

INFORMATION BULLETIN



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

BURKINA-FASO, CHAD, MALI, MAURITANIA AND NIGER: FOOD SECURITY (DROUGHT)

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Focus on Niger

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The Situation

Niger was one of the countries in the Sahel region affected by drought which led to a food crisis in the region. The Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) reported that cereal production of member states of the CILSS decreased to 8.8 million tons, compared to the 11.5 million tons yielded in 1999-2000. Food production in 2000-2001 went below the average in the five low-income food deficit Sahel countries most affected by low rainfall. There was acute soil deterioration and rural exodus thereby increasing food insecurity.

According to reports received by the *Système d'Alerte Précoce et de Gestion de Catastrophe* (SAPGC), 3,500,000 inhabitants were only receiving half the food needed to survive. The price of a 100-kg bag of millet increased from 8,000 FCFA (20 CHF) to 20,000 FCFA (50 CHF) during the crisis. To respond to this situation, the Government of Niger launched an appeal for international aid in December 2000 particularly for the Filingué district situated 187 km to the north-east of Niamey. Filingué was a village hit by the second highest vulnerability rate. In their struggle for survival, women, children and elderly had begun eating leaves and children began to show signs of malnutrition.

The Government procured 3,000 tons of foodstuff and sold them at subsidized rates to the population. Other donors supported the operation by selling millet and sorghum at approximately 15-35% lower than the market rate. With the collaboration of partners such as the Luxembourg Development Cooperation, Swiss Development Cooperation, Spanish Red Cross, GTZ, Caritas and WFP, the Government set the price of cereal in the entire country at a fixed price of 15,000 FCFA (37.5 CHF) per bag.

Responding to the Government's desire not to further a dependency on outside assistance by the free distributions of food, the World Food Programme (WFP) set up in each affected village a food-for-work scheme (SAPGC engineers taught villagers to recover arable ground by planting trees with half-moon wells around their trunks to retain rainwater) to provide immediate food relief as well as a long-term solution to unpredictable rainfall in the region.

The government set up an emergency commission to provide overall coordination for the food-for-work operations. After several working sessions, the area of Filingué was divided into eight zones; Zone One - made up of nine villages - was allotted to the Niger Red Cross (NRC).

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

Following an assessment conducted by the NRC, with support from the Federation, in March 2001, 6,500 persons of Filingué were identified by the Red Cross as being particularly vulnerable. The NRC formulated a plan of action based on the above mentioned assessment and prepared a four-month distribution programme of dry food. The Spanish Red Cross provided the NRC with 108,182 EUR (approximately CHF 164,000) to purchase and transport 318 tons of millet to the main depot at Filingué, and made plans to send a delegate to Niger to assist the NRC for about one month.

The NRC purchased the food locally and distributed it in two phases out of Filingué. The first distribution phase was completed in July 2001; the second phase was completed at the end of August 2001. To facilitate the technical and logistical aspects of the operation, the Federation covered all costs related to personnel, administration and transportation from the main depot in Filingué to the distribution centres by provided the NRC with CHF 40,000 allocated from the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) as well as two computers which were formatted with appropriate software; a basic training course for the staff on how to use the computers and software was also organized by a visiting delegate from the Federation Regional Delegation in Abidjan. The Federation also assisted the NRC to coordinate its activities, perform an evaluation of the project as well as to provide financial and narrative reporting during the entire operation.

The NRC worked in partnership with the *Système d'Alerte Précoce et de Gestion des Catastrophes (SAPGC)*, the executing organ of the national food crisis unit. The NRC was responsible for purchasing and stocking of food items, as well as conducting a census of beneficiaries and conducting the actual distribution of food. Ten volunteers from the Filingué subsection of the Red Cross conducted a census for nine villages over a five-day period. This census was done in the presence of the Federation delegate. As stipulated in the Memorandum of Understanding between SAPGC and the NRC, every able-bodied beneficiary of the food distribution had to have worked for nine days doing land reclamation in their farms in order to receive a total of 44 kg of cereal in the two distribution phases. The first phase of the distribution process was completed as planned between 20-27 July 2001.

As preparations for the second phase of distribution were underway the Spanish Red Cross delegate arrived. With the delegate's assistance, the list of beneficiaries for the second distribution was revised to include the most vulnerable, not just able-bodied vulnerable, and the Niger Red Cross followed this new list in the second distribution.

In the second distribution 7,101 able-bodied people were counted instead of the 6,500 beneficiaries originally planned by the partners. Some 3,313 most vulnerable people received their rations as well, even though they did not work - this in keeping with Red Cross principles of helping the most vulnerable. Food distribution was performed according to the information reflected in the table below:

2nd Distribution of Food by Villages

	VILLAGE	ABLE-BODIED PERSONS	VULNERABLE PERSONS	FOOD DISTRIBUTED BY TONNES
1	Ibankan	349	364	7'600
2	Sabara I	385	193	8'400
3	Sabara II	375	153	8'250
4	Rouafi I	1'216	665	26'750
5	Rouafi II	498	244	10'900
6	Chinagame	1'287	311	28'300
7	Ayawa	1'996	702	43'900

8	Kabefo	604	334	13'300
9	Dinkilmi	391	347	8'600
	TOTAL	7'101	3'313	156'000

A total of 312 tons of food was distributed to nine villages in two distributions (please see previous Information Bulletin of 8 August 2001, for information regarding the first distribution). This quantity of millet was in accordance with SPHERE standards for the provision of four months of millet at 12 kg per month per person. But with the second distribution, the individual ration had to be reduced to 11 kg per person due to the higher number of beneficiaries in the recount.

Lessons learned

- Impassable roads made the transport of food difficult which increased the number of days needed for distribution.
- Red Cross principles were initially not taken into consideration at the beginning of the operation (the Niger Red Cross followed the government's policy of food-for-work to the exclusion of the most vulnerable). However, with this distribution operation, the NRC now understands the importance for creating awareness on the Fundamental Principles and humanitarian values of the Red Cross among the general public and members.

For a full description of the National Society profile, see www.ifrc.org

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All International Federation Operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

For support to or for further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal.

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