

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

THE GAMBIA: SQUALL IN UPPER RIVER DIVISION

22 April 2004

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

This Information Bulletin (no. 03/2004) is being issued for information only. It is the final of three Information Bulletins in respect of this operation. The Federation is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time.

- [Information Bulletin no. 1/2003 dated 1 September 2003](#)
- [Information Bulletin no. 2/2003 dated 12 September 2003](#)

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The Situation

At 10 p.m. on 24 August 2003, a squall of some 30-35 knots hit the area around Basse Santa Su in Upper River Division (URD), the Gambia. It was estimated (joint needs assessment August 30-31) that some 800 families (8,000 persons) suffered from the effects in Mansajang Kunda, Manneh Kunda, Alluhareh, Basse and Koba Kunda. Some 1,600 houses were partly damaged (roofing and roof construction) or completely destroyed (above all mud/grass houses). Three deaths were reported and 19 persons were admitted to Basse Health Centre; severe cases were treated in Bansang hospital. Some individuals are also traumatized, having been trapped inside a damaged house.

An assessment team, comprised of representatives from the [Gambia Red Cross Society](#), the Government of the Gambia, and NGOs, visited some of the affected areas in Upper River Division (URD) on 30-31 August 2003. The team – coordinated by Catholic Relief Services - also collected secondary information from the Commissioner's Office and compiled a Needs Assessment Report. At the same time, the Gambia Red Cross distributed limited quantities from its disaster preparedness (DP) stock to the most vulnerable people. The Federation allocated CHF 30,000 from its Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) for this operation.

The Gambia: Squall in Upper River Division; Information Bulletin no. 3/2004 (Final)

Following meetings with the National Disaster Relief and Resettlement Committee and NGOs, the Gambia Red Cross with International Federation planned to assist 300 families with food and non-food items. An in-depth needs assessment was carried out 4-6 September 2003. Distribution of food items took place 16-19 September 2003 and non-food items on 22-26 September 2003. An evaluation of the emergency response by the Gambia Red Cross was carried out 21-24 November 2003.

The Gambia Red Cross coordinated its intervention with district authorities, specifically the Commissioner's Office.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

Objective 1: To assist 200 families with basic food supplies

Progress/Achievements

The national society distributed 1,400 kg of beans and 400 litres of edible oil to affected families from existing emergency stock. The National Disaster Relief and Resettlement Committee provided transportation. The distribution took place on 29 August 2003 in Basse town, while the beneficiaries were selected from several villages near Basse.

The Gambia Red Cross Branch Office carried out an in-depth assessment 4-6 September, in the five villages where a rapid assessment was done earlier by the local Gambia Red Cross branch. A member of the Gambia Red Cross national emergency response team and the Branch Officer supervised the assessment. Nine volunteers were assigned to the job, forming three teams. A format was designed and copied, concentrating on family size, number of children, damage on houses and food supply lost. The Gambia Red Cross Secretary General and the Federation Technical Advisor joined the teams on 6 September and had discussions with the Project Supervisors, the Branch Chairman and the Commissioner. The assessment reflected the following information:

Village	No of persons affected	Estimated no. of families
Mansajang Kunda	645	70
Manneh Kunda	636	66
Basse town	597	65
Alohungari	994	104
Koba Kunda	40	5
Total	2,912	310

With the number of affected persons/families being three times the early figures and given the commitment of the Gambia Red Cross to the people in these five villages, it has been agreed with local government and other NGOs to reduce the quantity of food to be distributed as follows:

Commodity	Quantity per family/compound
Rice	50 kg.
Edible oil	6 litres
Sugar	5 kg
Smoked fish	½ box (approx 50 kg)

These supplies were procured between 8 and 11 September 2003 in the greater Banjul area; suppliers in Basse could not meet availability and quantity requirements.

During the assessment, families voiced their concern regarding the prevalence of malaria going high. Since bed nets also were destroyed during the squall, the Gambia Red Cross decided to include bed nets in the distribution, although not foreseen in the budget.

The Gambia Red Cross URD Branch prepared for the distribution by contacting village leaders and examining suitable distribution points. The Disaster Management Officer compiled distribution lists, supervised the procurement and explored available transportation alternatives. The distribution took place 16-19 September.

Finally 244 families/households (2,276 persons) received food aid in quantities indicated above plus a bed net. In addition 46 families/households (452 persons) in Chamoi village received food plus 108 bed nets. A total of 242 bed nets were also distributed to 30 households in Kabakama, Basseding and Dampha Kunda villages.

Objective 2: To assist 100 families with construction material

Progress/Achievements

The needs assessment carried out 4-6 September was used for identification of families most in need of construction material for the repair of their damaged houses. Funds spent on construction material:

Item	GMD	Equivalent CHF
Cement, 20 kg bag	41,250	1,689
Nails, 20 kg box	22,720	930
Corrugated sheets, packs of 20	140,625	5,757
Palm Rhums (construction wood), pieces	104,000	4,258

The material was procured in greater Banjul area, with the exception of construction wood that was found at a better price in Basse. Quantities per family were determined on estimated needs. On average, six bags of cement, one-half box of nails, three packs of corrugated iron sheets and 70 palm rhums for construction were given. Forty-three (43) households (672 persons) received this assistance.

Impact

The Gambia Red Cross early distribution of food, though small, was very much appreciated, being the only available assistance. As it turned out, the continued and expanded Red Cross response was one of the few ones by a humanitarian organisation directly targeting the squall affected population. As part of an evaluation in November 2003, the Gambia Red Cross with a representative of the Commissioner’s office visited a random sample of assisted families to follow-up on the project. Questions asked touched upon quality (excellent, fair, poor), quantity (sufficient, not sufficient), commodity used or sold, and the Gambia Red Cross teams’ performance. The answers were generally very positive. However, distribution quantities were often found insufficient (see table below). Regarding Gambia Red Cross’ way of delivering the assistance, this is a typical comment from the evaluation interviews: “The relief from Red Cross arrived at a time when we were desperate. We are very happy. We pray for them.”



“Palm Rhums” (construction wood) procured at Basse, the centre of the squall disaster, still heavily flooded in late September 2003.

Sampling of beneficiaries interviewed by the Evaluation team:

Village	Food recipients	Sufficient/Not sufficient (%)	Non-food recipients	Sufficient/Not sufficient (%)
Manneh Kunda	9	56/44	5	35/65
Mansajang Kunda	11	64/36	4	63/37
Basse	3	100/0	2	88/12
Alunhari	10	28/72	1	0/100

The evaluation team also interviewed the Branch Chairman, a representative of the Commissioner's office, workshop participants and the contractor engaged in rehabilitation of the Branch Office (see below).

The food assistance, however, alleviated the suffering during the "hungry season". The repair of houses was usually postponed until after the rainy season (early November).

Constraints

Mobility is a major problem for the Gambia Red Cross. The only four-wheel drive vehicles owned by the national society (a pickup and a Landcruiser) are not reliable; frequent maintenance and repair is costly and obstructs the planning of field trips. At branch level, the only motorbike is being used to shuttle volunteers. Communication is another weak point. The Basse office has an HF radio, but it is in poor condition. Mobile phones can operate but the network is not reliable.

The ongoing restructuring of the national society headquarters is affecting the speed as well as supervision continuity.

Federation coordination

The Federation's Technical Advisor with the Sahel sub-regional office in Dakar assisted the Gambia Red Cross with the launching of the two prior Information Bulletins and with coordinating the response. Meetings with WFP and NGOs at an early stage and with the National Disaster Relief and Resettlement Committee were encouraged and attended by the Technical Advisor.

National Society Capacity Building

A two-day workshop took place between the distributions of food and non-food items; it focused on needs assessments for volunteers participating in the emergency response. Code of Conduct, Disaster Response and Disaster Preparedness policies and some practical exercises were also part of the workshop programme. A representative of the Commissioner's office participating in the workshop said: "The success of any institution depends to a large extent on the training of its staff...The workshop came at a time when the situation was very real The most interesting was the practical part of it... More days would have been needed to thoroughly cover all topics."

To alleviate the problem of mobility for Gambia Red Cross, funds have been allocated to the repair of the four-wheel drive pickup used for monitoring trips and minor transport duties. The Branch Office in Basse has been able to carry out a minor repair of leaking roofing. Finally, the balance of funds was used to replenish the disaster preparedness stock used, albeit only with non-food items.

Communications – Advocacy and Public Information

Media coverage of the Red Cross intervention is subject to some critical reviewing in the national society. The initial distribution received fairly good coverage by Upper River Division radio and national television; the acting Gambia Red Cross Secretary General also gave an in-depth interview. The Disaster Response team is considering a more proactive approach in future to assure a greater interest from newspaper, radio and television.

Banners attached to the transport of relief goods across the country produced good visibility and a lot of support from people in towns and villages en route.

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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 for The Gambia, no. 01.34/2004](#).

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