The Adventist Development and Relief Agency Bangladesh and its predecessors, the Seventh-day Adventist Welfare Services and the Seventh-day Adventist World Service, have provided humanitarian services as a nongovernment organization since the 1960s in the area now known as Bangladesh.
Organization of ADRA Bangladesh

During the 1960s, the Seventh-day Adventist Welfare Services, the welfare wing of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, provided humanitarian services as a department of the East-Pakistan Section of the Pakistan Union from the section office in Dacca, the capital of East Pakistan. The Seventh-day Adventist Welfare Services, or in Bangla, Seventh-day Adventist Janakollayan Sangstha (SAJS, meaning people’s welfare), was the only humanitarian service provider of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In the 1970s, the organization’s name was changed to Seventh-day Adventist World Service (SAWS). A liberation war in 1971 resulted in Bangladesh, formerly known as East Pakistan, to gain its independence from Pakistan. The Seventh-day Adventist World Service (SAWS), a voluntary non-government organization started its operation in Bangladesh at this time. SAWS worked in cooperation with the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists under the leadership of Leon N. Powrie and N. C. Dewri of the Bangladesh Union. In 1983, SAWS was renamed as Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) during the leadership of Lyle E. Spiva. The government of Bangladesh recognized the change in 1984.

After the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971, East Pakistan achieved independence and declared as Bangladesh. From that time, the organization, now known as ADRA, has shared the Dhaka office premises with what is now the Bangladesh Union Mission.

During the 1980s, the staff at SAWS/SAJS in Bangladesh consisted of 25 to 30 people. It has been increasing since then, and in 2019, ADRA Bangladesh had about 238 staff members working on different humanitarian and development projects.

Major Relief Efforts

Bangladesh is a land of disaster that experiences storms, cyclones, floods, tidal surges, landslides, and flash floods every year. SAWS and, later, ADRA Bangladesh conducted major relief efforts in the 1970 November cyclone, the 1988 flood, the 1991 cyclone, the 1998 flood, the 2007 and 2009 floods, the 2016 and 2017 cyclones, and the 2017 Rohingya refugee crisis.

SAWS carried out major relief distribution and services after the November 12, 1970, cyclone and tidal bore in the southern part of East Pakistan, distributing food and clothing. Relief funds given by Seventh-day Adventists from many parts of the world at that time totaled about US$45,000.

After the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971 and 1972, SAWS distributed relief and provided rehabilitation services in the form of distributing emergency food and clothing, constructing shelters, and building villages’ roads and bridges. Later, SAWS carried out infrastructural development projects and initiated a few development projects, such as handicrafts (income generation) for jobless women, a seed bank, and cooperative income generation.

ADRA Bangladesh has always been one of the first organizations to respond to any emergency or humanitarian crisis in the country. Being part of the global network, ADRA Bangladesh leverages the opportunity to activate its emergency operation with a match funding of its own and the rest with funding from the international network and its Asia regional headquarters along with technical assistance based on needs assessment and situation reports. It prioritizes the needs and offers relief support accordingly, starting with food response for survival. Later, as required, the organization provides nonfood items and other support.

Interaction with the Government

The Government of Bangladesh has always been very supportive of humanitarian organizations. The Government of Bangladesh welcomed SAWS during the liberation war because the country needed foreign aid due to the devastation caused by the war. SAWS, now ADRA, is accountable to report any foreign donations to the NGO Bureau of the Bangladesh Government. After the liberation war, the NGO Affairs Bureau was flexible and did not require a lengthy procedure to approve the release of funds. It required SAWS to report to the local government officer before the project implementation or relief distribution services.

From 1970 to 2020, a renowned national newspaper named The Daily Ittefaq covered the success stories of ADRA’s work and relief distribution services. Currently, many local newspapers cover different news and stories of ADRA’s work in Bangladesh.

Mission and Vision

ADRA’s mission is to work with people in poverty and distress to create just and positive change through empowering partnerships and responsible action.

ADRA’s vision is to be a professional, learning, and efficient network that embodies integrity and transparency. ADRA reaches across boundaries, empowering and speaking out for the at-risk and forgotten to achieve measurable, documented, and permanent changes in lives and society.
Directors

SOURCES
Human Resources records. ADRA Bangladesh office, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
Peterson, Adrian M. “Pakistan Workers Join Relief Forces.” *Southern Asia Tidings*, February 1971.

NOTES
6. Ibid.
7. Human Resources records, ADRA Bangladesh office, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

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