

Update on MSF assistance to people in Bangladesh's remote coastal areas affected by Cyclone Sidr (Wednesday 28th November 2007)

Cyclone Sidr, which struck southern Bangladesh on Nov. 15, killed more than 3,000 people and made hundreds of thousands homeless according to the latest official figures. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is providing assistance to victims in the most remote areas.

After visiting villages in the districts of Bhola, Patuakhali, Jhalakati, Pirojpur and Bagherat, MSF has begun medical activities, distributions of relief items and is working on improving access to clean water.

Around Mathbaria, South of Pirojbur district, four mobile clinics are being set up in the areas of Sapelzehat (45,000 habitants) and Betemore (28,000 habitants). "The population has had poor access to healthcare because the roads have been damaged," said Dr. Peter Reynaud, from Mathbaria. The first two clinics will focus on the riverbank areas where villages have been most heavily hit. The teams will provide treatment for health problems linked to the cyclone, problems such as diarrhoea, dysentery, respiratory and skin infections as well as minor injuries. A delivery of medical equipments and medications is on its way to Mathbaria from Dhaka. A doctor, four nurses and a pharmacist are also on their way to Mathbaria. In the district of Pirojpur, MSF is also supporting Madbhuri hospital, which was damaged after the cyclone. This hospital is a referral centre for a population of 500,000. MSF will also provide medical supplies and technical support for water treatment and waste management.

Water is a concern, as some villagers are drinking from contaminated ponds. MSF is bringing in water and sanitation material such as chlorine and water pumps to clean and repair water points in order to improve water quality and build or repair latrines where needed.

MSF has begun the distribution of hygiene and household kits in some of the most affected islands of south Bangladesh. In Char Bangla, one of the islands of Galachipa in Patuakhali district, 350 families have received cooking utensils, soaps, blankets and water containers. "Many people there have lost everything," explained Tony Marchant, member of the MSF team in Patuakhali. "Access to these islands remains very difficult and people have not been able to receive much aid until now."

To cover the needs in some of the other isolated islands in the area, MSF will distribute around 6,000 of these kits using speedboats and fishing trawlers.

In all locations where MSF is present, the teams are monitoring the health situation and preparing to respond to possible outbreaks of disease.