

UNICEF Situation Report No. 1 - EXTERNAL The SIDR Cyclonic Storm 2007 – India 16 November 2007

HIGHLIGHTS

- According to the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) and other government and NGO/UNDP sources, there has been a threat from the very severe category IV cyclonic storm entitled “SIDR” over east-central and adjoining west central Bay of Bengal, threatening mainly Orissa and West Bengal states of India.
- However, IMD latest report issued at 05:30 a.m. on 16 November 2007 describes the SIDR as practically stationary. It's been moving to north, more specifically the north-eastern direction and weakening further.
- The SIDR has not caused any significant damage and as per the current prognosis it is unlikely to cause any further damage.
- UNICEF and its partners have closely monitored the situation, particularly in West Bengal and Assam. It should be noted that both states have apparently shown remarkable readiness and capacity to deal with potential disaster in terms of quick and systematic mobilisation of its resources.
- This far, no government request for assistance has been made and is not expected. UNICEF India has secured funding in case of a need for urgent/immediate response.

Current Situation and Assessment

OVERALL

- Traditionally, cyclones in India generally strike the East Coast – i.e. West Bengal, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu - harder than the rest of the Indian large 8,041 coast line; some of the Arabian Sea Cyclones strike the west coast of India as well mainly the Gujarat and North Maharashtra coast. Out of the storms that develop in the Bay of Bengal, over 58 per cent approach or cross the east coast in October and November. Devastating cyclones such as Orissa super-cyclone of 1999 are rare.
- As of today, the SIDR-caused critical heavy falls are expected in Gangetic areas of West Bengal, where squally winds speed will be reaching 45-55 km/h during next 12 hours, as well as in north-east Indian states of Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur, Assam, and Meghalaya during next 24 hours.
- The overall threat, however, has been reduced. It is now unlikely that the SIDR will have any significant adverse impact in India. However, a degree of threat will still remain in coming days.
- UNICEF continues to monitor the situation closely along with government, UNDP and NGO partners.
- UNICEF-supported Sphere India's Unified Response Strategy (URS), which aims at better coordinated approach among key humanitarian players, is expected to meet on the cyclone situation by end of the day on 16 November 2007.
- In both West Bengal and Orissa, UNICEF has limited pre-positioned essential WES and health emergency commodities which will allow for immediate support to affected population if required. Sufficient funds are available in Indian Country Office New Delhi in case of a need for further support.

At present, there is no indication that the concerned state governments will request any assistance from UNICEF.

WEST BENGAL

- State government has reviewed the cyclone situation at the highest level immediately upon the alert. Chief Minister of the state has presided the meeting and ensured that all preventive measures are taken in time.
- Red alert has been declared in four coastal districts, which are the most vulnerable to cyclones and where heavy rain has been recorded: South 24 Paraganas, North 24 Paraganas, East Medinipur, West Medinipur.
- Army, Navy and Air-force have been alerted to provide support if required. Civil Defense volunteers from Kolkata have been rushed to the Sundarbans area in the south to assist the district and local authorities in the search and rescue activity if needed.
- Government of West Bengal has set up round-the-clock control rooms for coordination and monitoring of relief measures at the state, district and block level and allocated financial support to ensure timely assistance.
- Over 200,000 of the population in the potentially affected districts who are at risk have been evacuated and are now staying in 10,000 school buildings. Fishing operations have been totally suspended. There has also been some diversion or suspension of rail and road traffic.
- Relief material for shelter such as tarpaulin and food, medicines, oral-rehydration salts and other emergency requirement have adequately been mobilised by the government to take care of the evacuated population.
- There has been a threat of extensive damage to “kutcha houses”, old buildings, as well as large scale disruption of power and communication lines, disruption of rail and road traffic - due to extensive flooding and potential threat from flying debris. However, the damage has been minimal. According to block officials and locally elected representatives, some trees were uprooted in Sagar and Ghora Mara Islands of South 24 Paraganas district and some old houses had collapsed. By 16th November, people who had moved to cyclone shelters and school buildings have begun moving back to their houses. There have been no reported cases of casualties, illness or accidents in the state.
- Although West Bengal is now unlikely to be battered by the cyclone, the next two days are likely to witness heavy rains. The IMD predicts rain as much as 25 cm in some areas, particularly along the coast. Rain and thundershowers with isolated heavy falls are also likely over Gangetic West Bengal during next 24 hours. Sea condition will be rough to very rough. Fishermen of the above areas are advised not to venture out to sea.
- UNICEF has been in very close contact with the district and state administrations, as well as with its NGO partners in the affected areas. State government is apparently fully prepared and confident to handle the situation.
- As precautionary measures, UNICEF state office has reviewed the stock of its pre-positioned Health and WES supplies at the Department of Health State warehouse and NGO partners for possible immediate dispatch to potentially affected areas. The network of NGOs in the coastal districts has been contacted for preparedness in case of any eventuality.
- The Emergency Preparedness Plan of the UNICEF office in West Bengal will be reviewed and updated in light of current political and environmental developments. The office plans to undertake vulnerability and resource mapping in the first week of December 2007 in collaboration with government and with technical assistance from Emergency Section in New Delhi.

ORISSA

- Upon the first alert on possible cyclone to strike on 14/15 November, a high level meeting on the situation was chaired by the Chief Minister of Orissa with officials from the Orissa Disaster Mitigation Authority (OSDMA), the Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) and his team. The Ministry of Defence – Air Force and the Indian Navy - have been approached and requested to be on the alert for evacuation purposes.
- In general, the state authorities have demonstrated a very good level of preparedness to deal with possible disaster.
- In anticipation of the cyclone SIDR threat, the state government had promptly evacuated approximately 200,000 people from the coastal districts of Balasore, Kendrapada, Jagatsinghpur, Bhadrakh, Puri and Ganjam.
- The evacuated population have been provided with food, drinking water and shelter in the (earlier built) cyclone shelters set up at 97 points in the coastal belt of Orissa. Provisions of supplies were planned to last for up to 30 days. As the threat reduces, it is expected that these people will return to their homes shortly, within a day or two.
- Warning messages were being relayed in the vulnerable areas through public address system. The state provided financial package of six districts were provided \$ 50,000 each for undertaking precautionary measures. Para military forces and teams from the Orissa Disaster Rapid Action Force were on the stand by in the vulnerable areas of the 6 districts. As a precautionary measure schools were ordered to remain closed for two days (16/17 November 2007) in 14 districts by the state.
- Overall, except for a slight drizzle reported from north Orissa, at present no adverse impact reported due to the landing of the cyclone in Orissa. The probability of another cyclone wave is minimal.
- The SIDR Situation is being constantly monitored by the state authorities, the international Inter-Agency Group and United Nations Team (Orissa-based UNICEF and UNDP).
- Coordination meetings are planned during the day (16th November) to assess the developments and planning appropriate response.
- In view of the above, there are no plans for any immediate response from UNICEF. Nonetheless, UNICEF has taken precautionary measures. It reviewed the situation jointly with UNDP. The network of NGOs in the coastal districts has been contacted for preparedness in case of any eventuality. The pre-positioned stock of relief items has been reviewed.
- Further, the office Security plan has been reviewed for likelihood of the cyclone and staff kept updated. The emergency procedures have been reviewed including: emergency communication equipment; satellite phone confirmed working; communication channel established with Orissa Disaster Management Authority; office vehicle checked in good working condition; need to back up critical data (PROMS, Accounts documents); Update of staff and dependants location.