islands, and sandbanks and the only way to get help to the hundreds of thousands of hurricane survivors is by boat.



*Survivor of Cyclone Sidr in the  
Lagoons District*

## JDC-IDP in Action

The needs of the affected population were overwhelming and covered virtually all spheres of human life.

Confronted with the vast devastation, the Government of Bangladesh made an appeal to International NGOs and governments for assistance. JDC responded by opening an emergency mailbox in order to quickly address the needs in the region. As a small NGO with limited resources, JDC cannot play a major role in the rescue phase. It can, however, apply its expertise to the reconstruction and rehabilitation phase and very effectively develop model projects that can be replicated throughout the region. Such projects, if proven successful, can improve the living conditions of the population from the pre-disaster level, thereby promoting development.

Similarly, by working with and through local NGOs, the assistance is aimed at building local capacity. JDC-IDP staff contacted The Turkish International Blue Crescent (IBC)—an organization with which JDC is partnering in Pakistan—and began to plan a joint disaster relief and recovery operation in the affected area of Bangladesh with local NGOs. The approach adopted by both organizations is to use assistance as leverage for the development of local capabilities and to reduce post disaster dependence. Both IBC and JDC believe that while a disaster can be very devastating, it may also provide opportunities for development.

To learn firsthand about the situation and to establish credibility with the local population, emergency humanitarian assistance was distributed. Following the assessment, two critical decisions were made: 1) To select two critical areas of involvement that can promote development and 2) To focus on some of the most hard-to-reach villages situated in the Bay of Bengal.



Together with the local community and local NGOs, JDC and IBC began to implement two major interventions critical to the long-term recovery of the region: a fishermen support project and a hygiene promotion project. All funds allocated to the projects came from the JDC mailbox.

While Bangladesh is a predominantly Muslim country, the population of the villages benefiting from the IBC-JDC partnership is a unique composition of Muslims, Christians, and Hindus. The recovery program in Bangladesh is yet another example of IDP's non-sectarian disaster assistance strategy and commitment to Tikkun Olam. Here, a Jewish organization, in partnership with a Muslim NGO, is assisting Muslims, Christians, and Hindus and promoting good will in a Muslim State.

JDC is still collecting funds for the programs in Bangladesh, as the needs remain high.

## Fishermen Support Project



From the 243 families living in the village, 127 were earning their living from fishing before the Cyclone hit. The joint JDC-IBC project supported 70 of the poorest fishermen families by providing them with fishing boats.

The boats were built in the village itself by local artisans along with the support of the beneficiaries. The fishermen themselves supervised the construction work of their own boats, which served as

the best form of quality control as well as ensuring that individual needs were met. JDC-IBC contracted the artisans and paid for the materials. The boats are made from chambal wood and rain tree, and at 25 ft in length and 6 ft wide, they suit the local fishing conditions.

An agreement was signed with each fisherman stating that they are to use the boat for livelihood purposes only and are to follow all legal regulations. It also stated that they are fully responsible for future maintenance and may not transfer ownership for a two-year period.

*In the village of Belal Gazi, one of the beneficiaries is a woman who is head of her household since her husband died in the cyclone. She has five children and no relatives in the village to support her. Before having the boat, for which she expressed enormous gratitude to our staff, she would wade into the river barefoot to catch fish with a small net.*

### **Use of boats**

The boats were provided to groups of 7-10 fishermen at a time. The fishermen are back at work collecting shrimp from the river, up to 15 km toward the sea. They leave every morning at sunrise with their boats and nets and return with the catch before 11 a.m., when the heat becomes unbearable. The catch is used for daily food by the family or sold to wholesalers. It allows the fisherman to earn around 300-400 Taka daily (5-6 dollars) in a region where the average income is less than one dollar a day.



## Hygiene Promotion Project

The hygiene promotion project is implemented by AVAS (The Association of Voluntary Action for Society), a local NGO with good community networks and experience in the field.

The project aims to improve the health and hygienic condition of the population by:

- Increasing hygiene awareness of the targeted women, men, and children.
- Enhancing hygiene habits of the population.
- Increasing general awareness on health issues.



*Hygiene kit distribution, sticker enlarged below*

## Project Implementation



The project facilitated the collection of data from 1046 household dealing with their general well-being.

First, local health service committees were elected in schools, composed of both teachers and students. Training courses were conducted for the teachers in hygiene promotion.

Members of the committee monitor the personal hygiene conditions of every student in school and the hygiene situation at home and at their neighbors thus motivating others who are not attending school.

Weekly sessions are conducted in each school by a trained teacher and an appointed Hygiene Promoter. Students become aware of personal and environmental health practices and acquire hygiene-related knowledge for sound personal and family health practices.

Similarly, a youth committee, a women's committee and a religious leaders committee were formed in several villages composed of 10 to 15 villagers each. The committee organizes monthly meetings supported by the Hygiene Promoter. They follow an action plan, review the progress in the monthly meeting, and assist the team to implement various awareness programs in the local community.

## Social Mobilization

In collaboration with local Government and institutions as well as people in the community, the World Water and Sanitation Day program was enacted to coincide with World Health Day. A message of well-being was disseminated through rallies and meetings.

For instance, on World Water Day, the field team organized a rally promoting the principles of the project and held a public discussion at Charpara Keramotia Ibtadaee Madrasa (school). The purpose of the rally was to educate people about the use of sanitary latrines and safe water. Demonstration latrines were built in different locations in the village to promote the use of ring slab latrines.



Following demonstration workshops, each family in the village received hygiene kits containing basic items for personal and household health.

World Water Day community meeting

### Outcomes of Fishing and Hygiene Projects

Charpar Village is one of the areas most affected by the Cyclone SIDR.

The fisherman support project provided income-generating capabilities for 70 families as well as temporary jobs and training opportunities for those who participated in the construction of the boats. The fishermen are able to upgrade their boats when they have the means.

The capacity of the local NGO that implemented the hygiene project was strengthened. As a result of this well-being intervention, residents of the village and at least seven other neighboring villages that were heavily affected are now practicing more adequate hygiene norms than before the cyclone. With over 4,000 beneficiaries, the hygiene promotion project has encouraged villagers to use latrines--the majority for the first time ever. The improved quality of life adds to the rehabilitation of the villages in the aftermath of the disaster.



Fishermen have been able to return to their livelihoods