

SUDAN: FLOODS

5 March 1998

appeal no. 24/97

situation report no. 1

period covered: November 1997 - January 1998

Red Sea State on Sudan's coast is normally susceptible to chronic drought -- in 1996/97 the Sudanese Red Crescent Society (SRCS)/Federation carried out a relief operation targeting 179,000 Beja nomads with food assistance. The area is also prone to heavy floods in the rainy season, as occurred last October, causing widespread damage to property.

The context

Heavy rains and floods in the Red Sea State coastal area between 20 October and 4 November 1997 caused eight deaths, destroyed hundreds of homes and displaced thousands of people. Many of the 700,000 inhabitants of Sudan's second largest town, Port Sudan, were threatened by epidemics of infectious diseases and malaria. Local authorities declared an emergency and called for national and international assistance for 100,000 people.

Latest events

More rain did not fall as feared and a large number of the affected population moved back to the shantytowns. However, as these were among the poorest people, the cost of rehabilitating their houses constituted a heavy burden, contributing to their continued vulnerability.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

An in-depth assessment of the situation was made between 30 November and 4 December by a team consisting of SRCS and Federation staff members, including a water/sanitation engineer from the Southern Africa Regional Delegation in Harare. The team found that although the combined action of Government and humanitarian agencies (notably Oxfam and SRCS) had contained the problem, further intervention would be required to maintain the relatively stable condition of flood victims.

In addition to a breakdown of the water and sanitation system, overcrowding due to lack of shelter contributed to the flare-up of a range of endemic diseases through faecal contamination of the environment and water. Later, breeding of houseflies aggravated the problem.

This favourable environment for vector propagation led to a huge increase in mosquito density -- by 226% in October and 505% in November -- in spite of Government efforts to control it through spraying. A survey organised by the team showed that malaria had become the number one health problem, accounting for 42% of illness recorded during the two weeks preceding the assessment. Other mosquito types had also increased, causing skin eruptions among the population.

Due to a lack of material and financial resources within SRCS, and a low response to the Appeal it was not until the middle of December 1997, when funds were received from the Royal Netherlands Embassy, that some of the needs could be met. Five health education sessions were conducted and home visits were carried out by SRCS volunteers, in addition to the distributions detailed below. Health education is ongoing.

- { Medicines, blankets (800) and tents were distributed to six health centres, including SRCS' two health centres in Diem Al-Arab and El-Ingaz, and to the most vulnerable families. These supplies were donated by the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Khartoum.
- { Health education and environmental health campaigns were conducted in the affected areas.
- { Four hundred tents and 1,490 blankets donated by the German Red Cross Society were distributed among the flood-affected.

Outstanding needs

Some of the needs listed in the appeal 24/97 are still unmet, and the following action needs to be continued: health education, provision of medicines and blankets, vector control/water testing and control, repairs to school latrines and communal water tanks, consideration of the rehabilitation phase.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

An Emergency Committee was formed by Red Sea State authorities with the participation of SRCS while the central government responded to the situation through the Higher Council of Civil Defence. Water pumps, medicine, air sprays, chemicals and other necessary relief materials were provided and channelled through this body. Government also undertook the repair of the main highway (Port Sudan-Khartoum), the railway and local port within 48 hours of the floods.

UNDP donated USD 10,000 to Oxfam's flood response programme and at the start of the emergency an assessment mission combining Government, UN agencies and NGOs was initiated.

WFP provided food assistance to 800 families (4,800 persons). Distribution was undertaken by SRCS.

Oxfam's preliminary assessment mission in late October found 16,025 families (80,000 persons) affected. The agency provided plastic sheets and blankets to the most vulnerable groups.

Contributions

The Royal Netherlands Embassy donated USD 25,000 for the procurement of blankets, medicines and personnel costs.

Conclusion

While the rains abated in early December the affected population is still in dire need as the disaster has added to their poverty. Most of the shelters that were destroyed by the floods were made of mud and other makeshift material, which was easily destroyed by the heavy rains. The need for shelter material and medicines remains but construction materials are difficult to obtain in the area.

In the case of similar situations in the future, the National Society would be able to react much more quickly and appropriately if it already had an emergency stock. National Societies are invited to to

review the disaster preparedness component of the Sudan programme (01.15/98), presented in the Federation's 1998 Emergency Appeal and to consider assisting in establishing such a disaster preparedness stock. For further information, please contact Atoussa K. Parsey, Desk Officer, tel: (44.22) 730.43.35, e-mail: parsey@ifrc.org.

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