

# **MAURITANIA / NIGER : DROUGHT**

28 July 1997

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*situation report no. 1*

*period covered: 23 April - 24 July*

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*The food and health assistance programme is well under way in both countries, with some logistical modifications in Niger and a pending budget revision in Mauritania. Both National Societies are highly involved in the day-to-day activities, and co-operation with the other agencies involved is excellent. The main fear is that if rains do not arrive soon, the whole exercise will have to be repeated next year.*

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## ***The context***

Unusually poor rainfall in parts of Niger and Mauritania and the ensuing poor harvest has affected as many as 500,000 people, some of whom are in dire need of relief assistance. Following thorough assessments, the International Federation, together with the concerned National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies launched an appeal to assist (Niger) 6,000 children, 2,500 pregnant/lactating women and (Mauritania) 17,500 vulnerable people, 3,900 children under five and their mothers.

### **Niger:**

Dry conditions in Tanout have caused severe food insecurity, especially for vulnerable families and children under five. In response to the emergency, the Niger Red Cross Society (NRCS) has implemented a supplementary feeding programme in ten health and feeding centres in partnership with WFP, MSF (France) and the local Ministry of Health.

The expected rains have still not appeared, giving a bleak outlook for the November harvest. The situation has become so critical that the President of the Republic has asked all citizens to include rain in their daily prayers. Agencies and donors are mobilising more resources as they realise there is an urgent need for intervention.

### **Mauritania:**

Mauritania is experiencing a similar situation: the disastrous harvest last November resulted in a nation-wide food deficit. A joint mission by the authorities and aid agencies resulted in a general interagency plan of action in which the Mauritania Red Crescent Society (MRCS) obtained a co-ordinating role and the mandate of the government to expand its traditional food aid activity to 50 Community Food Centres in Inchiri, Adrar, and Assaby.

National and international donors and agencies in Mauritania have difficulties in funding their programmes and starting activities. The strategy being adopted by the international community is to supply the market with cereals in order to prevent prices from escalating. WFP is concentrating on the south-east's irrigated, rice producing areas which are today affected by drought. The EU is concentrating on the south-central region, around Brakna, with Lutheran World Foundation as a partner.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent action***

### **Niger •**

Thanks to financial support from the DREF and from National Societies, NRCS was able to start its programme in ten health and feeding centres in Tanout on 1 June under the supervision of the Federation's Regional Delegation in Abidjan.

Each centre's programme is implemented jointly with three other partners: WFP, Ministry of Health and MSF (France). WFP supplies food to one third of the beneficiaries. The Ministry of Health provides each centre with a nurse for medical activities and therapeutic nutrition while MSF provides training, technical and material support for nutrition, vaccination and medical supervision.

NRCS supplies two-thirds of the food, distributes it and assists the nurses by providing volunteers at each centre. The volunteers' activities include maintenance of the centre and health education for the mothers of the beneficiaries. They also store the food supply, detect cases of malnutrition on the spot and in surrounding villages and record them, distribute monthly dry rations, which are equivalent to what WFP is providing (28.35 kg), prepare rations with mothers, and pass on education on health and nutritional topics. The 44 volunteers undertook a three day training session with MSF before the programme began.

Since the April appeal the beneficiary groups and amounts distributed have been changed in order to maximise the efficiency of the operation. A total of 3,700 beneficiaries (2,500 children, 1,200 lactating and pregnant mothers) now receive rations, the distance to be covered has been reduced to a 5-10 km radius around each centre and dry rations have been increased from 8.7 kg per person per month to 28.35kg per family per month (millet, niébé beans, oil and sugar, all locally purchased) in addition to the wet ration. The wet ration enables the child to recuperate his/her weight; the dry ration creates a favourable environment for the child because, through his/her share, a normal meal becomes available to the entire family.

The Regional Delegation Abidjan provided one Mercedes truck from the Liberian refugees operation in Côte d'Ivoire to support the NRCS in Tanout, and will lend a Toyota Land Cruiser 4x4 Station Wagon as soon as the new regional fleet obtains official number plates.

### **Mauritania •**

The three goals of the operation are:

- To provide wet rations (wheat flour, powder milk, oil and sugar) to 2,500 children under five and to 1,250 pregnant or lactating mothers for five months in 50 Community Feeding Centres in three affected regions (Assaba, Adrar, Inchiri).

- To provide dry rations to 17,500 vulnerable families for five months in the same three regions, plus Nouakchott district.
- To activate each Red Crescent Local Committee and have elections in all 56, in preparation of the General Assembly in December.

The first part of the operation started in the beginning of July, thanks to the 32 MT of skimmed powder milk provided by the Danish Red Cross and a Mercedes truck funded by the Swedish Red Cross. Participating National Societies' contributions have enabled the MRCS to purchase locally the necessary quantities of wheat grains, oil and sugar for the feeding centres. This part of the operation is now covered. Thirty volunteers are deployed to work in the centres and identify the beneficiaries. Two supervisors (a logistician, a nutritionist) regularly visit all the centres. In addition to being part of the operation, these visits focus on the institutional development of the local and regional branches, and will continue after the operation in preparation for the General Assembly to take place in December 1997.

The second part of the operation, general food distribution, has not yet started, due to lack of funding. The original budget is currently being revised. The dry food ration will be changed into wheat grains (300 grams per person per day) and oil (20 grams per person per day), following WFP rations in their programme in the south of the country. The operation will run to October, after which date, if it rains, there will be no need for external assistance.

The programme is supervised by the Regional Relief Delegate.

## ***Outstanding needs***

A Toyota pickup is urgently required for the MRCS as the Land Cruiser provided by the Regional Delegation will not be sufficient for the three parts of the programme.

## ***External relations***

The Secretary General of MRCS has been chosen as the president of the local NGO commission which is liaising with international organisations and embassies in the co-ordination of the various programmes and promotes local fund-raising.

NRCS works in close operational partnership with MSF (France), the Ministry of Health and WFP. This collaboration has given volunteers the opportunity to assist professional medical staff, receive trained and work under professional supervision

Both National Society Presidents have appeared on national television to speak about the drought programmes.

## ***Contributions***

See Annex 1 for details.

## ***Conclusion***

The programme progresses well, with tactical modifications increasing its efficiency. However, if rain does not fall soon, similar interventions could be necessary next year, (May to October 98). Rural development programmes are included in the three year development plans of both National Societies.

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