

MAURITANIA/NIGER: DROUGHT

25 March 1997

appeal no. 09/97

situation report no. 3 (final)

period covered: 15 April 1997 - 25 March 1998

Although donor response to this Appeal was rather low, judicious planning allowed the Federation, Mauritanian Red Crescent and Niger Red Cross to assist over 20,000 drought victims. Both National Societies acquitted themselves well and the experience gained through this operation will be invaluable for the forthcoming nine-country regional drought appeal, soon to be launched by the International Federation.

The Disaster

Low rainfall in the Sahel between June and August 1996 resulted in insufficient harvests affecting some 500,000 people in Mauritania's Brakna, Tagant, Assaba, Adrar and Inchiri regions and Niger's Tanout region. To counter the food shortage, the Governments of both countries issued appeals to the international community and humanitarian organisations in early 1997 outlining the urgent need for food assistance.

The Appeal

The International Federation launched an Emergency Appeal in April 1997 seeking contributions in kind, cash and services for 2.07 million CHF to assist 30,000 beneficiaries for six months. The operation in Mauritania targeted assistance to 17,500 vulnerable people, including 2,500 children under five, 1,250 pregnant/lactating women and 150 women on a food-for-work programme to prepare wet rations. The operation in Niger aimed to assist 6,000 children and 2,500 lactating/pregnant women. It also set out to reactivate local Red Cross/Red Crescent committees in both countries.

The Operation

Programmes started in June (Niger) and July (Mauritania). In the former, first aid volunteers remained in Health Centres to assist nurses after food distributions ended.

Plans of Action

Mauritania

- { April: determine the resources, identify a delegate, prepare logistics and finish purchasing;
- { May-June: establish a distribution plan, mobilise 150 volunteers, identify beneficiaries of the supplementary food programme;
- { June-September: implement food distribution and nutritional/health education programmes at distribution sites.

Niger

- { April-May: identify and train volunteers, sensitise beneficiaries, organise logistics and establish ten feeding centres;
- { June-August: implement distributions, nutritional and health/sanitation follow-up, train beneficiaries in community-based first aid.

The Delegation

The Regional Delegation for Western Africa provided assistance to the Operating National Societies with needs assessments, programme implementation, supervision, follow-up, accounting and reporting. Funds were allocated from the Secretariat to the Operating National Societies through the Regional Delegation's finance department. The Head of the Regional Delegation, the Relief Delegate and other regional delegates (Finance/Administration, Logistics, Information and Reporting) provided support services on a regular basis.

Participation of Operating National Society

Both Operating National Societies directly implemented their respective programmes. The operation in Mauritania mobilised 30 volunteers and 150 women in the beneficiary community through a food-for-work programme while some 40 volunteers worked for the Niger Red Cross operation. Field co-ordinators were specifically assigned to supervise and manage each operation while the headquarters of the National Societies provided administrative and co-ordination support.

Co-operation with Authorities and other agencies

Mauritania: the National Society was chosen as the nation-wide co-ordinating body for the international donor community.

Niger: good co-operation and co-ordination was established with partners in the field during this operation. Respective tasks included:

- { Niger Red Cross: first-aid, immunisation, distribution of dry rations, health and nutritional education;

- { MSF-France: health, supplies of medicine, nutrition, distribution of wet rations for supplementary feeding, nutritional training of the Niger RC volunteers WFP: supplies of food items to health/feeding centres;
- { Famine Early Warning System (FEWS): co-ordination, assessments;
- { Ministry of Health: health, immunisation, nutrition.

Needs assessment

Needs assessments were conducted in both countries by the National Societies' Headquarters and Local Committee officers. Federation support was provided through a Secretariat resource person in Niger and Regional Delegates in Mauritania who reviewed NS' draft programme proposals regarding target beneficiaries, areas of intervention and the type and quantity of food required.

A second needs assessment was carried out in October in both countries following another poor harvest.

Objectives/Plan of Action/Implementation

The objectives remained the same, but some revisions occurred at the implementing stage.

In Niger, the targeted number of beneficiaries was reduced from 8,000 to 2,500 as other humanitarian organisations, notably MSF and WHO, had already started providing food assistance to some of the targeted vulnerable groups. To avoid duplication of services and to increase the impact of food assistance, the Federation/NS reduced the target number of beneficiaries, and increased food from 8.5 kg to 28.5 kg monthly individual rations per family of five. Millet, oil, sugar and beans were distributed.

In Mauritania, the food assistance planned for 17,500 beneficiaries was reduced both in duration and number of beneficiaries: 15,000 people (including elderly and disabled) living in the most drought-affected regions received 50 kg wheat and four litres of oil per family of five for two months from October-November instead of May-November. These reductions were due to the late arrival of donations and low financial support. Food assistance for the 2,500 children and 1,250 women was provided as planned in the 50 feeding centres from July to December (type of food: wheat, skim milk, oil and sugar).

The operations proceeded as follows:

- { May-June: mobilisation of funds and in-kind donations;
- { June-July: identification and sensitisation of vulnerable groups, refresher courses for volunteers;
- { June-November: food distributions in 50 feeding centres in Mauritania (Inchiri, Adrar, Assaba), and in ten health centres in Niger (Tanout region), health/sanitation education and follow-up of activities by field co-ordinators and the Regional Delegation;
- { October-November: distribution of dry food rations in Mauritania;
- { November-December: phasing out of programmes in Niger by continuing to provide first-aid workers' assistance in the Health Centres after distributions ended in October.

Strengths and Weaknesses

The operations in both countries reduced the impact of the drought on the beneficiaries' nutritional status. The specific strength of the operation in Niger was the good co-operation established with other partners in the field, with the government authorities through the Ministry of Health, and FEWS. In

Mauritania, the operation strengthened the National Society's institutional development through the reactivating of 16 out of 56 local Red Crescent committees and provided the momentum for the holding of the General Assembly in February 1998, where the NS statutes were renewed.

Resource development was not a priority area at the onset of the operations, but objectives targeting revenue generating activities should have been included at the planning and budgeting stage. Some activities were initiated but could not be carried out due to lack of funds.

The programmes were slow to start due to poor response from donors: just 29% of the appeal was covered.

Media coverage of both operations was significant — the National Society Presidents appeared on national television to present the drought programmes, press releases were issued and Niger's national television made a report on distributions.

Conclusion

Both operations fulfilled their stated purpose: to alleviate the suffering of some of the most drought-affected people by assisting 2,500 and 17,650 in Niger and Mauritania respectively. The main strengths were the opportunities given to National Societies to manage programmes by themselves instead of executing Federation-directed operations. They both gradually assumed responsibility for implementation and management, while the Federation's role focused on operational support, supervision and standard systems implementation. Regular monitoring of programmes was carried out by the Regional Delegation.

The Federation Secretariat is presently preparing a regional drought appeal for nine Sahel countries, including Niger and Mauritania. Based on the experiences of the 1997 operations, one of the essential aspects for 1998 will be resource development.

The Federation extends its thanks to all donors who participated in this appeal and contributed, through the National Societies of Mauritania and Niger, in assisting vulnerable drought victims.

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