

## **UNITED NATIONS INTER-AGENCY APPEAL FOR EMERGENCY RELIEF TO FLOOD VICTIMS IN CHINA**

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in the People's Republic of China**

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### **Summary**

In response to a request from the Government of China, the United Nations system in *China launched an International Appeal for Flood Emergency Relief and Immediate Rehabilitation* on 23 September 1998. The objective of the United Nations Inter-Agency Appeal was to facilitate the co-ordination of international assistance to the Chinese Government as a result of the massive 1998 summer floods. The appeal received an overwhelming response from the international donor community. More than US\$ 110 million were provided against the appeal of US\$ 139 million. Relief programmes have been successfully implemented by the UN agencies reaching millions of vulnerable flood-victims in all 7 of the most affected provinces. Some programmes were under-funded while other programmes attracted more funds than appealed for. Some contributions were separately negotiated between the Chinese Government and international donors; and the assistance provided was not always consistent with the priorities identified in the UN Appeal.

The United Nations Disaster Management Team ensured a coordinated implementation of the UN Appeal efforts and became the focal point for international assistance. Government counterparts were involved at all levels to facilitate implementation and reporting of UN channeled assistance. The Government, using national resources, replicated successful approaches introduced by UN agencies. The Government also matched international assistance, in particular food aid, with national resources to enable the immediate implementation of the emergency relief programme.

Problems encountered included the often-unavoidable delays in accessing disaster areas and transferring funds from donors to and within the UN system. Despite the importance of disaster mitigation, it proved easier to mobilize funds for emotionally driven relief responses that were strongly associated with the immediate event, than for longer-term disaster reduction needs

### **Introduction**

The relentless rains of the 1998 summer in China caused vast flooding that affected some 180 million people or one seventh of China's population. The floods caused major devastation in central, south-east, north, and north-east China; mainly along the Yangtze River and its tributaries. The Songhuajiang and Nenjiang Rivers also flooded much of northeastern provinces of China.

Devastation ranged from human tragedy to massive infrastructure damage. As of 28 January 1999, the Government reported 4,150 deaths. Eighteen million people were evacuated from the flood areas. More than 23 million hectares of crops were affected, of which 5.3 million hectares of crops were completely lost. A total of 13 million houses were affected and 6.9 million houses were totally destroyed. Damage to housing, health clinics, schools, factories, water supplies, roads, bridges, and irrigation systems are estimated at US\$ 31 billion.

The disaster was caused by extreme rainfall, coupled with the melting of lasting and deep snow accumulated in the Qinghai-Tibet plateau. According to Chinese Government officials, the rampant deforestation on the upper-reaches of the Yangtze River, contributing to soil erosion and silting in the river was also a major flood factor. In addition, many areas surrounding the river, including former wetland flood plains, have become overpopulated and are now used for agricultural production.

Although China's rivers flood annually, the extent of the floods in 1998 were unparalleled. Unparalleled, not

only in the magnitude of the geographic areas affected, but also in the huge numbers of people affected and the duration of time they spent in temporary shelters on top of dykes. In the South, along the Yangtze River basin, more than 2.9 million people sought refuge on the dykes. In times of previous floods, people remained on the dykes for up to two weeks. As a result of the 1998 floods, people were forced to live on the dykes for up to five months. All these survivors, now homeless and with no remaining sources of income, existed in overcrowded conditions, with insufficient shelter, under deteriorating sanitary and health conditions. When weather conditions abruptly worsened, their situation became extremely critical. This was particularly true in the north where bitterly frigid winds from Siberia reached the country by mid November. The temporary dyke top shelters became completely inadequate and people in the north were temporarily relocated to existing buildings in other areas of the province.

### **Chinese Government Response**

China's advanced prevention policy, based on timely predictions, forecasting and early warning, contributed significantly to limiting the scope of the damage of the floods. These early warning systems continued into the autumn, when the water receded.

The rescue relief operations mounted by the Chinese Government at all levels have been impressive. And the Chinese people put forth an exemplary effort both in country and abroad, in coping with the effects of the floods. The massive mobilizations of farmers, villagers, police, and the Army to shore up the dykes and to provide relief to the affected population avoided what could have been much greater suffering and loss of human lives. The fund-raising campaigns among the Chinese brought much-needed supplies to the victims during the first weeks of the disaster. The Chinese Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and the Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and non-governmental organizations provided substantial and essential relief assistance, which complemented and enhanced the Government's efforts and those of international organizations.

### **United Nations Response**

In view of the devastating scale of the disaster, the Government of the People's Republic of China appealed for international support to complement its own massive relief efforts. On 27 August 1998, the Government requested support from the United Nations (UN) through the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to assist in mobilizing and coordinating international assistance. In early September 1998, a joint United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) and UN Inter-agency Mission was fielded to China to determine the immediate disaster relief needs. Such UNDAC teams are established by OCHA to assist in meeting international needs for early and qualified information during the first phase of a sudden-onset emergency. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Food Programme (WFP), and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) participated in the mission of the joint inter-agency assessment team. In light of the mission's findings and under the guidance of the UN Resident Coordinator, the UN system in China launched the *International Appeal for Chinese Flood Emergency Relief and Immediate Rehabilitation* on 23 September 1998.

Based on international experience in disaster management, the US\$ 139 million appeal was targeted to complement Government's efforts. The appeal was designed to last for four months and aimed to provide emergency relief to the most vulnerable flood victims in the form of food, shelters, water supply and sanitation facilities, disease control services, seeds, fertilizer, and construction of new schools. These funds could be channeled either through the United Nations system or through concerned international, bilateral or NGO organizations and agencies.

### **Donor Response**

More than US\$ 110 million were provided by the international community of which US\$ 80 million (73%)

were channeled through the UN system.<sup>1</sup> Donors included twenty-one governments, eighteen national Red Cross societies, two Hong Kong NGOs, seven UN agencies, and seven international private contributors.

### Programme Impact

With these financial contributions, the Government of China and UN Agencies together provided emergency relief in the form of shelters, food, water supplies, sanitation facilities, disease control services, seeds, fertilizers, and construction of new schools (see Table 1). The Government was essential in the implementation of all of these programs.

The shelter programme provided 6,000 tents in the south and building materials in the north to homeless people. The food programme distributed 315,000 metric tons of rice to flood victims in the south through its relief and Food-For-Work programmes, contributing to the rehabilitation of land, irrigation ditches, and wells. The Food-For-Work programme accomplished its rehabilitation objectives. During three months the beneficiaries rebuilt 79,000 houses, renovated 2,000 km of farm roads, cleared 55,130 hectares of farmland, fixed 247,000 water wells, and repaired 7,600 irrigation canals. The health programme improved and maintained a standard of healthcare for displaced flood-victims by providing medicine, water purification tablets, and diagnostic equipment. The water and environmental sanitation programme prevented spread of disease through improvement of the water quality and the environmental sanitation of the flood-victims, and through hygiene education campaigns. The agriculture emergency programme assisted farmers to resume production by providing 1,540 tons of seeds and 536 tons of fertilizers. The initial rehabilitation of essential facilities programme rehabilitated health and education facilities. And, the education programme re-established school facilities by providing chairs, desks, teaching equipment, and construction of many new schools.

**Table 1**  
**Flood Emergency Relief and Immediate Rehabilitation Needs**  
**As Requested in the Appeal Launched by the UN System in China**

Relief Activity	Amount of Appeal (US\$)	Amount Received (US\$)	Amount Channeled Through UN (US\$)
<b>Shelter</b>	\$ 28,800,000	\$ 4,122,765	\$ 3,609,765
<b>Food</b>	\$ 87,700,000	\$ 70,636,053	\$ 70,636,053
<b>Medicine</b>	\$ 7,000,000	\$ 11,000,000	\$ 1,000,000
<b>Water and sanitation</b>	\$ 5,400,000	\$ 2,820,000	\$ 2,820,000
<b>Agriculture</b>	\$ 90,000	\$ 590,000	\$ 590,000
<b>Education and initial rehabilitation</b>	\$ 9,600,000	\$ 16,465,656	\$ 1035 656
<b>Associated relief assistance</b>	\$ 0	\$ 4,900,000	\$ 0
<b>Co-ordination</b>	\$ 450,000	\$ 345,847	\$ 345,847
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 139,040,000</b>	<b>\$ 110,880,321</b>	<b>\$ 80,037,321</b>

Total amounts provided by donors, and the amounts channeled through the UN system, through January 1999. In addition to the above amounts, FAO provided 2 TCP emergency projects valued at US\$ 800,000 for provision of seeds and fertilizers under its regular programme to flood affected farmers in 7 provinces.

<sup>1</sup> The donors included Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Egypt, European Commission, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States, Caritas Hong Kong, Hong Kong UNICEF, National Red Cross societies from Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Japan, Liechtenstein, Macao, Monaco, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Republic of Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States, seven UN agencies, and seven international private contributors.

The international response to the appeal had a positive impact on millions of the most vulnerable flood victims, including the young, old, disabled, and sick during a period of more than 4 months. The relief activities reached flood victims in all 7 of the most flood affected provinces (See Table 2).

**Table 2**  
**Number Of Flood-Victims and Flood Affected Provinces That Benefited**  
**From the UN Appeal for Flood Emergency Relief and Immediate Rehabilitation**

Relief Activity	Number of Beneficiaries	Number of Affected Provinces Reached
Shelter	50,000	7 of 7
Food	5,800,000	4 of 7
Medicine	3,000,000	7 of 7
Water and sanitation	2,800,000	6 of 7
Agriculture	160,000	3 of 7
Education and initial rehabilitation	57,000	1 of 7

Rehabilitation activities that were implemented by the UN agencies in collaboration with the Chinese Government. September 1998 to May 1999

The World Bank Group and the Asian Development Bank simultaneously launched emergency recovery loans. Although these activities were not included in the UN Joint Appeal, they were coordinated with the UN System relief response. The emergency rehabilitation programmes received US\$ 380 million to finance the rehabilitation and reconstruction work on flood damaged facilities and infrastructure. When completed a total of 50 million flood-affected persons in 6 affected provinces will benefit from the World Bank Group and Asian Development Bank programmes.

#### **Coordination and Follow-up on the United Nations Inter-Agency Appeal**

During the disaster response the United Nations Disaster Management Team (UNDMT) played an important role in effectively coordinating and programming UN and international resources in China. The UNDMT was activated in June 1998. It included representatives from all UN agencies present in China, as well as representatives from the World Bank and International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC). UNDP chaired the meetings. OCHA detailed a staff member to assist in coordinating activities of the UNDMT.

From August onward, the team met weekly to coordinate and monitor agency activities. In response to the need for centralized coordination, the team established itself as a focal point for all UN agencies and donors. Speakers from Government, UN agencies, and other relief agencies briefed the UNDMT on their findings and activities. As the skills of each UNDMT team members strengthened over time, the Team as a whole achieved high levels of co-ordination, planning, and decision making. Monthly progress reports on all UN projects were jointly prepared and distributed to all donors, embassies, and UN agencies. UNDMT briefings were arranged for UN agencies, Government, press, embassies, and donors; and after 3 months a field visit was organized for donors to show project progress.

From October 1998 to January 1999, separate individual assessments were conducted by FAO, UNDP, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the World Bank, and IFRC. Missions focused on monitoring the implementation of the activities of the September UN appeal or assessing remaining relief and rehabilitation needs. A joint visit was organized by UNDP/OCHA, UNICEF, and WFP to provide opportunities for representatives of donors to monitor the progress of the donor-funded programmes. Missions were carried out in the seven worst affected provinces: Hubei, Hunan, Jiangxi, Anhui, Jilin, Heilongjiang and the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.

Several key flood relief and essential rehabilitation needs could not be incorporated into the September appeal, as it was necessary to wait for the floodwaters to recede in many of the most badly damaged provinces. For example, FAO was unable to assess the full extent of damaged and rehabilitation needs for livestock, fisheries, and agriculture during their first joint assessment mission in September. Thus, FAO returned to the affected areas in November 1998 to determine the assistance required for rehabilitation of agriculture and flood production facilities. Similarly, flood relief efforts could not be completed before the winter freeze in the remote northern regions and provinces; and relief efforts had to resume with the spring thaw.

Therefore, under the guidance of the UN Coordinator in China, the UNDMT also took the lead in preparing and launching a Second Flood Appeal on 10 February 1999. The objectives of the February 1999 appeal were to facilitate consolidation of the results of previous flood relief efforts; to rehabilitate essential human settlements, education, and production facilities; and to implement integrated flood management and information systems to mitigate flood risk in the future. This appeal was not limited to a specific time period. The UNDMT will provide an annual assessment of the response to this Second Appeal by early 2000.

### Capacity Building

Capacity building was one of the major achievements reached during the UN co-ordinated flood relief programme. The capacity of the UNDMT improved dramatically. While external help from UNDAC was essential in preparing the first appeal, the members of UNDMT prepared and launched the second appeal on their own. One member of the UNDMT received specialized international assessment training by OCHA to further strengthen the UNDMT in China.

Capacity building of the Government counterparts was emphasized at all levels from national level to village level through training. WHO conducted 9 training workshops at the national and provincial level on disaster surveillance for Epidemic Prevention Station staff. UNDP trained disaster managers at county and provincial level on disaster management and preparedness; 27 provinces benefited from the training. UNICEF trained 24,982 relief personnel through a *Training-For-Trainers* programme in disease prevention and environmental disinfecting. The training proved cost-effective at province, county, township, and village levels. WFP trained national volunteers and short-term international staff on monitoring food distribution.

### Lessons Learned

*Lesson 1: Good organizational practices by a national UNDMT can improve the effectiveness and coordination of emergency relief*

UNDMT developed into a UN inter agency co-ordination focal point. Programmes and activities were co-ordinated to avoid duplication. UNDMT members shared information on the disaster situation, discussed further relief needs identified by field missions, and took actions to maximize the impact of the relief and rehabilitation programmes. For example, OCHA conducted an assessment mission to Inner Mongolia on the basis of discussions at UNDMT meetings and identified continued needs for medicines, construction materials, and water and sanitation in the province in December 1998. This led UNICEF to field a follow-up mission to further assess the needs and to confirm their findings. After the evaluation, WHO, UNICEF and UNDP reallocated some of their disaster funds to address these needs. The quality progress reports, the two appeals and the development of a knowledge body were a result of teamwork. Articles were accepted for publication in international journals, such as the *Humanitarian Affairs Review*. Press and donors were informed on the progress and barriers of the programmes regularly.

*Lesson 2: Cost sharing with the Government can improve the timeliness and the extent of emergency relief*

Cost sharing with the Government enabled UN relief assistance to reach flood victims in a timely manner. This collaboration significantly strengthened the ties between UN agencies and Government counterparts. The WFP relief and *Food-For-Work* programme, and the UNDP construction materials programme were

matched with a contribution from the Chinese Government. WFP started its programme with the Government's share of funds. Without this cost sharing, the programmes would have started several months later greatly hindering the effectiveness and the output of the programme.

The UNICEF comprehensive cost-effective programme became a model for the implementation of other water and sanitation programmes. The model included training in safe water delivery, public health education, and rehabilitation of damaged water supply systems. The Government used this successful programme as a model to formulate other central Government initiatives to allocate an additional RMB 45 million (US\$ 5.5 million) for new projects to address water and sanitation problems in other flood-affected counties.

*Lesson 3: Early assessment of relief needs is essential to improve the timeliness and the quality of emergency relief assistance*

The UNDAC and Inter-UN agency teams were only able to visit the affected areas 2 months after the floods. The Chinese Government should be encouraged to facilitate more timely and more early assessments by international agencies and UN organizations. Assessing the needs immediately after the event allows international donor disaster assistance and funds to arrive earlier and to be better prioritized.

*Lesson 4: Rapid transfer of funds is essential for timely implementation of emergency relief*

Existing administrative procedures did not always ensure rapid transfer of relief funds to the affected areas. In one case, it took several months for the appropriate UN agency in China to receive the funds that had been pledged by its donors. Although most agencies were able to develop and implement new and timely disaster emergency funds transfer systems during 1998, emergency relief funding mechanisms throughout the UN system need to be in place before the disaster for timely emergency relief response so that valuable time is not lost. Administrative procedures, which are designed for regular development activities, are not adequate for emergency relief funding.

*Lesson 5: UN Appeals were less efficient in mobilizing funds for rehabilitation and mitigation, but highly effective for immediate emergency relief*

Despite the importance and usefulness of initial disaster rehabilitation and mitigation, it is easier to mobilize funds for emotionally driven relief responses that are strongly associated with the immediate event than for longer term disaster reduction needs. The UNDMT experience confirmed that donors found it easier to respond to the first UN disaster appeal than to the second appeal, which focused on essential capacity development needs for flood rehabilitation, disaster prevention, and mitigation.

### **Follow Up**

The experience gained during the aftermath of the devastating floods in China in the summer of 1998 has been exceptional. New professional relationships between the UNDMT and the Chinese Government Disaster Management Team have been created through information and idea sharing. This process is important and has created a strong basis for the time when the Chinese Government and the UN system will be faced with new emerging disasters. The achievements and lessons learned will be incorporated into the formulation of the UN China Development Assistance Framework. As part of its assistance, the UN system has endeavored to assist the Government of China in documenting and evaluating the major steps taken to mitigate the impact of the 1998 flooding. This workshop is a key step to share the Chinese experience with, and to learn from, other disaster-prone developing countries in managing severe storms and catastrophic floods. The UNDMT in China wishes all the participants fruitful discussions during this workshop and it is hoped that the workshop will lead to further technical cooperation among disaster-prone countries.