

I could see trees falling down everywhere around me

An ocean of gold, pink, red, yellow and green saris fill the cultural centre in the village of Madaripur, where an emergency relief distribution by ACT member, Lutheran Health Care Bangladesh (LHCB), is currently underway in response to the Cyclone Sidr emergency.

Chandani Begun is one of the people gathered in Madaripur waiting to receive food assistance. She tells of her shock when the cyclone struck, because she never expected anything like this to happen.

"There is only one word to describe Sidr... massive," she says. "I could see trees falling down everywhere around me. This situation is completely new to us, since cyclones usually don't hit our area this bad."

Ms. Begun lives on her own, but found safety at a friend's house when the storm passed through Madaripur.

Norman Rodriques, the coordinator for LHCB in the area, oversees the assistance, which includes a bag of rice, beans, salt and oil for each person. On this particular day, LHCB is distributing 550 food packages to affected families in Madaripur.

Mr. Rodriques estimates that close to 70 per cent of the population in the rural areas around Madaripur lost their houses in the cyclone. In addition, he adds that rice, vegetables and the seeds for the next season have been destroyed, further complicating the future food security situation for affected families.

He also shares how thousands of trees have been uprooted, significantly affecting the livelihoods of those who earn an income building furniture and constructing houses.

As this distribution continues, Ms. Begun explains that she is financially dependent on her neighbours.

"It was also on their cell phone that my daughters could reach me after the cyclone," she says.

Ms. Begun says that her neighbours have supported her after the cyclone, sharing with her some money, food and the sari she is wearing.

After Ms. Begun receives her assistance, she eagerly puts the sack on her shoulders, makes her way through the crowd and begins her walk home.

Three weeks have passed since the cyclone struck Bangladesh and devastated parts of the country. ACT members are still continuing their immediate emergency response and they are now also planning further rehabilitation assistance, including housing and livelihood support for communities affected by Cyclone Sidr.