

Central African Republic: Floods

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The Disaster

In October 1998, heavy and prolonged rains caused all the rivers in the Central African Republic (CAR) to rise. During the night of 24th to 25th October, the river in Bangui flooded the surrounding areas, destroying 2,700 houses and causing 6,000 people in the capital to abandon their homes. 10 towns throughout the country were affected, and a total of 9,200 persons were reported to have lost their homes, belongings, and food stocks. In addition to the serious health and sanitation concerns, wells providing potable water in the affected areas were polluted.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The Central African Red Cross Society (CARCS) joined the government in assessing the situation, and identified 7,912 persons in need of immediate assistance. The CARCS volunteers assisted many people to escape from the waters and settle in school buildings made available by the government. Red Cross volunteers also provided invaluable assistance in digging channels so that water would drain away from flooded areas. With a release of CHF 65,000 from the Federation's Disaster Relief Response Fund (DREF), the CARCS procured rice, generic medicines (chloroquine tablets, ampicillin tablets, paracetamol tablets, quinine tablets and mebendazole tablets), and chlorine powder. The distribution and related administrative costs were also covered with this allocation. Between 18 October 1998 and 31 January 1999, 10 MT of rice, 1,600 blankets, and 900 jerry cans were distributed by 100 CARCS volunteers to a total of 8,940 victims of the floods (4,000 women, 1,343 men, and 3,600 children). As the floods had rendered access to the affected areas very difficult, the distributions took place at the CARCS Headquarters. While the blankets were purchased outside the country, all other items were procured locally. The ICRC warehouse in Bangui was made available for the storage of all items. The CARCS also distributed items supplied by the Government, specifically 689 bed sheets, 356 mattresses, 83 blankets, and 2,095 kg's of rice.

Additionally, 100 kg's of chlorine powder (of which 25 kg's were donated by MSF) were used to chlorinate 2,980 pit wells during a one month operation involving 50 Red Cross volunteers in Bangui. This activity was combined with a campaign on environmental sanitation and health education to raise awareness of diarrhoea diseases.

A total of 100 CARCS volunteers, one relief coordinator, one wat/san technician, 2 drivers, and the financial administrator of CARCS were involved in this operation. A CARCS nurse also managed an emergency health post in the most affected area of Southwest Bangui.

The CARCS had originally intended to resettle the flood victims in safer areas of Bangui, but because no locations for settlement had been identified this plan was dropped. Consequently no construction materials were procured.

Outstanding needs

At the current time there are no outstanding needs.

Conclusion

With the delivery of assistance to flood victims having been effectively carried out, the operation is now concluded.

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