

MINOR EMERGENCY



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

GEORGIA: FLOODS

9 May 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

MINOR EMERGENCY 05ME027

BULLETIN NO.2

CHF 50,000 HAS BEEN ALLOCATED FROM THE FEDERATION'S DISASTER RELIEF EMERGENCY FUND (DREF), UNEARMARKED FUNDS ARE REQUESTED TO REIMBURSE THE FUND

Summary

The Federation is expected to launch an emergency appeal before 15 May 2005 when sufficient information is collected. Based on already identified priorities, it is estimated that a total budget in the range of CHF 500,000 to support approximately 20,000 people for up to six months will be issued. This bulletin comprises a detailed report of the damage found in the affected area by the Federation's Field Assessment and Coordination Team (FACT).

All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct](#) and is committed to the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable. For support to or for further information concerning Federation programmes or operations in this or other countries, or for a full description of the national society profile, please access the Federation's website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

For further information specifically related to this operation please contact:

- Mr. Giorgi Gigiberia, Secretary General of the Georgian Red Cross; phone +995 32 961 534; Fax +995 32 953 304; email ggigiberia@redcross.ge
- Mr. Ashot Sargsyan, Federation representative in Georgia; phone +995 32 922 248; Fax +995 32 922 249; email ifrcge01@ifrc.org
- Mr. Roger Bracke, Federation FACT team leader; phone: +41 79 2020724 email: rbracke2@yahoo.fr
- Ms. Sylvie Chevalley, regional officer, Federation Secretariat, Geneva, phone + 41 22 730 4276 email sylvie.chevalley@ifrc.org

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

The Situation

A period of torrential rain and subsequent rapid melting of abnormally high levels of snow in the mountains in late April 2005 caused severe flooding and landslides in Georgia. Initial reports indicated that the Racha-Lechkhumi region (Oni, Ambrolauri, Tsageri), the Svaneti region (Mestia, Lentekhi) and the Imereti region (Khoni, Tskaltubo, including Kutaisi city) were most affected. Basic infrastructure (roads, electricity lines and communications) has reportedly been seriously damaged because of the rising water levels and resulting landslides. On 28 April 2005, the government appealed for international assistance.

Since most of the damage occurred in remote, mainly high mountainous villages with a poor communication infrastructure, information has remained scarce and fragmented. In fact, it lacked the cohesion to allow a clear analysis of the situation and an appropriate response to the disaster. Upon the arrival of the Federation's Field Assessment and Coordination Team (FACT) in Georgia, the exact number of the affected population and their needs was not known while the Government estimated only 20 per cent of the information was available. Furthermore, most of the information provided was limited to the damage of infrastructure and little was known about the effects on households.



Danger: massive debris flows, sparked by heavy rain, remain a threat.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

On 28 April 2005, the Federation launched a minor emergency alert to inform the international community on the disaster and the Red Cross plans. CHF 50,000 was allocated from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF). On 29 April 2005, a FACT was deployed to collect information, identify the immediate needs, recommend on Red Cross action and initiate an appropriate response to the disaster.

The Federation FACT team comprising seven members arrived in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, on 30 April 2005. A number of meetings were held with representatives of the authorities at central, regional and municipal levels to obtain official statistics on the damage and the needs. The FACT visited over 20 per cent of the families whose houses and/or

farmland were reported to be damaged by the floods.

The focus was on the Kvemo Kartli, Mestia-Samegrelo, Imereti, Racha-Lechkhumi and lower Svaneti regions, reportedly the most affected. Specifically:

- Gardabani in Kvemo Kartli, eastern Georgia.
- Mestia town and Tsvirmi, Ipari, Latali and Becho villages in Mestia-Samgrelo.
- Tskaltubo town and Zhoneti and Opurchkheta villages in Imereti.
- Tsageri, Lentekhi and Oni in Racha-Letchkhumi.

FACT members interviewed local health personnel and farmers too. The attention was directed towards assessing the damage to households (as opposed to infrastructure), overall health situation of the affected communities (morbidity/mortality trends, water and sanitation), food security and availability of safe potable water.

The Red Cross Society of Georgia, the Federation and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have worked in close coordination. Georgian Red Cross representatives were an active part of the Federation assessment efforts. The ICRC provided logistical support (vehicles, drivers, accommodation in Zugdidi and technical support). Their advice on security and administrative issues has been excellent and is very much appreciated. ICRC has offered their stock of 4,879 jerry cans, some 1,725 blankets, and 628 kitchen sets, for distribution by the Georgian Red Cross in the flooded areas.

Findings

The FACT findings indicate that Mestia is the worst affected of the visited areas. The main flood induced damage is the loss of agricultural land, crops, pasture land, fodder and sometimes, livestock, which will have a long-term impact on the food and economic security of the affected households. The most significant effect of the disaster is



Cut off: floods caused damage to infrastructure, including this bridge in Ipari village, Upper Svaneti.

the loss of the possibility to grow potatoes before the 31 May planting deadline (to enable harvest in time) either because fields are covered with stones and other debris or snow or because they are heavily saturated with water. In Svaneti, potatoes are the main cash crop that provides most of the income needed for the purchase of the wheat flour and other essential food and non-food commodities. This combined with the reported loss of livestock, will directly result in the insufficient provision of food at least until September 2006 and even beyond for those families whose agricultural plots have been destroyed, especially so in all 16 villages surrounding Mestia. For some families the damage is permanent, as they will not be able to remove the thick layers of debris from their farmland.

Not all farm lands, however, are covered with mud and debris and should be prioritised for rapid cultivation but shortage of seeds is a concern. Last year (July 2004) due to a severe hail-stone storm and flooding almost all the potato crops had been destroyed in five villages – Mestia, Mulakhi, Tsvirmi, Ipari and Ieli. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has responded with a purchase of 1,500 kg of potato seeds to distribute to each of the 1,500 targeted households. The seeds are expected to arrive the last week of May 2005, i.e., right before the planting deadline. It is important to plant before 31 May to enable the families to collect the harvest by mid September, at the latest, before the temperatures drop below zero and crops start freezing in the fields. The FAO seeds, however, will be sufficient to meet only part of the needs as the number of families requiring support is far more this year than in 2004. Some retargeting of the originally planned distributions will be necessary to ensure the seeds arrive at those locations where the soil is ready to receive them.

No specific health impact has been identified during the emergency. Morbidity and mortality rates have remained stable. Health sector infrastructure exists and staff is available in most places, but often essential medicines and medical supplies are lacking especially in mountainous villages. Due to limited access, the immunization service is affected and needs to be re-established.

Water and sanitation is identified by the population and the local authorities as *the* priority in most regions, particularly in Latali, Ipari, Mestia town, Lentekhi and Oni, where the water system was damaged because of either physical damage to pipe and capitation points or because filtration and purification processes are insufficient. In Oni, for instance, even the hospital does not have safe drinking water. Water contamination with the consequent risk of diarrhoeal disease outbreak is perceived a real threat calling for an immediate assistance in water purification and chlorination. A sustained campaign to promote hygiene and provide mothers with the knowledge to immediately respond to diarrhoeal cases (preparation of oral rehydration solution, ORS) in their families is also necessary. The feasibility of some modest structural rehabilitation that will have a rapid impact is being investigated too since immediate actions should be taken to improve the access to and the quality of the drinking water on a sustainable basis.

Most of the damage to the houses seen by the FACT was rather caused by the hail-stone storm and flooding in July 2004 and further aggravated by the 2005 floods and landslides. Most of the severely damaged houses are in geologically high risk areas. Floods and landslides in this region are recurrent. It needs to be stressed that some further severe rain is expected in June-July and that abnormally high levels of snow are still on the mountains. More severe mud and debris slides are hence still expected by the geologists of the Georgian Department of Geology. Lack of maintenance of the infrastructure and a weak follow-up to the recommendations provided by the geologists have aggravated the situation. All collapsed and most of the severely damaged houses should not be reconstructed. The cost of implementing conservatory measures to provide future protection to these locations is often unrealistically high in view of low numbers of families that live in these locations. For that reason, a suitable solution for relocation of the families, acceptable to all involved, should be found. A large number of families have indicated that they are afraid of staying in their homes. Indeed they often spend nights with their relatives and would prefer to move to safe places provided they remain in the same region or receive what they perceive is a sufficient level of compensation from the authorities. The issue is complex and highly sensitive but it is important that the dialogue between the government and the population to find a durable solution continues energetically. Advocacy towards the government should be combined with a sustained risk awareness campaign for the population. This is deemed to be important since most people, while acknowledge the threat, do not realise its speed and force.



Land of debris: the aftermath of the disaster has been devastating for many villages.

In view of the acutely continuing risk, confirmed by the Georgian geologists, preventive relocation of some of the population should be considered. A rapid strengthening of first aid capacities of the communities at risk is recommended too.

Findings per region/village

The level of damage seen by the FACT team varies per region and village:

Chvabiani (Mulakhi)

At the end of 1980s the Government declared the village a geologically at high risk, which means there is an increased risk to major floods and land and debris slides. This constant threat has already forced 23 families to move to safer areas.

The team did not find structural damage to the houses. Most families, the team talked to, however, had farm lands destroyed by landslides. Some livestock,

on average three to four animals per family, was killed too.

Most of the people the FACT team interviewed are unemployed. An average family size is 6.5 often sustaining themselves with the pension of their elderly relatives (28 GEL, equivalent of USD 14 per person per month).

A functioning water scheme is in place. No waterborne diseases have been reported so far. The village does not have a health post. The nearest one is 4 km away from the village. Parents have informed that the vaccination of their children has not been done over recent years.

In response to the 2004 floods, the village received food aid – flour, oil and sugar - from the government and few other organizations. This helped them to survive through winter. Some families have been supported by their relatives and neighbours who are better off. Others, however, depend solely on assistance from the government and/or NGOs.

Tsvirmi

The FACT team found that most of the damage to the houses in this village was caused by the hail-stone storm and landslide in 2004, for which no compensation has been obtained so far. The houses are located in a high risk zone. Some families are willing to move to safer places but the dialogue with the Government has not yet yielded any results. Remaining issues revolve around the areas for the resettlement and/or the level of the compensation proposed by the authorities.

According to the local governor, of 102 ha of the arable land 52 ha were destroyed by the latest disaster and cannot be used for planting. These families had been affected by the landslides in 2004 too. This year the land is less saturated and is in a better condition than in other villages visited by the FACT team. Planting, therefore, should be possible before the end of May deadline. A drinking water supply system is functioning.

The families whose pasturelands were affected have started slaughtering some of their livestock because they cannot feed them.

The village does not have a proper ambulatory (a public health post). There is, however, a doctor. Basic medication is in short supply. According to some parents necessary vaccination of their children was not done for the last two years.

Ipari

The FACT team saw many heavily damaged houses. Almost all damage, however, dates back to 2004. At least 50% of the arable land is covered by thick layers of mud and stones. The population pointed at the importance of continuing food distributions that have helped them to survive winter last year. The water supply system is damaged and needs urgent attention. Signs of landslides can be observed on all sides of the surrounding mountains. This visually confirms that the area is at a permanent high risk and that a solution for relocation should be found urgently.

Latali

The FACT team saw similar damage to the houses in Latali but none of a structural nature. There is severe damage to some agricultural land triggered by floods and debris slides. The major problem identified by the team and the population, however, is the collapse of part of the water supply system and the poor quality of whatever quantity is still provided.

Becho

In 1987 the village was classified by the Government as highly at risk and families should relocate immediately in view of a real threat of being wiped out in case of another landslide. The FACT team was appalled by the very visible threat and can only confirm the government's assessment. At least 20% of the farmland is covered by mud and debris. Farmers fear it will be impossible to plant potatoes before the end of May. This provides yet another argument to arrange for an immediate preventive relocation of the inhabitants of Becho.

Zhoneti and Opurchkheti villages in Tskaltubo

Some 35 houses were damaged in Zhoneti and Opurchkheti villages in Tskaltubo, of which three are permanently uninhabitable. Farmlands are covered with mud and debris. Villagers fear their plots have been damaged to the extent that it will no longer be possible to use them for planting. The water supply system is functioning well. No waterborne diseases have been reported. There is a central hospital, a TB clinic, a maternity house, two polyclinics and 13 ambulatories (local health posts) in the region with a total of 400 medical personnel, of which 137 are doctors. The health facilities were not affected by the floods. The stock of medicines and medical supplies, however, is limited.

Tsageri

According to the acting governor of Tsageri, a total of 270 houses have been affected by the floods. Rainfalls started on 18 April 2005. Three rivers, Tskenisiskali, Rioni and Lajanuri burst their banks. Two water reservoirs have been damaged. The debit of water during floods was 800 m³/sec. Five bridges on the main road and eight bridges in the villages were destroyed. In some places the water level in houses was more than one metre. The

government responded with the distribution of sleeping bags and tents. Other private companies provided the affected population with the second hand clothing.

The connections between the villages are cut. 15 of 32 villages, with a population of 700 households, are still inaccessible. In Lajama, 37 families were evacuated to schools and public buildings. The electricity supply system is disrupted. Shortage of food is a major concern. The authorities estimate their food stocks will be enough to sustain the local inhabitants for only two to three weeks. No damage was reported to the water supplies, which are mainly wells or spring water. Safe and clean water is available. No contamination has been reported.

The local authorities admitted that the lack of maintenance and negligence has aggravated the impact. The government has allocated funds for rehabilitation of roads and river banks to prevent similar disasters in future. A special commission was formed to coordinate assessment and rehabilitation works. The outstanding needs are food, medical items and non-food relief items as most of the life stocks were damaged by the flood.

The main income sources of the affected population is agriculture. In mountain villages the cultivation has not started yet. Main crops are bean, corn, potatoes, hazelnut and the next harvest is in October.

There has not been any disease outbreaks registered so far in the floods affected villages. Latrines were damaged in some of the affected houses. The health facilities in the region include a central hospital with the specialized medical equipment, one polyclinic and 16 ambulatories (local health posts) in all villages and have the capacity to receive 300 patients a day. Although there was no damage observed to the health facilities, the lack of access to some villages could cause delays in transportation of patients if there is a need. According to the chief doctor the FACT interviewed, there is enough qualified medical staff in the region who are available 24 hours every day. The stock of medicaments is rather limited and no additional supply or assistance was received in the aftermath of the disaster.

Lentekhi

The local governor reported that 75 houses and 100 ha of agricultural lands have been damaged. Of 800 houses in Lentekhi, 300 are at risk of further floods and landslides and should relocate. 40 villages with the population of 1,500- 2,000 people are out of reach. The authorities are planning to send helicopters to these villages as soon as the weather allows to assess the damage and the needs. There is still a thick layer of snow in the mountains that might trigger more floods shortly.

Approximately 6 km of one of the three water pipelines was destroyed. Another pipeline that goes through the bridge has been cut. The authorities stated that they will be repairing the pipe in two days as a temporary solution. People are currently using spring water and there are mineral water collection points too which they used for drinking. Some of these springs are in the city, others are in the mountain, accessible by truck or foot (2-3 km from the city). Water contamination has not been reported.

Oni

Loss of agricultural land, crops and food is the direct impact of the emergency, with a longer-term effect on economic security of the households projected.

The total population of Oni is 3,600 people, of which 45 per cent are pensioners. The main source of income is agriculture.

In the aftermath of the floods, the government provided food and non food relief items. WFP too is planning to distribute food items to some 690 families (both affected and non-affected) in Oni district.

The heavy rainfalls in Oni started on 23 April and continued for three days. As a result, the river level rose by about 2.5 meters. The main reservoir is severely damaged and the drinking water is muddy. The water catchment and the entire filtering system, most of the piping and sedimentation pools were destroyed too.

In 2000, the government started a project to build a water catchment and filtering system on the river Rioni. Due to the lack of funds the project has been on hold although some preliminary works have been conducted and initial procurement of pipes was made.

People are currently using spring water 2 km away from the village. The only water supply available now is the supplementary water reservoir in Oni, which in the past has been used to water the farm lands. The supplementary reservoir, however, has a limited capacity and can provide water to only half of the population. Furthermore, the reserves of water, according to the local governor will be sufficient only for two more weeks.

A total of 50 families were affected by the floods. 17 houses located in the surrounding villages of Oni are demolished and foundations of 20 houses in town are in water. Virtually all farm-lands of the affected families are covered with mud. 191 facilities are located in disaster prone area and some 70 families are still under high risk as there is still plenty of snow in mountains and more floods are expected.

Gardabani

Two villages in Gardabani region were affected. The floods were caused by a combination of several factors: torrential rains, subsequent rapid melting of snow in the mountains, and the opening of dams by the authorities in Tbilisi, which resulted in a rapid rising of the river Mtkvari by 20 metres. Water burst the river banks and flooded the adjacent villages. The local authorities and the population acted efficiently. People at risk were evacuated immediately. Indeed the authorities had installed a crises committee one month before the onset of the floods since they were alerted by the abnormally high level snow in the mountains this late in the year. Only a limited number of families suffered damages. No casualties have been reported. Loss of livestock has been minimal since the authorities organised a rapid evacuation. Six days after the villages were flooded, water receded. The situation in Gardabani region is no longer critical and its authorities and the population should be commended for their high level of preparedness.

Other actors involved

A Government working group has been formed under the leadership of the Prime Minister to coordinate disaster response. Almost all ministries are represented in it. The UN system is coordinating through an enlarged Disaster Management Team, which was established in 1996. The Federation and the ICRC are members of it together with other international organisations involved in disaster management.

WFP has been working in Georgia for a long time and has been focusing primarily on food for work programmes implemented by ACH and World Vision, which they intend to continue in the flooded regions this year too. They are also planning to distribute food commodities from their contingency stocks to 28,000 worst affected people to cover their daily food requirements for two months. A number of small NGOs and local political parties are also planning or have started food distribution.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has procured 150 tonnes of potato seeds (class A that can be re-produced in the following years), a variety that rapidly yielded to maturity, to distribute to 1,500 families in villages of the Mestia region, that was affected by a hail-stone storms and severe flooding in 2004 (Ipari, Tsvirmi, Mulakhi and Kala). In view of the recent floods, the FAO may want to consider the possibility of retargeting the distributions to ensure that the seeds are provided to the people whose farmlands can be used for cultivation. FAO has also informed that they might have an additional USD 20,000-25,000 available to procure more seeds. The procurement will have to be arranged locally to save time (as explained above, seeds should be planted before the end of May to enable the farmers to take harvest before cold weather; the international procurement is not an option as it takes a longer time). The Ministry of Agriculture confirmed that potato seeds of class B (one-season) are available for purchase in the country.

UNICEF has confirmed that they will cover immunization and distribution of medical kits to floods affected families.

The FACT team has been in close contact with all key actors involved. Information on findings has been shared regularly to coordinate work and avoid duplication of efforts.

Proposed action by the Federation/Georgian Red Cross:

- To advocate to the Government and the local population regarding the importance of revitalizing the dialogue to ensure the relocation of the population at risk to safe areas.
- Given that WFP has already part of the necessary food available in country and definitely has the expertise to take a lead in this sector, the Federation will not appeal for food, but will examine the possibility of the Georgian Red Cross to participate in the distribution of WFP and government donated food.
- In order to minimise food insecurity, the Federation proposes to locally purchase potato seeds and to distribute them for planting before the end of May in Mestia region in coordination with the FAO.
- It is recommended to immediately start the distribution of jerry cans, water purification tablets and hygiene parcels in Mestia, Ipari, Latali, Lentekhi and Oni. This has to be accompanied by a pragmatic and targeted health promotion campaign to prevent the spread of water borne diseases.
- A water and sanitation expert is at the time of writing assessing the possibility of improving the water provision through some modest structural interventions in these locations. A plan of action will be developed based on the outcomes of the assessment.
- In view of the risks of yet more landslides, first aid courses will be organized to strengthen the population's capacity to respond to accidents.
- The Red Cross will not get involved in the reconstruction/rehabilitation of houses to prevent people from staying in high risk areas.

The assessment continues as of today (9 May 2005) the FACT team left for Lagodekhi and Akhmet villages (Kakheti region) in eastern Georgia to investigate the impact of the floods on the households there. Findings will be reported shortly via subsequent updates.

The Federation will launch an emergency appeal before 15 May 2005 when sufficient information is collected. Based on already identified priorities, it is estimated that a total budget in the range of CHF 500,000 to support approximately 20,000 people for up to six months will be issued.