

OPERATIONS UPDATE



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

GUYANA: FLOODS

27 January 2005

The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 181 countries.

In Brief

Appeal No. 05EA001; Operations Update no. 1; Period covered: 24 – 27 January 2005; Appeal coverage: 0%

Appeal history:

- Launched on 24 January 2005 for CHF 2,042,000 (USD 1,724,515 or EUR 1,321,970) for 6 months to assist 30,000 beneficiaries (6,000 families)
- Disaster Relief Emergency Funds (DREF) allocated: CHF 300,000

Outstanding needs : CHF 2,042,000 (USD 1,724,515 or EUR 1,321,970)

Related Emergency or Annual Appeals: Caribbean Sub Regional Programmes Annual Appeal 05AA041; Hurricane Ivan Emergency Appeal 21/2004

Operational Summary: It is estimated that the severe flooding in Guyana has impacted some 150,000 people most of whom live in low-lying villages and communities within a radius of 20 km of the capital, Georgetown. The hardest hit communities are Albouystown, Shopia, Better Hope, Coldingen, Enterprise Gardens, Paradise and Enmore. Many residents in these areas live in poverty and the severe flooding has further exacerbated their already precarious situation. Regions 3, 4 and 5 continue to be declared as disaster areas by the Guyanese government. In addition, regions 1, 2 and 6 are affected and if the rain continues, conditions will further deteriorate. A significant amount of water has drained from the higher grounds of Central Georgetown; however, some areas in Central Georgetown remain seriously affected, with residents unable to return to their homes. On the East Coast, the water levels remain high and continue to rise as water drains from higher ground; more and more families have been forced to evacuate their homes and take shelter in school buildings which have two or three floors. Access to these communities is possible by boat as the roads are impassable. Food security, water and sanitation and the deteriorating public health situation require immediate attention. To date, the Guyana Red Cross Society (GRCS) has brought food and non-food assistance to 3,903 families (19,515 beneficiaries) in 31 of the most affected communities and villages. The operation in response to the floods disaster has a particular focus on water and sanitation, given the health risks posed by the flood waters. As a result, the GRCS has, to date, distributed 837 hygiene kits to benefit 4,185 beneficiaries in the worst flood affected areas. GRCS first aid volunteers are passing on key health messages, particularly regarding prevention of diarrhoea and the use of ORS.

Contributions are urgently needed in response to this Emergency Appeal to assist vulnerable flood victims who are exposed to food shortages and illness, given the extent of the floods.

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Background

Three days of torrential rains which began on 14 January have caused serious flooding in Guyana, affecting more than 150,000 people. This is the third time since late December that rains have caused flooding in the country's capital, Georgetown, and other coastal towns. After a day of relative sunshine the rains started again on 22 January causing increased flooding in many parts of the country, including the capital and surrounding areas. There are indications that the rainfall will continue to cause increased hardship for the affected population. Whilst the main airport is still functioning and accepting flights, the state owned radio station is not operating and the Municipal Airport has been forced to close. Furthermore, the heavy rains have cut off some areas along the eastern coast of the country. There are also reports that one of the main canals in the capital city of Georgetown burst its banks. Houses have been completely flooded and many businesses have been forced to close in an effort to protect their goods. Government offices, courts and schools were also forced to close. In the eastern coastal region of the country, roads are flooded and impassable. In some areas, more than two feet of water are covering the roads, making several communities unreachable for rescue teams.

Georgetown and the surrounding area is divided into two districts: Demerara-Mahaica and West Demerara-Essequibo Islands, both of which have been declared "disaster areas" by the Guyanese government. The district of Mahaica-Berbice, which is located on the east coast of the country, to the southeast of Georgetown, has also been declared a disaster area. The hardest hit communities are Albouystown, Shopia, Better Hope, Coldingen, Enterprise Gardens, Paradise and Enmore. Many residents in these areas live in poverty and the severe flooding has further exacerbated their already precarious situation. Thousands of people have been displaced by the floods and have been forced to seek refuge in one of the shelters set up in East Coast Demerara by the Guyana Defence Force. The GRCS Headquarters was also transformed into an emergency shelter assisting those in need from the surrounding area. Tens of thousands more have also been affected by the floods and are in urgent need of potable water and food. The Guyanese government has released 200 million Guyanese dollars (approximately USD 1,120,448 or CHF 1,332,025) for emergency relief. On 20 January, a telethon was held in Berbice County; money and food supplies from which will be channelled through the Guyana Red Cross Society (GRCS).

The Ministry of Health is also trying to ensure that people are able to locate to shelters which have been opened, but there have been difficulties in reaching those people most in need. In addition, Environmental Health and Vector Control Units are working with communities to ensure that an adequate supply of disinfectant is available in order to reduce the spread of disease.

The Pan American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU) has deployed a team leader and a water and sanitation delegate to Guyana; the Regional Health Delegate is also currently in the country; a regional intervention team (RIT) member who is an expert in water and sanitation has also travelled to Guyana to ensure support for the National Society.

CHF 300,000 has been released from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) in order to facilitate prompt mobilization of relief goods from PADRU.

Operational developments

Regions 3, 4 and 5 continue to be declared as disaster areas by the Guyanese government. However, regions 1, 2 and 6 are also affected and if the rain continues, conditions will further deteriorate. There is currently a lull in the rainfall, although forecasts are for rain over the next five days on an intermittent basis. A significant amount of water has drained from the higher grounds of Central Georgetown; however, some areas in Central Georgetown remain seriously affected, with residents unable to return to their homes. On the East Coast, the situation has not changed. The water levels remain high and continue to rise as water drains from higher ground; more and more families have been forced to evacuate their homes and take shelter in school buildings which have two or three floors. Most health centres remain closed as they are flooded with possible damage of equipment and drug supplies. Initial Red Cross assessments point to six people having died as a direct result of the floods; the numbers of injured and missing are not known. Statistics on the homeless are currently not available with many sharing accommodation with family and friends and other sleeping in the thirty five shelters set up, mainly in schools, in flood-affected areas. It is difficult to assess the total number of houses affected, although a rapid Guyana Red Cross Society assessment indicates that in 95% of areas visited about 85% of houses are flooded. Major arterial roads are passable, but others are severely flooded making it necessary for beneficiaries to access distributions in boats, upturned fridges and by other means. The public water system has begun to function in the capital, as the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) is distributing potable water to points throughout the city; however, in the flooded parts of town and surrounding areas piped water is not available. Food security, water and sanitation and the deteriorating public health situation require immediate attention. Most people in flood affected areas have lost their food stocks and many food shops have had their products destroyed. Food supplies have been severely affected with floodwaters destroying large areas of agricultural land. There are reports of many animals killed in flooded areas including pigs, cattle and fowl.

Furthermore, concerns continue to be expressed with regard to the status of a major 48 km conservancy dam which is threatening to overflow towards the capital and surrounding areas. Water is presently flowing over the top in some areas and it is feared that the dam may break, should rains continue.

The Pan American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU) charted a flight to Guyana containing the following relief items: 5,000 blankets; 1,000 kitchen kits, 26 rolls of plastic sheeting, 1,000 hygiene kits (for a 5 member family) and 1,000 collapsible jerry cans for immediate distribution to the neediest families in community shelters. This consignment also included one ton of relief goods purchased by UNICEF and comprising jerry cans, oral rehydration salts, water purification tablets and health kits. A second cargo flight from PADRU has now reached Guyana containing 8,000 blankets, 1,375 hygiene kits, 1,375 collapsible ten litre jerry cans, 50 raincoats, 50 pairs of rubber boots and Federation visibility items. This consignment also included 624 boxes of water purification tablets and 10,000 sachets of oral rehydration salts shipped by PADRU on behalf of UNICEF.



Flooded streets in Guyana; boats are necessary for transportation and distribution of relief goods

Red Cross and Red Crescent action - objectives, progress, impact

Emergency relief (food and basic non-food items)

Objective 1: 30,000 vulnerable beneficiaries (6,000 families) in Guyana have benefited from the provision of food and non-food items to assist them during the flood emergency.

Progress/Achievements (activities implemented within this objective)

The Guyana Red Cross Society continues to identify additional affected communities through links with community leaders and through assessment team visits to each target community. Lists of beneficiary families are compiled by community leaders; Red Cross teams then visit the communities, verify the lists and assess the needs. Beneficiaries include particularly vulnerable groups in their communities such as children under 5, pregnant and lactating women, the disabled and senior citizens; distributions of relief items are carried out by GRCS volunteers.

Food has been sourced locally and packed into family bags / parcels with sufficient food for a family for one week. To date, a total of 3,518 family food packages have been distributed, assisting 17,580 individuals, in the worst flooded areas in Georgetown, Demerara (East Coast) and Demerara (West Coast). In addition, 160 blankets and 1,307 bars of anti bacterial soap have been distributed.

Distributions took place as follows:

Place of Distribution	Date	Families	Beneficiaries	Food	Blankets	Soap
Railway View wcd	22 January	150	750	150		
Zeelugt	22 January	150	750	150		
Sophia Fields 8 & 9 sect. b	23 January	300	1,500	220		
Mahaica Shelter	23 January	75	375	75	150	
Better Hope Center	23 January	190	950	190		
Sophia c Fields 8-14	23 January	72	360	72		
3rd. Batch-Better Hope	23 January	46	230	46		
Ogle, Well Street	23 January	40	200	40	1	
2nd. Batch Better Hope	23 January	80	400	80		
Enterprise Primary School	23 January	15	75	15		
Children's Home Convalescence	23 January	2	10	2		
Vreydeid Lust ECD	23 January	70	350	70		
Sophia Sect. D Field 10	24 January	100	500	100		
Cummings Lodge	24 January	370	1,850	370		740
Montrose	24 January	50	250	50		100
Triumph	24 January	120	600	120		240
Cummings Lodge 1 st	25 January	76	380	76		
Guyana Society for the Blind	25 January	63	315	63		
HIV Positive Shelter	25 January	11	55	11		

Plum Park-Sophia, 1st batch	25 January	320	1,600	320		
Better Hope South	25 January	140	700	140		
Strathspey	25 January	25	125	25	9	
Better Hope North						
Triumph 2	25 January	300	1,500	300		
Sophia-rotary	25 January	92	460	92		
C Field Sophia	23 January	127	635	127		127
Better Hope	23 January	76	380	76		
Patterson South- Section B	26 January	168	840	168		
Sophia - 'A' Field	26 January	270	1,350	270		
Pigeon Island	26 January	100	500	100		100
Total		3,598	17,990	3,518	160	1,307

Impact:

The distributions have had a positive impact on the most affected population, providing vital food supplies for a one week period, together with essential non-food relief items.

Constraints:

There has been some difficulty in accessing trucks to move food and non-food supplies. The situation has been improved by a loan of two vehicles from the CIDA Programme Support Unit. The GRCS/Federation now have two small flat-bottom boats which provide the capacity to reach outlying areas.

Health**Objective 1: The water and sanitation needs for 30,000 vulnerable beneficiaries (6,000 families) in Guyana have been assessed, and assistance delivered in this sector.**

The Guyana Red Cross Society has distributed 837 hygiene kits to benefit 4,185 beneficiaries in the worst flood affected areas, as below. In addition, to help address the medical needs of the target communities, the GRCS has distributed oral re-hydration solution (ORS) to 31 families, analgesics to 29 individuals and skin cream to a further 17 people. GRCS first aid volunteers are passing on key health messages, particularly regarding prevention of diarrhoea and the use of ORS.

Place of Distribution	Date	Families	Beneficiaries	Hygiene kits
Railway View wcd	22 January			
Zeelugt	22 January			
Sophia Fields 8 & 9 sect. b	23 January	300	1,500	300
Mahaica Shelter	23 January	75	375	75
Better Hope Center	23 January	76	950	76
Sophia c Fields 8-14	23 January	72	360	72
3rd. Batch-Better Hope	23 January	46	230	46
Ogle, Well Street	23 January	40	200	40
2nd. Batch Better Hope	23 January	80	400	80
Enterprise Primary School	23 January			
Children's Home Convalescence	23 January	2	10	2
Vreydeid Lust ECD	23 January	70	350	70
Sophia Sect. D Field 10	24 January			
Cummings Lodge	24 January			

Montrose	24 January			
Triumph	24 January			
Cummings Lodge 1 st	25 January			
Guyana Society for the Blind	25 January			
HIV Positive Shelter	25 January			
Plum Park-Sophia, 1st batch	25 January			
Better Hope South	25 January			
Strathspey	25 January			
Better Hope North				
Triumph 2	25 January			
Sophia-rotary	25 January			
C Field Sophia	23 January			
Better Hope	23 January	76	380	76
Patterson South-Section B	26 January			
Sophia - 'A' Field	26 January			
Pigeon Island	26 January			
Total		837	4,755	837

The National Society has launched a public health awareness campaign through the distribution of 184 posters on key health messages focusing on “Health in Disasters” and “Use of Mosquito Nets” in coordination with the Ministry of Health. These target those communities worst affected by the floods, together with the shelters. Specific leaflets on “Water, Sanitation and Personal Hygiene” are being adapted in consultation with the Ministry of Health (MoH), GWI, and UNICEF for immediate distribution.

The most common health problems of those affected by the floods are diarrhoea, fungal skin infections, conjunctivitis and acute respiratory infections. Furthermore, raw sewage is circulating in the waters due to flooding of septic tanks and pit latrines, and there has been an increase in rodents and snakes, resulting in risks of snake bites and leptospirosis. In the immediate disaster response, the Task Force on Health chaired by the Ministry of Health, has, together with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) as its key international partner, established a number of mobile teams which visit the affected communities and provide relief items, such as water, bleach, disinfectant and information to the worst affected communities.

The Ministry of Health states that many of those treated to date were suffering from itches and rashes and 25% to 30% from coughs and colds, most of those affected being children. There have been five cases of severe diarrhoea, which were referred to the Georgetown Public Hospital.

Impact:

Basic hygiene supplies and soap to help prevent skin ailments have been provided, together with oral rehydration salts, to assist those in the worst-affected communities and to prevent diarrhoea and vomiting, particularly in children under 5 years of age.

Constraints:

A major constraint in the implementation of this objective is the lack of suitable vehicles, the inaccessibility of some communities due to the high level of the waters and the difficulty in obtaining the use of boats.



A woman and her child struggle through the flood waters

Objective 2: Awareness of vulnerable families will be raised in key health messages through an HIV/AIDS/STI and TB campaign.

The GRCS has distributed a number of posters on key prevention messages; however more material is due to reach Guyana from the Federation's Sub-Regional Office in Port of Spain by the end of the current week. So far, distributions of 19 boxes, each containing 144 condoms, have taken place.

The campaign will be further developed as the operation evolves.

Psychosocial Support

Objective 1: Staff and volunteers of the Guyana Red Cross Society plus the affected communities have benefited from psychosocial support to assist them in recovering from the effects of the floods

Unfortunately, the psychosocial support coordinator for the GRCS is not presently able to leave her community. However, two volunteers with experience and training in the field of psychosocial support have been identified, and it is hoped that they will be in a position to launch this component of the operation. In addition, the Regional Health Delegate is contacting members of staff from the Jamaica Red Cross and Grenada Red Cross Society who are experienced in psychosocial support in emergency settings, in order to request their assistance. A full time local coordinator for psychosocial support is required for three months, together with volunteers to undertake training and subsequently implement activities.

Strengthening of Preparedness and Response

Objective 1: The capacity of the Guyana Red Cross Society and vulnerable communities in disaster response and community based disaster preparedness (CBDP) including First Aid have been strengthened

Basic messages in first aid are being distributed in the most affected communities. More copies of these key messages are due to arrive in Guyana from the Port of Spain Sub Regional Office by the end of the current week.

Guyana Red Cross Society staff and volunteers are working closely with Federation staff through a counterpart system. GRCS staff are being instructed in standard Federation logistics, relief and vehicle management systems.

Objective 2: The capacity of the Guyana Red Cross Society in the area of telecommunications has been reinforced.

This component of the operation will be implemented once the emergency relief phase has been completed.

Federation Coordination

The Guyana Red Cross/Federation are involved in the overall coordination of disaster response at all levels. The Federation is taking part in all Joint Operations Committee (JOC) meetings together with the GRCS. A close working relationship is maintained with Guyana Water Incorporated, the Ministry of Health, UNICEF and PAHO through the water, sanitation, solid waste and vector control working groups. The GRCS has also facilitated a meeting of over 20 local NGOs with a view to better coordinating the local response to the disaster and has been represented at civil society meetings through the Citizens Initiative. Furthermore, the Federation and GRCS attend daily meetings with key government authorities, and representatives of UN and international organizations.

Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement -- Principles and initiatives

- Relief activities being carried out are based on the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.
- Beneficiary selection criteria focus on the vulnerability of those affected; as a result, food and non-food distributions target children and female heads of household as a special priority group.
- In addition to the targeted communities, specific assistance is being provided to groups with special needs which are not receiving assistance from other organizations: these include “The Guyana Association for the Blind” the “Children’s Convalescent Home” and a shelter for Persons Living with HIV/AIDS.
- Activities are based on the SPHERE Project humanitarian charter and the code of conduct for emergency response.

National Society Capacity Building

The Guyana Red Cross Society has launched a volunteer recruitment campaign as a result of the flooding and now has over 50 staff members and volunteers who are available to work in order to implement the floods response operation. The National Society, supported by Federation staff members, was the first organization to launch relief efforts in response to the flooding.

Communications – Advocacy and Public Information

The GRCS and Federation have a high profile in the relief effort through press conferences and links with the local and international press. Stories focusing on Red Cross activities have been published in all local newspapers; a televised Red Cross press conference has taken place and interviews have been held with the Associated Press and the BBC.