



CENTRAL AFRICA: FLOODS AND LANDSLIDES

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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 185 countries.

In Brief

This DREF Bulletin is being issued based on the situation described below reflecting the information available at this time. CHF 169,213 (USD 138,699 or EUR 105,265) was allocated from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) on 21 December 2006 to respond to the needs in this operation. This operation is expected to be implemented over 3 months, and will be completed by 20 March 2007. Unearmarked funds to repay DREF are encouraged.

This operation is aligned with the International Federation's Global Agenda, which sets out four broad goals to meet the Federation's mission to "improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity".

Global Agenda Goals:

- Reduce the numbers of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.
- Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.
- Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.
- Reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion and promote respect for diversity and human dignity.

Background and current situation

The Central Africa region has been experiencing an unprecedented flood situation. Since 25 November 2006, floods have hit most Central African countries, leaving several people homeless. The situation in specific countries is as described below.

Republic of Congo (RoC)

Brazzaville, the capital city of RoC, is situated at the bank of the River Congo. It experiences recurrent floods, often with an enormous impact, during the rainy season. Since late October 2006, the city has registered torrential rains that have caused flooding. Lives have been lost and houses as well as property have been damaged. In response to this floods situation, the Federation provided funds from DREF to enable the Congolese Red Cross to assist the affected population. For more information, please refer to DREF Bulletin no. [MDRCCG001](#).

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

DRC is the central African country most affected by the current floods. The country is at the mercy of the Congo River which crosses it from East to West. The flooding of the river presents a serious threat to the riparian populations¹, including 12,000,000 inhabitants of Kinshasa, the capital. The water level of the Congo River has been increasing on a daily basis. This is a threat that needs to be taken seriously because a combination of cholera – which is recurrent in the country – and floods would complicate the situation.

¹ Living by the banks of a river, a stream, or other body of water.

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In November and December 2006, floods rendered a significant number of families homeless and exposed them to potential epidemics and diseases. The situation is critical in Itsangi and Basoko territories, some neighbourhoods of Kisangani in Oriental Province and Bumba territory in Mongala District, Équateur Province. In Kisangani, six people are missing, after being washed away by the floods.

Based on the information collected from the River Commissioner, results of inter-agency evaluations and missions, the Tshopo District Commissioner, the Executive board of the Lowa Health Zone as well as an evaluation carried out by the volunteers of the Red Cross local committee, it is estimated that over 8,131 households (56,917 people) have been affected in 41 villages and 5 peripheral neighbourhoods of Kisangani. The same sources revealed that over 911 households (6,377 people) have been affected in 4 neighbourhoods of the Équateur Province. More localities are likely to be affected as the rains continue.

Torrential and violent rains have been falling in Mbuji-Mayi since November 2006. These rains have caused landslides in the Mikela neighbourhood, in Mishonnyi and Tshipuka (Dibindi Council). The landslides affected a total of 12 hectares of land and damaged 196 houses and household property. Approximately 757 households (5,300 people) were affected, including 371 men, 1,113 women and 3,816 children (of whom 2,756 are of school-going age and 1,060 are aged under five years). Most of the affected people are living with foster families.



These houses were destroyed by torrential rains in Mbuji-Mayi, in December 2006.

Crops have also been destroyed and roads have been rendered impassable, thus leading to an increase in food prices. Houses, latrines and graveyards have been destroyed, thereby increasing the risk of epidemic outbreaks, especially the risk of waterborne diseases. This situation has also caused a significant number of people to be displaced and exposed them to health, hygiene and sanitation threats. The situation is critical and there is an urgent need to provide assistance to communities living at high risk areas as well as to the floods-affected population. Such assistance would consist of food, non-food items (NFIs), chemicals and sanitation materials as well as shelter.

Gabon

Gabon experienced some floods with minor effects throughout 2006. However, taking into consideration that the Gabonese Red Cross Society is just recovering from a crisis it experienced over the past months, there is an urgent need to provide it with the means to build its disaster preparedness and response capacities.

Sao Tome & Principe (STP)

Although STP is not affected by the floods, forecasts indicate that they may occur at any moment. There is, thus, the need to build the disaster preparedness and response capacities of the Sao Tome & Principe Red Cross.

Central African Republic (CAR)

Some floods affected CAR in 2006, though in uninhabited areas. However, there is the fear that if the heavy rains continue in the region, serious floods may occur in the country. There is therefore the need to prepare the Central African Red Cross Society to intervene as the case may be.

Possible evolution of the situation

Forecasts indicate that heavier rains will soon fall along the Equator in DRC, Gabon, STP and the CAR. It is foreseen that these rains may be accompanied by violent winds and floods which may cause serious damages. Hence, there is an urgent need to take measures to prevent the effects of potential floods.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Since November 2006, the Federation's regional delegation in Dakar and the Central Africa sub-regional office (CASRO) have been working in close collaboration with concerned national societies. They issued an alert to the populations at risk and have also been following up the situation. Red Cross volunteers are currently mobilizing and sensitizing Red Cross local committees on the need to prepare communities and volunteers to respond effectively to potential floods disasters. All these preventive measures are intended to reduce the vulnerability of the populations.

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The Congolese Red Cross volunteers, together with community volunteers, have been carrying out sanitation and cleaning up activities. They have also been sensitizing the populations on the risks associated with poor hygiene practices and use of unsafe water, notably cholera and malaria. More volunteers are currently undergoing training on participatory hygiene and sanitation transformation (PHAST), water and sanitation (WatSan) and community-based first aid (CBFA).

Red Cross officers in the Oriental and Équateur provinces of **DRC** took part in an evaluation carried out by the inter-agency team in the affected territories, with the financial support of the Federation. 37 volunteers have been distributing 14 metric tones of food provided by the World Food Programme (WFP) to the affected population. They have also been sensitizing the populations in Itsangi on proper hygiene practices. A plan of action is being prepared to complement these activities.

Immediately after the announcement of the disaster in Mbuji-Mayi, the Kassai Oriental provincial committee of the Red Cross deployed a team of volunteers to assess the situation as well as to sensitize the populations on the necessity of leaving the affected localities and moving to safer grounds. The provincial committee also participated in the meeting that was organized by the crisis committee to coordinate and plan interventions. The provincial committee has been following up the situation in collaboration with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) office in Mbuji-Mayi, the Federation and the national headquarters of the Red Cross of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (RCDRC).

In addition to flooding, a cholera outbreak occurred in Bukavu and since the second week of December 2006. For more details on this epidemic and the Red Cross action, please refer to [Information Bulletin no. 1](#).

Needs

There is an urgent need to intensify sensitization on proper hygiene practices in the affected areas. Other needs include shelter, food, NFIs, water treatment in emergency situations, drugs and transportation means. There is also the need to provide agricultural implements and materials for treatment of water points and to facilitate sanitation and clean-up activities in the affected regions. Volunteers in the region also need to be retrained on WatSan and PHAST.

Coordination

The national societies have been working in close collaboration with the Federation and ICRC representatives in the countries concerned. They have also been sharing available information with other humanitarian actors within the region to ensure a smooth coordination of response initiatives.

In **DRC**, crisis committees have been set up and placed under the coordination of the mayors of Mbuji-Mayi and Kisangani. These committees are composed of specialized services of the government, notably the Division of Social Affairs, Office of Roadway Systems and Drainages (OVD)² and the Medical Inspectorate. The Red Cross of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and UN agencies – including World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nation’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) as well as the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC³) – are represented. Caritas is also an active member of the committees.

Plan of action

Objective 1: To reduce the effects of floods on vulnerable populations in the Oriental and Équateur provinces of the DRC and prevent the risks of epidemics within the next three months.

Planned activities:

- Distributing non-food items to 757 families affected by floods;
- Sensitizing the populations on hygiene and sanitation rules to prevent cholera;

²Office de Voiries et Drainages

³Mission des Nations Unies en République Démocratique du Congo

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- Conducting advocacy campaigns with other organizations and state services for longer-term actions and the need to construct facilities for drainage of surface water in high-risk zones;
- Conducting advocacy campaigns before authorities on the provision of a site for the social and economic reintegration of displaced people;
- Cleaning up market places (including stalls) and other public places such as schools and health centres;
- Rehabilitating and maintaining water sources, wells as well as private and public toilets;
- Setting up a community early warning system (EWS) in the 10 localities affected by floods;
- Training 100 Red Cross volunteers in the promotion of basic hygiene and sanitation practice in the 10 neighbourhoods/localities affected by floods.

Expected results

- Red Cross volunteers are well prepared for the surveillance of risks of floods and issuance of alerts;
- The flood-affected population in the Oriental and Équateur provinces of DRC have received adequate aid;
- The risks of epidemics are reduced.

Objective 2: Build the capacity of national societies of Gabon, Sao Tome & Principe and the Central African Republic so as to prepare them to respond to potential floods so as to reduce their effects on populations in high-risk zones.

Planned activities:

- Updating contingency plans and adapting to the regional coordination mechanism, taking into account the possible risks of floods (with the help of the RDRT resource persons available in each national society or deployed);
- Conducting sanitation activities in high-risk zones, including collection of refuse in public places, disinfection of houses, provision of sanitary facilities, rehabilitation of wells and water sources as well as cleaning of sewage systems;
- Training volunteers and community relays in WatSan, PHAST and CBFA;
- Sensitizing the population on proper hygiene practices to prevent cholera and other water-related illnesses;
- Equipping national societies with hygiene and sanitation tools;
- Conducting advocacy campaigns with other organizations and government services for longer-term actions and provision of annual grants to flood-prone communities for the maintenance of gutters and protection of dams;
- Setting up focal points for flood preparedness in high-risk areas;
- Establishing a network between the localities and the national society headquarters for the monitoring of activities;
- Distributing tools for regular surveillance of water levels in order to provide early alerts to the populations;
- Mobilizing and deploying RDRT members;
- Regional coordination and monitoring.

Expected results

- Concerned national societies have updated their contingency plans;
- The national societies are equipped to ensure fast and efficient response;
- Red Cross volunteers are well prepared for the surveillance of risks of floods and issuance of alerts;
- The Central African sub-region is equipped with hygiene and sanitation tools to respond to possible floods;
- The sub-region's communication system is reinforced to enhance good coordination;
- The risks of epidemics are reduced.

Implementation strategy

Activities in the Oriental and Équateur provinces of the DRC will be implemented with the help of all actors in the field. The provincial Red Cross committee proposes to undertake the distribution of NFIs and to conduct sensitization campaigns on the promotion of hygiene and sanitation for one month. Assistance will also be sought from other humanitarian actors to support other identified needs.

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Given the seriousness of the situation, two regional disaster response team (RDRT) resource persons will be deployed to help the Red Cross of the Democratic Republic of Congo and, at the same time, build their experience to respond in case of possible floods elsewhere.

Volunteers from the Gabon, STP and CAR Red Cross societies will involve other community volunteers and sensitize public authorities on general adherence to the preparation for, and response to floods. This will also help revitalize national societies and consult them in their position as auxiliaries to public authorities. Assistance will be sought from other humanitarian actors in the concerned countries for better coordination.

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