

PRESS RELEASE

30th May 2022

Bangladesh Flooding has an even greater impact on those people affected by leprosy

COLCHESTER, ESSEX – Lepra, the UK-based leprosy charity is already providing emergency support for people affected by severe flooding in Bangladesh.

As already reported, days of flooding and landslides in parts of Bangladesh have affected millions of people and left more than 50 people dead. Areas such as Sylhet and Sunamganj, in Bangladesh's north-east region, have seen heavy rains wash away towns, villages and infrastructure in what officials describe as some of the worst floods in many years. With almost one-third of the 160 million population living below the national poverty line, communities have lost their possessions and livelihoods with no financial means to balance the impacts of the humanitarian disaster.

In Sylhet and Sunamganj alone, Lepra have over 600 people registered to receive their support. They were without power for almost a week and are suffering from an acute lack of food, drinking water and fuel.

With their employment opportunities already limited by the discrimination associated with leprosy, people affected by it in Bangladesh often live a hand-to-mouth existence and without access to essential medicines, specialised footwear, and the necessary support systems their situations can deteriorate even more rapidly.

"As the overflowing Surma inundated our house, we are in dire need of food and freshwater." This quote was reported back to our Programmes team at Lepra in the UK from our colleagues in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has been a long-standing priority area for Lepra's work; it is one of the poorest and most densely populated countries in the world but has the fourth-highest number of leprosy cases. There are fears that those affected by diseases like leprosy will further pushed to the margins of society.

Lepra's immediate concern centres on both their staff on the ground and the people affected by leprosy that they support; initial emergency intervention by Lepra is providing food and clean drinking water to relieve the immediate humanitarian crisis and in the longer term Lepra plans to help with the rebuilding of houses and to offer livelihood support enabling people affected by leprosy to regain some financial independence.

However, evidence shows that a secondary issue will be the provision of replacement specialist footwear. Working in Bihar, India, during the floods of 2020 - Lepra observed that people affected by leprosy and lymphatic filariasis were vulnerable to bacterial infiltration of cuts and wounds that developed into systematic infection, and that their specialist footwear needed urgent replacement.

As the floods continue to wreak havoc, Lepra will continue to work to protect the most vulnerable- they are asking the public to help people affected by leprosy by donating through their website: www.lepra.org.uk/donate.

Just £6 can provide a person with a brand new pair of specialised footwear, allowing a person affected the mobility and freedom to rebuild their life in the aftermath of the flood and free up funding to help with the basics needed for people to survive these latest floods.

NOTES TO EDITORS

About leprosy

Leprosy is a communicable disease, caused by bacterium, which affects the skin and peripheral nerves of people. If left undiagnosed or untreated it can cause severe disability. A diagnosis often results in severe prejudice and discrimination. Leprosy can incubate in a human anywhere from 6 months to 20 years; and as a result, it is often difficult to diagnose the disease until it has already caused significant damage.

Millions of people are affected, with numbers continuing to rise. For over 7 million people across the world, leprosy causes damage to their health, livelihoods, and futures. 600 people are diagnosed with leprosy every day and 50 of those are children.

About Lepra

Lepra is a UK-based charity working in India and Bangladesh to change the lives of people affected by leprosy. Established in 1924, the British Empire Leprosy Relief Association (BELRA) was inaugurated by H.R.H The Prince of Wales at Mansion House in the City of London. We've been known simply as Lepra since 2008. Working in India and Bangladesh, we find, diagnose, treat, and rehabilitate people affected with leprosy with specialists diagnosing leprosy by using skin test patch anaesthesia, skin smears and non-invasive sensory investigation. We also work tirelessly to fight the prejudice and discrimination they face in their daily lives.

To find out more about our work, look at our website www.lepra.org.uk or via our social media channels



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