

OPERATIONS UPDATE



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

CENTRAL AMERICA : DROUGHT AND FOOD INSECURITY

21 December 2001

This Operations Update is intended for reporting on emergency appeals.

Appeal No. 31/01

Launched on 19 September 2001 for CHF 3,507,865 for 6 months.

Revised appeal issued 19 October 2001.

Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) Allocated: CHF 100,000

Beneficiaries: 59,136

Operations Update No. 1 Period covered: 20 October - 19 December 2001

"At a Glance"

Appeal coverage: 50.7%

Related Appeals: 01/26/01 - Central America

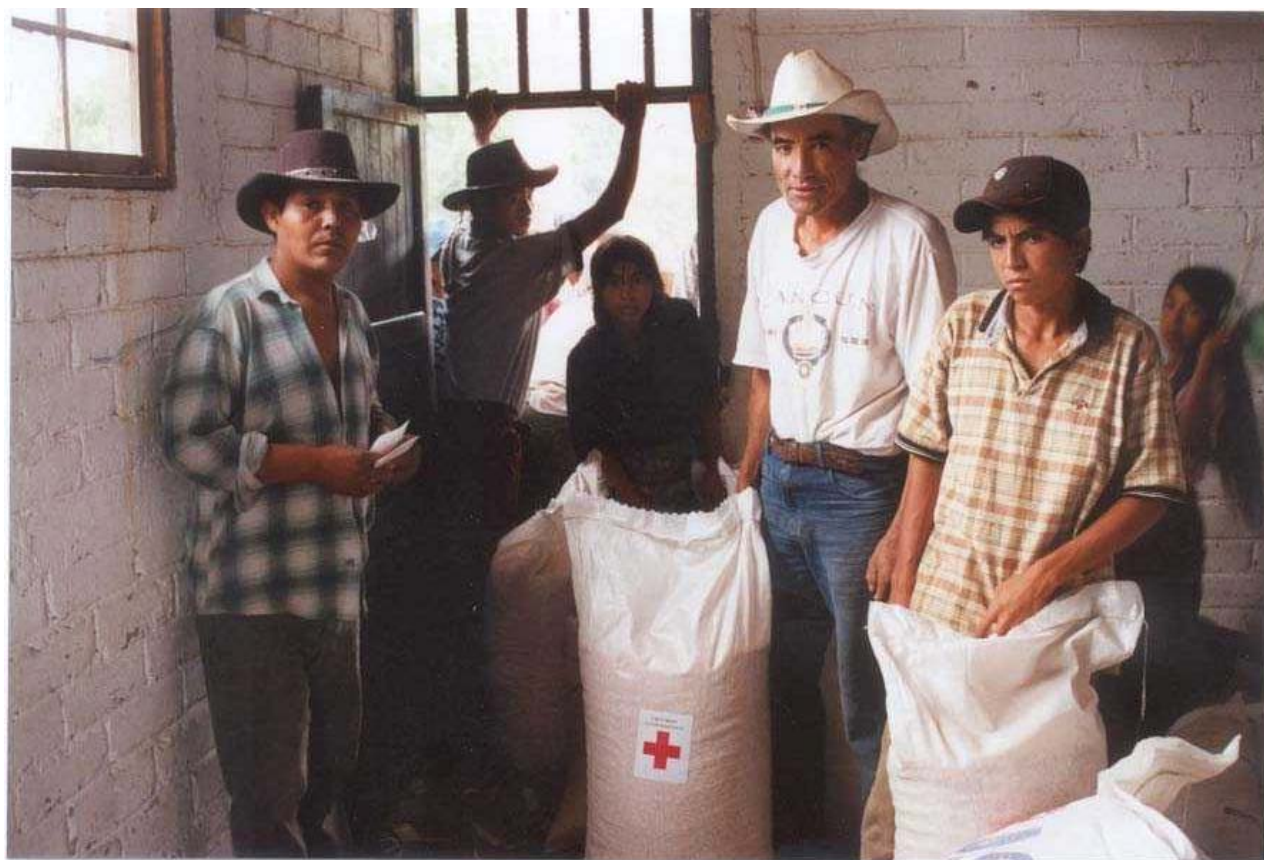
Outstanding needs: CHF 1,727,769

The Disaster/Situation: Thousands of Central Americans continue to suffer food insecurity; the dramatic drop in the price of coffee and its effects on employment and income in the region have worsened the plight of those affected. In Nicaragua and Honduras, the recent passage of hurricane Michelle brought further devastation to land and crops. The Salvadorean, Guatemalan, Honduran and Nicaraguan Red Cross Societies are working to distribute food rations to the most vulnerable subsistence farmers, together with fertiliser and seeds in the hope of improving the fruits of the second harvest due at the end of 2001 or in the new year. Further funding is required to fully achieve the objectives of this appeal to provide relief that integrate components of health, nutrition and disaster preparedness.

Operational Developments:

In El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, many rural areas are suffering from a third consecutive year of acute shortages of rainfall. Lack of rain since June this year has resulted in food deficits, as subsistence farmers' crops of beans and maize withered and died. The World Food Programme estimates that 1.5 million people are affected by drought, of whom 695,000 are facing critical food security problems. Drought is a regular occurrence in these countries, however, this year a series of exceptional aggravating factors has increased the severity of the problem. Those worst affected are subsistence farmers whose crops have been devastated by lack of rain and whose coping mechanisms have been exhausted. The situation was compounded in October and November, since hurricane Iris hit the northern departments of Peten and Izabal, particularly

affecting communities on the border between Belize and Guatemala, and the more recent passage of hurricane Michelle in late October/early November resulted in severe flooding on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua and in five provinces in Honduras. Further extensive damage to crops was sustained, especially in the departments of



Colón and Atlántida in Honduras.

In El Salvador, an average of 80 per cent of the maize crop was lost in four departments in the east of the country: San Miguel, Morazán, La Unión and Usulután; in addition, the earthquakes of January and February resulted in a reduction in the area planted. The government has initiated the "Plan Sembrador" to attend to the needs of 62 of the most severely affected municipalities; however, tens of thousands of people remain in urgent need of food.

In Guatemala, in early September, 41 people died of malnutrition in the municipalities of Jocotán and Comatán, department of Chiquimula, north east Guatemala, as a result of crop failure and poverty. In an on-going nutritional assessment conducted by UNICEF and the Ministry of Health in Jocotán, 865 children were identified as moderately malnourished and 258 as severely malnourished.

In Honduras, the government declared a state of emergency in the south, centre and west on 23 July, with southern Honduras having suffered a 100 per cent grain loss. Although the planting for the second harvest has been completed, the effects of the drought during the first planting season are expected to be long-lasting. In Nicaragua, drought is particularly affecting the north and north west regions, where farmers lost virtually all their maize crop.

A cold front in Guatemala, together with high winds, continue to affect the mountainous areas of El Progreso, Jalapa, Chiquimula, Zacapa and Jutiapa. The WFP states that serious losses of maize and bean crops are being incurred and a substantial increase in prices is evident as food is imported from other regions. The WFP, UNICEF, the FAO and government officials began a joint evaluation of the results of the second harvest on 12 November last. Observations from this study show high food deficits in Chiquimula, El Progreso, Baja Verapaz and Jalapa with agricultural production at less than 50% of normal levels. Over 25,000 families are seriously affected and the outlook for next year is bleak. For this reason, a second distribution followed by actions with a

longer-term impact (distribution of seeds, training in detection of malnutrition and improved farming techniques) are essential.

In Honduras, the WFP, in conjunction with USAID, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, is evaluating the effects of the drought on poor households. It is estimated that in El Salvador, the results of the November harvest will not cover the significant losses of staple crops; furthermore, although the picking season has started, coffee plantations are not taking on workers and many people who were affected by the two earthquakes in January and February are now in the grip of general unemployment. WFP assessment teams in Nicaragua found that most families planted less for the second harvest, as a result of lack of seed. In addition, many families were provided with sorghum to plant instead of

beans which is the main income-generating staple food.



Red Cross Red Crescent action w

Red Cross Societies w The Guatemalan, Honduran and Nicaraguan Red Cross Societies, and in particular, the disaster response departments, have been engaged not only in the Red Cross operation to assist the victims of the drought. In addition, given the passage of hurricanes Iris and Michelle, National Society staff and volunteers have been fully involved in

in implementation of contingency plans, search and rescue operations, needs assessments, drawing up of plans of action and the provision of aid to the most vulnerable affected by flooding. Please see information bulletin no. 1 dated 12 November 2001 regarding flooding in Costa Rica, Honduras and Nicaragua which provides details of the emergency operation which is currently in progress.

PHASE 1

Relief Distributions w

Objective 1: To mitigate the impact of food insecurity in the region caused by the lack of rain and other factors.

El Salvador: To distribute food rations to 1,000 families for three months in the departments of Morazán, la Unión, San Miguel and San Vicente.

Honduras: To distribute food rations to 2,500 beneficiary families for three months in the worst affected departments of Choluteca, Valle and El Paraíso.

Guatemala: To distribute food rations to 2,856 beneficiary families for three months in the worst affected departments of Jalapa, Baja Verapaz and Chiquimula.

Nicaragua: To distribute food rations to 2,000 families in the municipality of Tipitapa, Coloma, severely hit by the drought.

In September, the Guatemalan Red Cross (GRC), with the support of the American Red Cross, and resources provided by the Ministry of Agriculture and the GRC, distributed food rations to 896 families in the department of Chiquimula. This was followed in December by a further distribution to 777 families using the food donated by WFP (fewer families than in the first distribution because food was distributed solely to those families that had been active in related projects following the food for work policy of the WFP/the government).

On 10 and 11 November, distributions took place in Rabinal, Baja Verapaz, and 1,322 families from six communities received food rations of maize, beans and oil. This was slightly more families than originally foreseen in the survey, however the difference was covered using a surplus received in maize and by slightly reducing the ration of beans. A few families who did not receive oil will receive a double ration during the second distribution. As a result of poor accessibility to the area, trucks were obliged to stop some 20 kilometres outside Rabinal and it was necessary to off-load the relief goods on to smaller vehicles. Local authorities provided warehousing facilities in buildings such as schools, and the beneficiary communities were involved in the division of rations. Further distributions took place in Jalapa in late November to 391 families in 6 communities, and on 20 December, an additional 160 families in Piedras Negras and La Ceiba were reached.

Certain problems were encountered in relation to the provision of food under the terms of the agreement reached by the Guatemalan Red Cross, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Social Investment Fund; however, these difficulties have since been resolved. Following meetings with WFP, it is expected that the next series of distributions in the three affected areas supported by the Guatemalan Red Cross, will take place in January 2002. This decision was taken because affected communities are expected to harvest a small crop in December. However, the WFP predicts an increasingly difficult situation in the new year.

The Honduran Red Cross carried out relief distributions in September in the departments of Valle, Choluteca and El Paraíso for the benefit of 11,832 people (1,972 families). Between October and mid December, a further nine food distributions have taken place. With the support of the Spanish Red Cross, 914 families in El Paraíso received 16.36 g of maize; 2.72 g of beans; 0.9 g of butter; 0.9 g of sugar and 0.22 g of salt. To date, the Honduran Red Cross, together with the German Red Cross has distributed food rations to a total of 2,000 families made up of 14.63 g of maize; 2.27 g of beans; 1.8 g of butter; 2.27 g of sugar and 0.45 g of salt, in the departments of Valle and Choluteca. A further distribution of 10.72 metric tonnes (MT) of food by the Honduran Red Cross/German Red Cross is planned to take place between 26 and 28 December for 500 beneficiary families in Santa Bárbara. In addition, the Honduran Red Cross, with the support of the Swiss Red Cross, has distributed 17.16 MT of food rations to 400 families in Choluteca.

The Salvadorean Red Cross Society with the support of the American Red Cross and WFP carried out a distribution consisting of 6.48 MT of food for 1,100 families during the last week of October.

The Nicaraguan Red Cross carried out a distribution of rice, beans, maize, sugar, salt and oil, together with a hygiene kit, in October to 870 vulnerable families from 11 communities in Tipitapa, Colón.

Health

Objective 1: To contribute towards improving the health status of families affected by food insecurity.

In early November, the Guatemalan Red Cross provided communities in Chiquimula and Baja Verapaz with training in nutrition. Between 28 November and 4 December, further training was provided by GRC staff and volunteers in Chiquimula. This proved particularly important since the food provided differs slightly from the local produce to which the population is accustomed.

Training in nutrition also took place in Rabinal between 8 and 10 December and in Jalapa between 15 and 20 December. This was accompanied by the provision of vital health information particularly regarding hygiene, water and nutrition and these key messages were reinforced by the distribution of educational pamphlets and posters. The materials, which have been printed in Spanish, will also be translated and printed in the relevant indigenous languages; however, they rely primarily upon pictures rather than words, given the high proportion of the population that is not able to read.

Plans for January and February 2002 include working together with the Ministry of Health in order to train communities in how to detect malnutrition and to continue with training in basic health messages in Chiquimula.

The Honduran Red Cross has carried out training for volunteers from the branches involved in the drought operation in conjunction with UNICEF. This training focused on the weight/height ratio in order to assist in the detection of cases of malnutrition. In addition, two nutritional surveys were conducted in coordination with

UNICEF. The first report issued in July concludes that there was severe malnutrition of less than 5% ; therefore, at the time, there was no emergency, but indications are that the situation has deteriorated. Preliminary data released in the second report suggests a slight increase in cases of severe malnutrition. It is expected that the full report will be available shortly.

Disaster Preparedness

Objective 1: To strengthen the capacity of Red Cross branches in the region and to increase beneficiary participation.

In areas where relief distributions and other activities have been implemented, branches have participated and Red Cross volunteers have been active. As the operation develops specific capacity building activities will take place.

PHASE 2

Relief Distributions

Objective 1: To support agricultural recovery among subsistence farmers.

In September, the Guatemalan Red Cross with the support of the American Red Cross and with resources provided by the Ministry of Agriculture and the GRC, carried out distributions of seeds and fertiliser, together with some food rations, to 896 families in the department of Chiquimula.

The centre for investigation of tropical agriculture (CIAT) has provided advice to the Honduran Red Cross, the participating National Societies (PNS) and the Federation in order to assist in decision-making relating to the agricultural component of the operation. Such advice, based on research, is particularly with regard to climate, soil conditions and type of seeds in order to ensure that the activities undertaken have a positive impact.

As of late October, through the Honduran Red Cross, with the support of the Spanish Red Cross and the American Red Cross, 1,514 families received agricultural support through the distribution of 20.74 MT of seeds for beans, 6.81 MT of maize seeds and 137.62 MT of fertilizer in the departments of Choluteca and El Paraíso. 464 farmers in El Paraíso benefited from the immediate purchase of seed which was made possible through the release of Federation DREF funds at the outset of the operation. These same farmers were assisted through the provision of fertiliser, contributed by the Spanish Red Cross.

At the same time, in order to promote agricultural recovery, technical assistance and follow-up was provided by Red Cross volunteers, with the support of local community development organizations. Maize seed was distributed principally in Pespire, whilst seed for beans was distributed in Danlí, Yuscarán, El Paraíso, San Matías and Lauca.

Through funding provided by the American Red Cross, an agronomist who was engaged in October 2001, will continue to work with the Honduran Red Cross until the end of January. Reports from the agronomist indicate that recent levels of rainfall should result in satisfactory levels of crops for the second harvest. Nevertheless, crops will be insufficient for auto-consumption for farming populations, and will be inadequate to last until August of next year.

In El Salvador, the American Red Cross provided 0.48 MT of fertiliser for a total of 1,055 families in the department of Morazán; these beneficiaries were targeted by the WFP for the provision of food.

The project component for agricultural recovery in El Salvador aims to assist 200 families (approximately 1,200 people) in Morazán who have been most affected by the drought. Beneficiary families selected will be owners of small plots of land and for whom agricultural produce is the sole source of income. Two agronomists and an agricultural engineer will work with 150 farming families to improve soil conservation and to promote sustainable agriculture. At the same time, assistance will be provided to 50 families who are willing to diversify their crops and to plant fruit and/or vegetables on part of their land. Furthermore, guidance will be provided as to storage of grain and crops once harvested, and as regards capacity-building and income-generation. To date,

an agronomist has been contracted to develop an operational work plan and will commence work in Morazán on 27 December.

The American Red Cross is supporting the Nicaraguan Red Cross operation through the targeting of 500 families for community education in family gardening in Managua, Masaya and Ocotlán. Training is also underway for 50 Nicaraguan Red Cross volunteers in sustainable agricultural techniques; for example, the use of organic insecticides, crop irrigation and crop diversification.

Objective 2: To improve the capacity of affected families to meet their basic needs.

The Honduran Red Cross prefers, rather than to provide a cash contribution to affected families, to use the contribution for community micro projects. Training in identification and selection of projects is envisaged.

Contributions have yet to be made in Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua as a result of funding constraints.

The Netherlands Red Cross is supporting the Honduran Red Cross drought operation in the department of El Paraíso in which the PNS has been working since 1999. Seven communities have been provided with 170 metal grain silos for storage purposes. Assistance is also being provided to construct two irrigation systems and two community kits with tools and equipment were made available to 210 farming families. The Swiss Red Cross has planted 2,400 fruit trees in communities in Choluteca.

National Society Capacity Building

The drought and food insecurity operation in Central America has introduced new ways of working, integrating PNS activities more closely into an overall coordinated response. In addition, it seeks to go beyond distribution of relief items and aims to assist vulnerable subsistence farmers to build capacity in agricultural techniques and crop diversification; the operation also seeks to build components of health and disaster preparedness into relief response.

Federation Delegation

The Federation has delegations in each of the countries working on the response to the drought. The delegations in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala have disaster response/preparedness delegates and the regional delegation for Central America has a disaster preparedness delegate who is responsible for overall coordination of the operation. In the new year, it is intended to recruit a coordinator with regional expertise who will work closely with the regional disaster preparedness delegate to ensure maximum impact of the operation.

Coordination

Close cooperation is ensured between the regional delegation for Central America, through the regional disaster preparedness delegate, and the delegations in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua; at the outset of the operation, planning sessions took place to ensure common strategies and with a view to maximizing resources in the region. In order to reinforce coordination and to enable the National Societies to build on lessons learned from the operation, it is planned to recruit a programme coordinator in early 2002. Response by the PNS working in the region to the drought situation has been coordinated closely at country level in order to avoid duplication and to maximize potential assistance to the most vulnerable. Furthermore, cooperation has been maintained with the Ministries of Agriculture, WFP, NGOs and agencies working to alleviate the drought situation.

In Guatemala, a joint agreement between the National Society, the American Red Cross, the Spanish Red Cross and the Federation has been drawn up. Furthermore, an agreement with the WFP, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Social Investment Fund was signed in mid October.

The Honduran Red Cross took the initiative of coordinating an inter-agency meeting with all organizations working to alleviate the suffering of those affected by the drought. This took place on 16 October and facilitated an exchange of experience between the Pan American Health Organization (OPS), CARE, UNICEF, Acciones Futuras, Save the Children, Visión Mundial, Catholic Relief Service, the Christian Development Commission and Doctors without Borders. The aim was also to look to maximizing potential, resources and capacities

amongst those agencies working to alleviate the effects of the drought. This has also given rise to fruitful relations with other agencies, resulting in a joint initiative in nutritional evaluation which is taking place with organizations which include UNICEF, CRS, the WFP and the Ministry of Health.

Outstanding needs

Further funding is required in order to achieve fully the objectives outlined in the appeal and to ensure the implementation of each of its components which are considered vital to assist recovery and boost preparedness in the communities affected.

For further details please contact: Olaug Bergseth, Phone : 41 22 730 45 35; Fax: 41 22 733 03 95; email: bergseth@ifrc.org.

All International Federation Operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

This operation seeks to administer to the immediate requirements of the victims of this disaster. Subsequent operations to promote sustainable development or longer-term capacity building will require additional support, and these programmes are outlined on the Federation's website.

For further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>.

Peter Rees-Gildea
Head a.i.
Relationship Management Department

Santiago Gil
Head
Americas Department

Central America - drought and food insecurity						ANNEX 1
APPEAL No. 31/2001		PLEDGES RECEIVED			21.12.2001	
DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE	COMMENT
CASH						
REQUESTED IN APPEAL CHF				3 507 865		TOTAL COVERAGE 50.7%
AMERICAN -RC		25 000	USD	41 250	23.11.2001	DIRECT SUPPORT TO NICARAGUA RC
AMERICAN -RC		21 750	USD	35 888	23.11.2001	DIRECT SUPPORT TO SALVADOR RC
AMERICAN -RC		25 000	USD	41 250	23.11.2001	DIRECT SUPPORT TO HONDURAS RC
FINNISH -RC		33 638	EUR	49 734	01.10.2001	
GERMAN -GOVT		150 000	DEM	111 000	22.11.2001	DIRECT SUPPORT TO HONDURAS RC
IRELANDI -RC		200 000	ISK	3 310	19.09.2001	
JAPANESE -RC				115 760	18.12.2001	
MONACO -RC		80 000	FRF	18 032	20.09.2001	
NETHERLANDS -RC		6 400	USD	10 675	26.11.2001	DIRECT SUPPORT TO HONDURAS RC
NORWEGIAN -GOVT&C		1 700 000	NOK	313 650	13.12.2001	
SPANISH -RC		80 000 000	ESP	708 240	28.11.2001	DIRECT TRANSFER TO NICARAGUA, HONDURAS, GUATEMALA, EL SALVADOR RC
SWEDISH -GOVT&C		800 000	SEK	120 400	24.09.2001	
SWISS -GOVT				80 410	04.12.2001	DIRECT SUPPORT TO HONDURAS RC
PRIVATES		50	USD	81	06.11.2001	
WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME		78 730	USD	130 416	11.12.2001	DIRECT SUPPORT TO GUATEMALA RC
SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED IN CASH				1 780 096	CHF	50.7%