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## Gambia Floods 2010 DREF Operation

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### Country Context

The Gambia is located in West Africa, completely surrounded by Senegal with the exception of an 80-kilometre coastline to the Atlantic Ocean. It is the smallest country in mainland Africa — roughly the same size as Jamaica. About 75 per cent of the country's 1.8 million people depend on agriculture for their livelihood and small-scale production, mainly peanuts and fish. Tourism and overseas remittances also contribute to its economy.<sup>1</sup> An estimated 34 per cent of the population live on 1.25 US dollars a day.<sup>2</sup>

The Gambia is made up of five divisions and one municipality in the capital city of Banjul. The country is primarily a flood plain along the Gambia River, with its highest elevation reaching a maximum of 60 metres. Malaria is endemic in the country. Consequently, the country regularly experiences floods and epidemics, as well as storms and fires.

### Gambia Red Cross Society

The Gambia Red Cross Society (GRCS) was founded in 1948 as a branch of the British Red Cross and became an independent National Society in 1965. The GRCS is the main implementing partner with the Government of Gambia for all relief operations. Over the years, it has worked to develop its disaster response mechanisms through its volunteers, youth groups and staff. The GRCS has seven branches — one in each of the country's seven administrative regions — and its headquarters is located in Kanifing Municipality. The National Society's activities focus on disaster preparedness and response, including climate change, health programmes (HIV/AIDS, first aid, malaria prevention, immunizations, and water and sanitation), volunteer management, and information, communication and dissemination of Red Cross principles and values.

<sup>1</sup> The World Factbook. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ga.html>

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report 2010. [http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR\\_2010\\_EN\\_Tables\\_reprint.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2010_EN_Tables_reprint.pdf)



## Gambia Floods

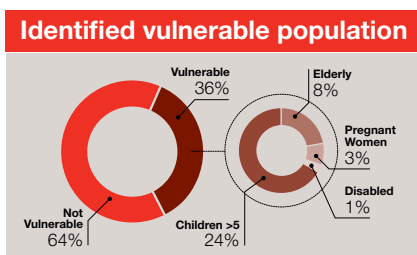
In 2010, the seasonal rainfall in Gambia from May to September was nearly 56 per cent above its normal range<sup>3</sup>, resulting in floods that damaged homes, markets, public infrastructure and livelihoods throughout the country. The situation culminated on 5 and 6 September, when torrential rains produced almost 20 per cent of the country's average annual rainfall in two days. Access to the riverbank was difficult, temporarily bringing the movement of people, goods and services across the Gambia River to a standstill. The rains flooded most of the country, affecting 25,000 people by destroying their homes and livelihoods; waterborne diseases were also on the rise. On 7 September, the Government of Gambia declared a national disaster due to the scale and complexity of the floods, and launched a national and international appeal for assistance with relief and rehabilitation efforts.

## Red Cross Action

As part of the overall coordination of the Gambia's National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA), local Red Cross branch volunteers and local authorities conducted an initial rapid assessment to determine the extent of the floods, the destruction, and the areas where first aid and other critical activities were needed. Where stocks were pre-positioned, the GRCS also initiated the distribution of pre-positioned food and non-food items to 344 displaced families. The GRCS coordinated with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent's (IFRC) regional delegation in Senegal and three regional disaster response team members supported the GRCS with its initial assessment and distribution activities. To reach the widespread and outstanding needs of the flood-affected families, the GRCS also requested a grant of 287,661 Swiss francs through the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF).

Through the DREF-supported operation, the GRCS reached 1,955 families (58 per cent of the total affected families) and 35 communities in the country's six regions.

- **Assessments:** Soon after the GRCS's initial rapid assessment with local authorities, the National Society conducted an in-depth nationwide assessment. This revealed that 3,370 families (24,532 people) were affected; of these, 36 per cent of the affected population were identified as vulnerable groups. The nationwide assessment also highlighted the immediate need for sanitation services and improved knowledge regarding health risks during floods. Shelter materials and technical support were also identified as necessities.
- **Distribution of cash coupons:** Based on the assessment, the GRCS planned to distribute hygiene kits to 500 families hosted in schools and public places. However, in planning the distribution with beneficiaries and other agencies, the GRCS identified more families needing assistance; further, beneficiaries were now requesting aid to rebuild their homes. As a result, the GRCS distributed cash coupons to 790 families to purchase a variety of items to rebuild their shelters. UNICEF and other stakeholders ensured the families still received hygiene kits.
- **Distribution of non-food items:** The GRCS distributed blankets, mattresses, buckets, jerry cans, bed sheets, mosquito nets and soap for bathing and laundry — to 1,080 families, 80 more than the original targeted 1,000 families.



<sup>3</sup> Early Warning Bulletin. <http://wamis.bo.ibimet.cnr.it/countries/gambia/gambia2010092.pdf>

- **Emergency Health:** Alongside purchasing and distributing mosquito nets to 1,000 families with children under the age of five and pregnant women, the GRCS also provided key messages regarding the nets, and about malaria and other vector-borne diseases. Nails and string were also supplied during the Hang-up Campaign for 1,500 people. Further, the GRCS focused on distributing health messages through drama performances, as well as by peer health education within the volunteer groups. Each of the 30 health volunteers spent two days a week delivering safe health and hygiene messages to approximately 48,000 people in 35 communities within the country's six regions over the three-month operation.
- **Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion:** To support this sector's activities, the GRCS identified and trained 30 community volunteers to help with the latrine construction, hygiene promotion and relief distributions. The volunteers worked with the community and six community development officers from the Department of Community Development to build 95 latrines for the identified vulnerable families who had no access to proper sanitation facilities. As part of the hygiene promotion, each volunteer was also assigned to reach five families each week with a minimum of three home visits. UNICEF trained the volunteers and disseminated messages in partnership with the GRCS's regional health teams.



## Added Value of DREF

**Flexibility:** The DREF allowed the GRCS to work with affected families as the situation evolved and the disaster response progressed to identify improved interventions in meeting the beneficiaries' needs. In the case of this intervention, the GRCS modified its response by providing cash grants to 790 families for the purchase of necessary shelter materials to rebuild their homes. The GRCS also adapted its sanitation response since UNICEF distributed the water purification tablets originally planned by the GRCS, and instead helped an additional 20 families — to a total of 95 families — to build proper sanitation systems.

**Indispensable support:** The Gambia floods seriously affected more than 25,000 people and caused extensive destruction; the disaster overwhelmed the response capacity of the Government, local agencies and the National Society. Due to the scale of the disaster, the amount the GRCS requested from the DREF was more than triple any previous DREF assistance it had requested in the last five years. Simply stated, the DREF enabled the GRCS to carry out its mission to help the most vulnerable people in times of a devastating disaster.

**Training for a better response:** During the operation, the GRCS planned and carried out hands-on training or refresher courses for staff, volunteers and local community members to ensure an effective and comprehensive response to meet the needs of those affected. Before the in-depth assessments, 10 volunteers received training on data collection methodologies; prior to distributions, community volunteers received training on distribution methods; the GRCS's health teams promoted safe hygiene practices and malaria prevention techniques, and sensitized caregivers on how to hang mosquito nets; water and sanitation volunteers received sessions on latrine construction and hygiene promotion.

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### What is DREF?

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' (IFRC) Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) is a source of un-earmarked funds to ensure immediate financial support is available for Red Cross and Red Crescent emergency disaster response operations. The DREF is a vital part of the IFRC's disaster response system and increases the ability of Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies to respond rapidly to humanitarian crises and disasters around the world.

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## GRCS's Operational Lessons Learned

- **Cash coupons:** The cash support was the first of its kind in Gambia. The GRCS visited many families to monitor the activities and speak to beneficiaries about the relevance of the intervention. Community members explained how they had used the cash and how they were better able to rapidly repair their homes.
- **Shelter training as preparedness:** Less than one year before the floods in October 2009, the IFRC held a shelter kit training for the GRCS to train 24 volunteers and staff on construction techniques, regionally-appropriate materials and methods of temporary shelters following a disaster. This was only the second IFRC shelter training offered in Africa and was recognized as necessary for Gambia given its propensity to floods and storms that frequently destroy shelters. During the 2010 floods, volunteers and staff were able to work with the beneficiaries to identify their sheltering needs, thereby assisting families with cash distributions to purchase appropriate materials to rebuild their homes. Many volunteers within the Upper River region also technically helped the families with their reconstruction.
- **Pre-positioned items:** Earlier in 2009 and 2010, the GRCS worked with the IFRC to pre-position items in disaster-prone areas of Gambia to be able to reach vulnerable families promptly after a disaster. The 2010 floods operation was the first time the GRCS utilized these stocks and was able to reach 344 families immediately; the stocks did indeed accelerate its response. Further, the public, media and Government recognized the GRCS's response operation as a success, improving its image nationwide. The pre-positioned stocks were replenished with the DREF funds so these will be readily available for the next disaster response.
- **Latrines sustainability:** To support the GRCS's latrine construction, the Department of Community Development appointed six community development officers. They assisted in identifying the best location to construct the latrines and proposed a design appropriate to the soil type, durability, bricks and the base slab. To make the latrines sustainable, the GRCS provided local materials such as sand, crushed rock and rafters, which are readily available locally; the communities constructed their individual pits for the latrines with support from the officers.
- **Coordination:** Coordination for all actors was a challenge during this operation; however it served as a lesson for all involved. Specifically, the NDMA has since developed a national contingency plan and the GRCS was a lead participant and signatory to the plan for future disaster operations.

**“People always express joy whenever Red Cross is mentioned.”**

**Deputy Governor of Gambia's North Bank region**

