

# **MADAGASCAR: POST-FLOOD FOOD SECURITY AND CHOLERA PREVENTION**

*15 March 1999*

*appeal no. 13/98  
situation report no. 1 (Final)  
period covered: April - August 1998*

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*Responding to initial reports of damage and potentially serious health concerns caused by torrential rains, the Regional Health Delegate undertook a mission to the affected area to assess the situation. Based on this assessment, an Appeal was launched on behalf of the Malagasy Red Cross Society on 3 April, 1998. The immediate objectives of the operation to provide basic food and seed rice to plant were attained, in large measure due to the effective organisational capacity of local Red Cross volunteers.*

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## ***The context***

Torrential rains, associated with the cyclical El Nino weather phenomenon, ravaged many of the low lying coastal and river areas of the island of Madagascar in February of 1998. Significant damage was sustained by the country's physical infrastructure - roads and bridges were washed away in the most seriously effected parts of the country - the north-eastern and south-central coasts. Most importantly, the rice crop, due for harvest in March 1998, was seriously jeopardised in many areas. Ministry of Agriculture reports, for example, indicated that the northern district of Mahjanga had lost 70% of the harvest.

In the south, where coffee beans provide a second cash crop to farmers, the wet soil conditions which persisted long after the flood waters had receded, caused crops to rot before ripening.

Coincident with this year of record rainfall, the country also experienced it's most intense infestation of African migratory locust in 50 years between March and August. Huge swarms of the insects destroyed rice crops, principally in the central highlands, which had been relatively unaffected by the rains of several months earlier.

Following these heavy rains in the early spring, continued freak weather events were witnessed. For example, in the town of Vohipena a hail storm on May 29 and 30 pulverised young crops, while in the northern area of Mahjanga, no rainfall was witnessed between early April and late May, traditionally a time of good cultivation in that area.

To respond to the situation, on April 3, 1998, the International Federation launched an Emergency Appeal for CHF 258,000 of which 50,000 from DREF on behalf of the Malagasy Red Cross Society. CHF 141,248 of the appealed for funds were received, enabling the majority of the activities outlined in the Plan of Action to be implemented. 30,000 beneficiaries in three areas of the country were targeted. One group were urban poor in the capital city of Antananarivo, whose dwellings were located in swampy parts of the city which had been fully submerged in water during the acute period of the rains. The other two groups were farmers in villages around the town of Manakara in the south-east and the city of Mahjanga in the north.

### ***Objectives of the Operation:***

The operation sought to immediately provide the following:

- ◆ food staples to the worst effected residents of these areas to ward off hunger and it's repercussions (families had already been seen to be de-stocking at the time the Appeal was launched) until the harvest of the coffee and tobacco cash crops. Distribution of beans and rice occurred during the third and fourth weeks of April, 1998.
- ◆ In the first two weeks of June, farmers were provided with irrigated rice seed as well, so that the year's second harvest could be guaranteed, the floods having washed away seeds stocks, as well as rice for consumption.
- ◆ Lastly, the Appeal sought to train Red Cross volunteers in appropriate response mechanisms to a potential cholera outbreak, similar to that which was being experienced in the nearby islands of the Comoros simultaneously. A training seminar was conducted from 17-18 July '98 and brought together National Society (NS) volunteers and Ministry of Health personnel from around the country.

Following is a summary of the commodities distributed in the course of the response operation:

<b><i>REGION/Village</i></b>	<b><i>Beneficiaries Served</i></b>	<b><i>Rice (MT)</i></b>	<b><i>Beans (MT)</i></b>	<b><i>Food Ration/Person</i></b>	<b><i>Seeds (MT)</i></b>	<b><i>Tents</i></b>	<b><i>Health Education Material</i></b>	<b><i>Medical Supplies</i></b>
ANTANANARIVO	5,500	11	6	2 kg rice, 1 kg beans	--	0	0	0
MANAKARA	--	--	--	--	--	0	0	0
<i>Vohipena</i>	12,700	38	--	3 kg	15 *	0	0	0
MAHJANGA	--	--	--	--	--	0	0	0
<i>Ambato</i>	2,647	8	--	3 kg	7	0	0	0
<i>Boeni/Madirvol</i>								
<i>Maevetanana</i>	2,300	7	--	3 kg	6	0	0	0
<i>Marovay</i>	2,500	8	--	3 kg	5	0	0	0
<i>Manaratsandry</i>	5,163	15	--	3 kg	10	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL**</b>	<b>30,810</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>6</b>	--	<b>43</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Appeal	20,000	70	28	--	29	--	--	--

\* Seeds were distributed to a selection of 3,713 families; specifically those living along the banks of the river where other cash crops (such as coffee) are not grown, and who thus sustained the most significant losses. These comprised the four small villages of Vohipena proper, Iakatra, Aendemaka, and Voyendav. Each family received 4 kg of rice seed.

\*\*The appeal had originally targetted 20,000 beneficiaries (see explanation below); the price of beans having risen in the country, more rice was purchased instead (original 70 MT rice and 28 MT beans).

The following modifications were made to the original Plan of Action, some as a result of financial constraints, others based on a closer look at the situation on the ground:

- ◆ The price of beans in the country had risen by the time the procurement operation began. In addition, most of the beneficiaries served were found to have adequate dietary supplies of protein, thus the decision to supply (to all but the urban caseload) a larger quantity of rice seeds was made.
- ◆ The number of effected individuals had risen from the initial estimates, after the acute emergency period. In consultation with beneficiaries and local volunteers, the NS determined to reduce the ration size rather than to exclude certain inhabitants of villages.
- ◆ The timetable for seed distribution was advanced in order to insure that seeds were in farmers hands in good time for planting. Beneficiaries in Antananarivo capital city did not receive seeds. The reasoning provided by the NS was that while urban agriculture is evident on a large scale in and around the city, it is not carried out by small-holders, but larger private-sector corporate enterprises.

It should also be noted that the NS found it very challenging to conduct an urban distribution. The required cooperation with local civil authorities for security purposes, as well as the identification of facilities/open space proximate to beneficiary residences in which to conduct an orderly distribution was found difficult.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent action***

During the operation, the Regional Relief Delegate from the International Federation's Regional Delegation in Nairobi, supported the National Society in areas of procurement and logistics during two separate two-week missions: 15 April-1 May, 22 May-5 June. As well, the Regional health delegate provided technical expertise in conducting the cholera training seminar.

During the relief delegate's missions, a volunteer doctor from Headquarters in Antananarivo, who was familiar with the effected regions and local RC structures, acted as counterpart. In each of the three effected regions, NS local representatives and volunteers were active and dynamic in organising beneficiary identification and distribution modalities. In particular, the regional representative from Fianarantsoa, was active in ensuring success in the southern/Vohipeno operation.

### **Analysis of the Operation**

#### **Needs Assessment**

Initial reports of the damage and impact of the rains were received by the Federation's Regional delegation in Nairobi in early March, based on the compiled field reports of the National Society. Amidst concern over the possible outbreak of water-borne diseases, such as respiratory infections and cholera, the Regional Health delegate undertook a mission to the effected area to assess the situation.

Both assessments proved accurate in general terms. Rather than entire districts having been seriously impacted however, isolated towns and villages were damaged, making it somewhat easier to target assistance.

#### **Objectives/Plan of Action**

The Objectives were attained and appropriately defined (with the exception of the provision of medical supplies, tents and health education materials for those who remained displaced in Antananarivo, all of the goals have been achieved). The willingness of volunteers at the village and town-level to commit time and resources to carrying out the program was impressive and reflects the experience that many in the NS have had in combating the effects of natural disasters which frequently assault the coasts of the country.

## ***Outstanding needs***

At the current time there are no outstanding needs.

## ***Contributions***

See Annex 1 for details.

## ***Conclusion***

The primary strength in the operation was the organisational capacity of local volunteers. In one case, without prior notification due to the country's poor communication system, the branch secretary convened a meeting of twenty dynamic and motivated adult volunteers within 30 minutes. The persons then ranged across some 20 km's informing those in remote locations of the coming distribution.

Several of the villages near the city of Mahjanga in the north are accessible year-round only by small boat. The transfer of 40 MT of rice and seeds to these villages, using local means, was a significant logistical exercise that taught lessons to all those involved and was ultimately successful.

The operation suffered from a lack of continuity at the Headquarters level. The Federation delegate from Nairobi was not present consistently for the duration of the two-phase operation (food and seeds), but rather provided support in a punctual way throughout. The absence of permanent relief staff in the National Society resulted in certain matters not being followed-up.

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