

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

4 February 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. 2; Period covered: 27 January to 3 February 2005; Appeal coverage: 4.6%. Contributions list will be attached to future updates.

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 1,948,000 (USD 1,615,947 or EUR 1,250,350)

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

Operational Summary: It is now estimated that more than 200,000 people in Guyana have been affected by the floods. The rains have begun to subside and the flood waters have gone down in some areas. A number of beneficiaries remain in shelters as many houses are still flooded, although the water has receded from the streets. The Guyana Red Cross Society has been able to reach almost all 6,000 families targeted in the emergency appeal and is already planning a second phase of the relief effort, which will start in a few days. The distribution of food parcels continued during the reporting period and has now reached 5,884 families in more than 50 communities. Blankets have been distributed to 1,532 families. Food and bed sheets are now being purchased for a second round of relief distributions, and kitchen sets and plastic sheeting are planned to be distributed to beneficiaries living in shelters. Plans are also being drawn up for a water distribution system for the east coast of the country, which will include two water tanks in each of 50 distribution points, with a total capacity of 100,400 gallons. To reduce the incidence of disease, hygiene kits have been distributed to 2,685 beneficiaries, and jerry cans have been distributed to 1,810 families. Basic hygiene supplies to help prevent skin ailments have also been provided, together with oral re-hydration salts, to assist those in the worst-affected communities and to prevent diarrhoea and vomiting, particularly in children under 5 years of age. Basic first aid messages are currently being distributed in the most affected communities, and more copies of these key messages are due to arrive soon in Guyana from the Port of Spain Sub Regional Office. Plans are also being drawn up for a psychosocial support project to assist beneficiaries in recovering from the affects of the floods. This project will be carried out with the support of the Grenada Red Cross Society, which has experience working in this area following its relief operation in response to Hurricane Ivan in 2004. Funding for this relief operation has been provided by the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) and the Canadian Red Cross. Additional funds are urgently needed to ensure that the needs of all the affected beneficiaries in Guyana are met.

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Background

Three days of torrential rains which began on 14 January have caused serious flooding in Guyana, affecting more than 200,000 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. The main airport has remained functioning and accepting flights throughout the flooding, and the municipal airport, which was forced to close, was reopened on 29 January and is now operating flights as usual. The state-owned radio station was interrupted for a short time, but is now operating again. The northern coast of the country, east of the Demerara River (referred to in the country as the East Coast), which had been cut off by the floods, are becoming more and more accessible by road. However, some areas are still only accessible by boat. 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. Most schools, both private and public, that are not in the disaster areas have re-opened as the flood waters in the affected areas have receded.

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 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 disaster management delegate to support the National Society in drafting the plan of action for this relief operation. The disaster management delegate will also prepare further deployments of Regional Intervention Team members, a logistics coordinator from the American Red Cross, and technical expert in finance and IT and telecommunications.

Operational developments

The rains have subsided somewhat and the flood waters have gone down in some areas. A number of beneficiaries remain in shelters as many houses are still flooded, although the water has receded from the streets. Residents are

currently trying to clean up as much as they can. Water levels in low-lying communities have not yet gone down significantly as these areas tend to act as drainage basins for the higher regions.

The Guyana Red Cross Society (GRCS) has been able to reach almost all 6,000 families targeted in the emergency appeal and is already planning a second phase of the relief effort, which will start in a few days. The state owned radio station was affected by the floods but is now operating again, broadcasting messages about health, school updates and environment cleanups. The municipal airport reopened on Saturday, 29 January and flights are now operating on regular schedules, bringing much needed relief supplies for beneficiaries. The East Coast of the country, which had been cut off by the floods, are becoming more and more accessible by road, which is allowing relief teams to access that region. However, some areas are still only accessible by boat.

Reports state that six persons are suspected to have died from leptospirosis, while a total of 15 persons have been diagnosed with this disease. Three have been hospitalised in the St. Joseph's Mercy Hospital. The symptoms of water borne diseases, particularly vomiting and diarrhoeal diseases, are beginning to be seen in the affected areas of the country. People have complained about skin rashes, sores, boils and fungal infections on their legs and arms. There is now an increased concern about outbreaks of hepatitis A, leptospirosis, typhoid, and dengue. People are calling the Red Cross for information about these and other health concerns.

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 distribution of food parcels has continued during the reporting period and has now reached 5,884 families (29,420 beneficiaries) in more than 50 communities. Blankets have been distributed to 1,532 families (7,660 beneficiaries). Two relief teams are carrying out distributions of food parcels and blankets throughout the affected area. The packaging of food parcels is being organized in the GRCS warehouse, with local Red Cross volunteers, students, and other community members taking part. Distribution lists are being prepared by Red Cross volunteers and community representatives prior to distributions. The community is showing a positive attitude towards the Red Cross teams that are delivering goods. Distributions have been orderly, with community members assisting in unloading trucks and organizing distribution lines.

The Federation and the GRCS have agreed to implement distributions of 780 food parcels provided by the World Food Programme (WFP). These parcels, which will provide families with a two-week ration of food, will be distributed in areas not included in the Red Cross' initial assessment, which identified 6,000 families in need of relief assistance. Additional agreements to distribute more food items in coordination with the WFP could be made over the next several weeks.

Food and bed sheets are now being purchased for a second round of relief distributions, and kitchen sets and plastic sheeting are planned to be distributed to beneficiaries living in shelters.

Thus far, distributions of emergency relief items have benefited the following number of beneficiaries:

Item	Number of families
Food parcels	5,884
Blankets	1,532

Impact

The distributions taking place in Guyana are ensuring that most vulnerable beneficiary families receive relief assistance. Essential assistance provided through the GRCS, such as food parcels, blankets and kitchen sets, will expedite the recovery process of those affected.

Constraints

The relief phase of the operation is progressing slower than planned due to difficulties in accessing the affected areas, many of which can only be reached by boat. Continuing unsettled weather conditions are also hampering the relief effort. As the rains are now beginning to subside, it is hoped that these difficulties will be overcome.

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.

Progress/Achievements (activities implemented within this objective)

The Federation is attending the meetings at the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) headquarters with the water and sanitation coordination group. The main concern with regards to the distribution of water is the amount of time that it takes to refill the trucks. According to census figures in the most affected areas, 127,000 people have been affected by the flooding and are currently in need of water. The GRCS has begun identifying additional personnel to carry out water and sanitation activities in the affected areas and is planning rapid-training sessions to be carried out as the necessary teaching materials arrive in the country.

The planned water distribution system for the east coast of the country will include two water tanks in each of 50 distribution points, with a total capacity of 100,400 gallons. A water marshal will be placed at each distribution point to carry out chlorine test and ensure that the quality of water is acceptable. The aqua kit provided by the Federation has already been passed on to GWI and a briefing on its use was carried out with the scientific service manager. The Federation also provided 5,000 jerry cans to GWI to be distributed to beneficiaries. In addition, UNICEF has confirmed the delivery of 8,900 jerry cans to GWI and four 1,500-litre bladders and 6,100 jerry cans are expected to be delivered to the water company by Tuesday, 8 February.

Sanitation systems in the country have been drastically affected as many septic tanks, pit latrines and sewerage systems are flooded or overflowing. The disposal of human waste is a very serious problem in the flooded areas, especially in the East Coast Demerara. In this area, 100 percent of the pit latrines, septic tanks, or drainage canals assessed have been damaged. Sewage is mixed in with flood waters, increasing the risk of water related diseases. The lack of toilets is another reality as 56 percent of the pit latrines throughout the affected regions are flooded. It is necessary to provide temporary toilets for these areas. PAHO is recommending an educational campaign in order to encourage the population to use plastic bags to dispose human waste and place it in dry areas. When the flood waters recede, sanitation facilities will need to be assessed to determine what repairs are required.

During the reporting period, the Guyana Red Cross Society continued distributing hygiene kits and jerry cans to assist beneficiaries in the worst flood affected areas. Thus far, distributions of emergency relief items have benefited the following number of beneficiaries:

Item	Number of families
Hygiene Kits	2,685
Jerry cans	1,810

Red Cross personnel have also distributed oral re-hydration salts and over-the-counter medicines to treat rashes and sores that have resulted from contact with contaminated water.

The National Society's public health awareness campaign includes the distribution of posters containing key health messages focussing on "Health in Disasters" and "Use of Mosquito Nets." Thus far, 200 posters have been distributed by health workers, Red Cross personnel and community members in the affected areas and more are expected to arrive soon. Posters containing information on water and sanitation are being drawn up but are not yet available. These posters will be distributed as soon as possible. Relief workers are also stressing the importance of avoiding or minimizing contact with contaminated waters.

Impact

Basic hygiene supplies to help prevent skin ailments have been provided, together with oral re-hydration salts, to assist those in the worst-affected communities and to prevent diarrhoea and vomiting, particularly in children

under five years of age. The Red Cross coordination efforts with the different stakeholders, including the Guyana Water Incorporated, are ensuring that the water and sanitation needs of the population are known and addressed.

Constraints

Coordination among stakeholders is still challenging, although progress is being made. In addition, the GRCS relief effort has been slowed by the fact that many Red Cross personnel have themselves been affected by the floods.

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

Progress/Achievements (activities implemented within this objective)

The GRCS has distributed a number of posters containing key health messages. More material is expected to arrive from the Federation's Sub Regional Office in Port of Spain shortly. In addition, Red Cross personnel are continuing to distribute condoms as part of their relief activities.

Plans are currently being drawn up to carry out a "Together We Can" workshop, as soon as the necessary materials arrive from the Sub Regional Office. "Together We Can" is a youth peer education methodology that addresses HIV/AIDS. Venues to conduct these workshops are being coordinated with the affected communities and with shelter managers.

Constraints

The distribution of condoms is being limited by religious and cultural beliefs.

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

Progress/Achievements (activities implemented within this objective)

Work in this important area will be carried out as soon as the emergency needs of the affected population have been attended to. Thus far, 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. This project will be carried out with the support of the Grenada Red Cross Society, which has experience working in this area following its relief operation in response to Hurricane Ivan in 2004. 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 first aid messages are currently being distributed in the most affected communities, and more copies of these key messages are due to arrive soon in Guyana from the Port of Spain Sub Regional Office. 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. Additional activities, such as community-based assessments, training of trainer workshops and community-based first aid (CBFA) workshops are being planned. This component will be fully implemented once the emergency phase of the operation has been completed.

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 Society and the Federation are involved in the overall coordination of disaster response at all levels. The Federation's field team has met with the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team that arrived in the country a short while ago. UNDAC does not have an operational role in this disaster response, but has a coordination role and is working with other international agencies in the country. In addition, the Federation is participating in meetings addressing specific needs in the areas of health and water and sanitation.

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.

[*Click here to return to the title page.*](#)