



case  
study

# Honduras: Tropical Storm Agatha 2010 DREF Operation

## Country Context

Honduras is the second largest and most mountainous country in Central America<sup>1</sup>, with coastlines to both the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean. It has an estimated population of more than 8.1 million with approximately 18 per cent of people living on less than 1.25 US dollars a day.<sup>2</sup> Unequal distribution of income and high unemployment are prevalent.<sup>3</sup> Poverty in the country is primarily within rural areas and more serious in the western part of the country. Honduras faces regular disasters, including hurricanes, floods, landslides, epidemics and earthquakes.

## Honduran Red Cross

The Honduran Red Cross (HRC) was founded in 1937 and mobilizes national and international solidarity to improve the living standards of the most vulnerable and help those affected by disasters. As such, over the years the HRC has developed into a robust and efficient National Society and has achieved the approval and support of the country's population. The HRC has a network of 51 branches throughout 15 of the country's 18 departments. Its headquarters and operations centre is located in the capital, Tegucigalpa.

## Tropical Storm Agatha

Tropical Storm Agatha was the first named storm of the 2010 Pacific Ocean hurricane season. Agatha brought severe rainfall, causing rivers to overflow, mudslides and widespread flooding in parts of Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua. The storm and subsequent floods caused almost 200 deaths, injured more, and destroyed or damaged homes and infrastructure. The governments of Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador declared a national emergency in their respective countries and reached out to national and international organizations for assistance.

1 Honduras National Statistics Institute (INE). <http://www.ine.gob.hn/drupal/node/62>

2 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) International Human Development Indicators. <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/HND.html>

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

## Red Cross Action

At the time of the storm, Red Cross disaster management leadership in the Americas was assembled in Mexico for the annual pre-hurricane meeting. Consequently, the response was well coordinated as all four National Societies were already planning with their response teams in the affected areas, their disaster operation centres as well as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).



While all four National Societies have extensive disaster response experience, the scale of Tropical Storm Agatha prompted the Honduran Red Cross, the Salvadorian Red Cross and the Nicaraguan Red Cross to request financial support from the IFRC's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) to help cover the costs of their emergency disaster response. The Guatemalan Red Cross launched an emergency appeal. This case study will focus on the DREF operation in Honduras which requested a grant of 93,706 Swiss francs.

### 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.

Being located in a disaster-prone region, the HRC has worked successfully over the years to establish disaster preparedness and response mechanisms; its response to Agatha was prompt, widespread and all-encompassing. The following activities were implemented and completed within the targeted three-month period.

- **Coordination:** The HRC has a close relationship with the Government's disaster management coordinating body on the national level, the Permanent Contingency Commission (COPECO). Throughout the disaster response, it constantly coordinated with COPECO, local government entities and other humanitarian actors to divide geographical areas of work to avoid duplication and gaps in assistance as well as to ensure all assistance provided was appropriate. Further, at the community level, the HRC's community branches in the disaster-affected areas worked together within each affected zone. At the headquarters level, staff and volunteers maintained a presence at the Municipal Emergency Committee in the capital of Tegucigalpa as well as at COPECO and the Department of Social Protection.
- **Disaster response teams:** From the onset of the emergency, the HRC activated approximately 900 volunteers in 36 branches throughout the country to carry out activities. Another 16 HRC branches were on standby to help if needed.
- **Search and rescue:** The HRC mobilized qualified rescue personnel and specialized aquatic and urban rescue equipment and conducted search and rescue efforts. The search and rescue team also settled the rescued people in the government-run collective sheltering centres.
- **Assessments:** A specialized national intervention team (NIT) assessed damage and needs, carried out a detailed house-by-house census, targeted beneficiaries, and monitored the situation in coordination with the authorities and other organizations.
- **Water and sanitation:** With the support and materials from two Partner National Societies in the country — the Swiss and the Spanish — the HRC installed a water treatment plant, water tanks and vehicles to provide safe drinking water to 15 affected communities in the southern region of Honduras, the area in which COPECO and the HRC agreed for Red Cross to carry out activities.
- **Distribution of food and essential relief items:** Based on the extensive damage to the southern rural areas — primarily agricultural land — the HRC provided rice, beans, sugar, corn flour and oil for 492 families (1,712 people)

for one month. Families also received essential items to help them get back on their feet such as cleaning supplies, kitchen kits, hygiene kits and blankets. These distributions were appropriate not only due to the damage of the land to harvest, but many of these rural families were already considered vulnerable as they had limited access to basic food and supplies as a result of political changes in the country.

- Psychosocial Support:** The HRC organized psychosocial support activities for children primarily between the ages of 6 and 15 who were staying in the collective sheltering centres and unable to return home. Disaster response and youth volunteers led games, educational activities and competitions to help the children overcome sadness from the situation as well as keep busy and positive during a difficult time in their lives. Further, the HRC provided all children staying in the shelters with storybooks and organized reading sessions. The psychosocial support indirectly aided parents and family members of the targeted children, as some members joined the sessions; the support also alleviated their stress and worry for the children.

## Added Value of DREF

**Flexibility:** The DREF aims to provide relevant and rapid assistance wherever the need is greatest and this was pivotal following Tropical Storm Agatha in Honduras. The HRC’s original response plan targeted 250 families in a two-stage distribution plan: first, non-food items and food for one month, followed by another one month’s supply of food. After coordinating with other agencies, the HRC team realized that some families were to receive additional food assistance from other organizations. To avoid duplication, the HRC identified other families severely affected by the storm that had yet to receive any assistance and provided a food ration package for one month to those newly identified families. The DREF grant enabled this additional help and therefore another 242 vulnerable families received a one-month supply of food.

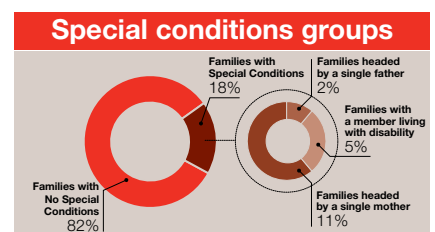
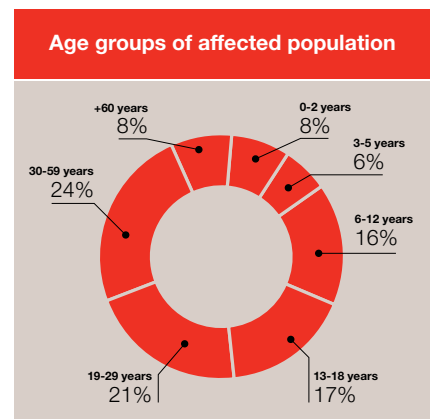
**Age, gender and disabled:** The HRC assessment team took the initiative to identify the most vulnerable by tracking the population’s age as well as special-attention groups — families headed by single mothers or fathers or families with a disabled member. The following graphs disaggregate the 1,712 people that the HRC assisted through the distribution of food and non-food items by age and special-attention groups. This helped keep the HRC accountable to vulnerable groups, including children and disabled people.

**Coordination:** The HRC developed and launched a unified plan of action and worked with its Red Cross partners in the country — IFRC, the Swiss Red Cross and the Spanish Red Cross — to divide the tasks based on expertise and resources available. The geographic area was already determined with COPECO and other actors. As a result, the DREF was able to fill a gap in the HRC’s overall operational plan with the support of food, non-food items and capacity building. It also complemented the Swiss and Spanish Red Cross’ support in water and sanitation and distribution of relief items in nearby affected areas in the south.

## Gender

Gender shapes the extent to which men, women, boys and girls are vulnerable to and affected by emergencies and disasters. Studies have shown that disasters generally accentuate existing gender inequalities. They also have the potential to alter the division of labour, mainly through changes in households. Disaster and emergencies can also present opportunities — good and bad — for a change in gender roles. Taking a gendered perspective can highlight opportunities and resources that support reconstruction and recovery efforts.

*Gender and Disaster Management, Australian Red Cross 2010*





## HRC Operational Lessons Learned

- **Coordination:** The HRC's operational coordination with COPECO, Red Cross partners and other humanitarian actors saved money, helped fill in gaps, used resources appropriately, and overall made the response more efficient and effective.
- **Assessments:** In coordination with all actors, the HRC carried out a house-by-house assessment tool — tried and proven during previous disasters response operations — to identify the most vulnerable in the affected zones in the southwest of the country. The beneficiaries, general public and government recognized the specialized NIT as exceptionally prompt and thorough during this operation.
- **Disaster response capacity building:** Due to its regular disaster responses, the HRC focuses on building capacity of its volunteers at all times; during disaster responses is no exception. Ten NIT members from nine local branches throughout Honduras completed a hands-on internship at the HRC Disaster Management Office's National Monitoring Centre. This experience helped seasoned disaster responders to better understand the administrative processes, planning, implementation, coordination and evaluation of the disaster response. Further, the use of the DREF to hold the operational evaluation meeting helped the National Society to identify lessons learned to incorporate into future planning and training.
- **DREF procedures:** The HRC identified the need for more training on DREF assistance and procedures, as very few staff members in the HRC disaster management department know DREF procedures well. The future training will enable additional staff and volunteers to quickly and efficiently complete a DREF request, resulting in improved plans of action, accountability and reporting on future disaster response operations.

