

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

23 May 2002

This Ops 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. 2 Period covered: 22 December 2001 - 10 May 2002

“At a Glance”

Appeal coverage: 60 %

*Related Appeals: 01.26/2001 Central America (appeal 2001);
01.19/2002 Central America (appeal 2002)*

Outstanding needs: CHF 1,403,252

The Disaster/Situation: Drought conditions prevail in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. It is anticipated that the rainy season, which usually begins in May, will be further delayed by the El Niño phenomenon. During the reporting period, relief distributions and capacity building continued in affected communities in all four countries. In El Salvador, planting of fruit trees is taking place with a view to diversifying agriculture; in Guatemala, an early warning system is being set up to detect child malnutrition; in Honduras, a nutritional survey was carried out in severely affected communities and in Nicaragua, discussions are taking place regarding an operation in the north of the country. The operation has been extended by five months until 19 August 2002 in order to continue activities to achieve the current objectives. However, the Salvadorean and Guatemalan Red Cross Societies will continue working to assist some 832 subsistence farmers in post harvest activities and marketing of products until the end of the year. These ongoing activities will be reported on in the regional programme updates for Central America. Extensive cooperation with UN agencies and NGOs has reinforced the impact of the drought and food insecurity operation and enabled implementation of activities under the appeal with reduced Federation funding.

Operational Developments:

Limited agricultural recovery and food insecurity continue to impact severely all countries affected by drought in Central America. The rainy season (May to October) has been delayed and rainfall has been scarce or totally absent in those departments which have been suffering from drought during the last twelve months. Dozens of rural communities in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua still depend on food distributions from the World Food Programme (WFP), national Red Cross



Distribution of 200 tool kits to subsistence farmers in Morazán Department, El Salvador.

societies/Federation/PNS and governmental and non governmental agencies, particularly since the first crop is not expected until July 2002.

A mid term strategy in response to the drought, developed from September 2001 by various institutions and organizations, was conducted with some success in agricultural recovery, particularly where irrigation micro-projects and reservoirs were established to maximize existing water resources. There are two harvests: one in July and one in October/November. However, the last corn and bean crop yield of 2001 was poor since many affected agricultural communities depend exclusively on rainfall, which normally occurs as of May.

Agencies working in the field have sought to take advantage of the dry season between October and May, during which relief and food distributions took place, in order to implement community capacity building projects and agricultural training workshops. The aim was to reinforce the capacity of farmers during seasons in which there is a shortage of rainfall and to facilitate improved post-harvest management.

During the Regional Climate Forum 2002 which was held in Managua, Nicaragua, on 22 and 23 April, experts and representatives of meteorological services in Central America and Mexico announced the possibility of a lack of rainfall between June and July, which is a critical period during the growth of maize crops. The *El Niño* phenomenon is expected to hit the region between May and October. Therefore, many farmers have not prepared the land for sowing, as they prefer to monitor the evolution of the rainy season and try to ensure at least one crop as of August 2002.

In *El Salvador*, the government's "Plan Sembrador" (distribution of seeds and fertilisers) is ongoing, however the authorities have recommended that farmers delay the sowing season in order to verify that newly sown crops do

not die during the anticipated extended drought, but that the seeds are able to grow fully, as a result of planting once the delayed rains begin to fall.

In *Guatemala*, hundreds of wells in departments in the south east of the country are already dry and the population is surviving with water delivered by tanker trucks. The departments of Chiquimula and Jalapa have not benefited from rainfall since the beginning of the rainy season, while several communities in the neighbouring department of Zacapa have begun to suffer from an acute lack of drinking water.

In *Honduras*, on 3 May, the Secretary of Agriculture and Livestock (SAG) introduced a national plan to mitigate the impact of drought in 70 municipalities, in coordination with all national and international organizations involved in agricultural, health and water and sanitation programmes. A serious shortage of water has already affected 145 municipalities, especially in the south and west of the country, resulting in potential risks of disease for the population and an increase in pests. The government and international agencies have started the design of contingency plans for *El Niño* which will include the construction of irrigation systems, better quality seeds and the digging of wells.

In *Nicaragua*, the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Forest (Mag-For), in cooperation with the National University of Agriculture (UNA), started a mid-term plan with eight different projects to reduce the effects of drought and the eventual *El Niño* phenomenon, in order to face food insecurity and to ensure better water resources and sowing systems. Meanwhile, the national disaster prevention and management system and community brigades are on alert in the north of the country, particularly in the departments of Chinandega, Madriz and Nueva Segovia which are affected by drought and are currently exposed to the risk of outbreaks of fire.

Red Cross Red Crescent action

The Guatemalan, Honduran, Nicaraguan and Salvadorean Red Cross Societies are facing a crucial period in the implementation of current programmes since rainfall should begin in the coming weeks. This will enable them to evaluate the results of seven months of work with the beneficiary communities, especially in relation to agricultural recovery techniques and community capacity building. The uncertain rainfall predictions for June and July in the middle of the growing season, represent a challenge to reinforce the capacity of subsistence farmers in a situation where there are water shortages.

The Honduran Red Cross plans to implement intervention until July in order to assist the most vulnerable families during the first harvest period, monitoring the results of agricultural recovery. After a first relief phase, covering the beneficiary families planned from October 2001 to May 2002, the Guatemalan and the Salvadorean Red Cross Societies will continue working until the end of the year 2002 - covering both periods of harvest, focused on a lesser number of beneficiary families: 632 subsistence farmers in Guatemala, 200 in El Salvador.

The Nicaraguan Red Cross has focused activities in affected communities close to Managua. A small-scale intervention in the north of the country, severely affected by drought, is under discussion, and implementation will depend on funding possibilities from the Federation and PNS.

The Panamanian Red Cross is monitoring the situation in some areas affected by shortage of rainfall in Panama, especially the Peninsula de Azuero, in order to assess needs as a result of lack of rains.

The decision of the different National Societies involved in the operation to work in the framework of short-term or mid-term operations was taken in relation to branch capacities, existing contingency plans in case of the occurrence of potential disasters such as *El Niño*, and the coming hurricane season.

PHASE 1

Relief Distributions

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.

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

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

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

In January 2002, the **Salvadorean Red Cross Society** (SRC) with the support of the American Red Cross, provided 1,100 families with 6,5 MT of food in the department of Morazan. An agreement was reached with WFP, whereby the SRC provided fertilisers during the month of October 2001 for the November harvest, with food distributions taking place during the months of October 2001 and January 2002 which mitigated the effects of the poor harvest.

From January to March 2002, the **Guatemalan Red Cross** (GRC), together with the Spanish Red Cross, the American Red Cross and the Federation, provided 2,965 families with 218,5 MT of maize, 21,5 MT of peas and 3,770 litres of oil in 21 communities in the departments of Jalapa, Chiquimula and Baja Verapaz. As of October 2001, three food distributions have taken place in Jalapa and two have been carried out in Chiquimula and Baja Verapaz. The National Society is reassessing the resources to continue the programme, since the WFP has asked the GRC to continue to provide logistical support to assist the most affected families in the above-mentioned departments over the next six months.

In the last days of December 2001, the **Honduran Red Cross** (HRC), together with the German Red Cross, distributed 10.71 MT of food (including maize, beans, oil, sugar and salt) to 500 families in Santa Barbara. The HRC assisted 3,814 families in the departments of Choluteca, Valle, El Paraiso together with Santa Barbara, (although it was not originally planned to carry out further distributions in Santa Barbara) with the support of the German Red Cross, the Spanish Red Cross and the Swiss Red Cross.

Health

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

Since January 2002, the **Guatemalan Red Cross** has continued working with the communities included in the health programme in Chiquimula, Baja Verapaz and Jalapa departments, reinforcing key health messages regarding mother and child care, nutrition, hygiene, water and the environment. Distribution of 4,000 educational pamphlets and 1,000 calendars, printed in Spanish and Chorti, Kaqchikal and Achi (indigenous languages) which include this information, is planned for the coming weeks. Action against Hunger (AAH), the Spanish branch, supported the GRC in a training of trainers workshop for 33 Guatemalan Red Cross volunteers from four different branches, who have trained 179 health promoters and 45 midwives in issues such as early warning for malnutrition in children under 5 years old including MUAC (middle upper arm circumference) measurements in 21 communities. Following the workshops, 42 weighing scales, 170 tape measures and 200 *shakir* tape measures were distributed to health centres located in the area where the project is under implementation in coordination with the local authorities.

The **Honduran Red Cross** introduced the results of a nutritional survey conducted in coordination with UNICEF in 22 communities of Choluteca (7) and El Paraiso (15) departments, which shows a decrease of malnutrition in children of less than two years of age, but an increase of malnutrition in children of 2 years of age or more, concluding that the average rate of severe child malnutrition stands at around 6% in these communities. Depending

on available funding, the **Honduran Red Cross** plans to continue working with the most affected communities in Choluteca and El Paraiso with training focused on the weight/height ratio and detection of cases of malnutrition.

Disaster Preparedness

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

Over 200 volunteers from Central American national societies involved in drought and food insecurity operations have actively taken part in relief distributions, community capacity building, agricultural recovery workshops (sowing and fertilising techniques, irrigation micro-systems) and health promotion workshops in the last six months.

Members of the national intervention teams (NITs) have been included in the teams from the national societies which are working for the operation at national level. The NITs have also worked together with the branch volunteers and communities.

Activities in disaster preparedness and response have been focused on practical experience to develop capacity. This has included the use of improved procedures during relief distributions. Meanwhile, community leaders and beneficiaries participated in activities implemented under the various programme components.

The workshops, and the exchange of information and technical knowledge between the facilitators, volunteers and community leaders provided an opportunity to promote further integration, for example, in Guatemala, the distribution of 4,000 educational pamphlets and 1,000 calendars with key health messages printed in Chorti, Kaqchikal and Achi indigenous languages, reinforces the National Society’s work with Mayan communities.

**PHASE 2
Relief Distributions**

Objective 1: To support agricultural recovery among subsistence farmers.



Salvadorean Red Cross agronomist monitoring the impact of an SRC irrigation micro-project in Morazán Department

In **El Salvador**, agricultural recovery is based on an integrated project that includes the diversification of crops by planting fruit trees in four communities of Morazan department, together with the distribution of corn and bean seeds and organic fertilisers. During February 2002, the **Salvadorean Red Cross Society** distributed 200 tool kits (including 1 shovel, 1 pickaxe, and 2 sowing tools) to beneficiary families in order to enable them to start working the land for sowing. In the coming weeks, 200 farmers who are heads of families, will receive appropriate capacity building in both agricultural techniques and marketing of their products.

The *Salvadorean Red Cross* contracted two agronomists and an agricultural engineer to develop a mid-term programme for the next nine months. The SRC team and the communities have begun planting 7,000 fruit trees (35 per family) in an area of 100 “manzanas”. On 26 February, an agreement was signed with the Interamerican Cooperation Institute for Agriculture (IICA), whereby this Institute provides technical assistance, certified plants, and capacity building as regards the planting of the fruit trees. The Red Cross branches in Morazan provided detailed lists of the beneficiaries and will assist in the promotion of the fruit trees programme. In order to mitigate the eventual effects of *El Niño*, the distribution of organic fertiliser will be increased (depending on specific needs) instead of the proposed 1.71 MT.

The *Guatemalan Red Cross* is completing the process of local purchase of 23 MT of corn seeds and 70 MT of bean seeds to begin distributions to approximately 2,000 farmers. The National Society has encountered problems in obtaining sufficient corn seed at a good quality/price rate, as many local suppliers have asked a price which is double the average. The GRC signed an agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food (MAGA) to obtain fertilisers at a low price in order to cover all vulnerable beneficiary farmers.

The *Honduran Red Cross* will distribute 23 MT of corn seeds to approximately 2,000 farmers in the coming weeks: the initial sowing of year 2002 will take place when first rainfalls arrive

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

A reassessment conducted by the *Salvadorean Red Cross Society* technical team in Morazan department concluded on the need for digging a water reservoir next to the beneficiary farmers’ piece of land, with a base of plastic sheeting and a thatch roofing to avoid the evaporation of the water. In addition, small fish will be provided for the water pool to avoid the growth of mosquito larvae. An agreement with WFP will contribute to a decrease in the cost of the project following a food-for-work system.

In order to accomplish the above, discussions have taken place with organizations involved in “post-harvest” programmes (such as the Swiss Development Cooperation and NGOs) in order to sign an agreement in which these agencies will carry out capacity building for the farmers and technicians, and the community will participate in the installation of grain silos.

The *Guatemalan Red Cross* is holding discussions with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food in Rabinal and Chiquimula to facilitate support for the implementation of training courses in agricultural techniques for the 2,856 families which received corn and bean seeds and fertilisers.

The Spanish Red Cross is supporting the *Guatemalan Red Cross* in an eight-month programme in Jalapa department, including 632 subsistence farmers living in 8 communities of the municipalities of San Luis Jilotepeque and San Pedro Pinula, and consisting of agricultural rehabilitation, distribution of corn and bean seeds, community capacity building and marketing.

The *Honduran Red Cross* has implemented 54 technical workshops for 1,951 farmers in El Paraiso, Valle and Choluteca departments, regarding treatment of corn and bean crops to avoid pests and post-harvest management. A further 111 farmers attended workshops organized in cooperation with other organizations.

National Society Capacity Building

More than 20 Red Cross branches are taking part in different programmes related to drought and food insecurity and over 200 volunteers from Central American national societies have been involved in relief, community capacity building, agricultural recovery workshops (sowing and fertilising techniques, irrigation micro-systems)

and dissemination of health promotion. Groups of volunteers have actively participated in the technical teams which implemented the nutritional surveys and the capacity building courses.

Federation delegations in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras have disaster preparedness and response delegates working with the relief departments of the National Societies to maximize the available resources. The delegates are supporting the National Societies in the design of specific contingency plans for *El Niño*.

To help boost capacity, a member of the national intervention teams (NITs) has been added to the national society personnel who are managing the drought at national level. In several affected areas, the NITs have worked together with branch teams and communities.

Federation Delegation

A regional programme coordinator was assigned from PADRU to the drought operation in April to make a reassessment of needs, evaluate the impact of the different programmes and harmonize the regional strategy until the close of the operation, planned for 19 August 2002, with the exception of a second intervention in El Salvador and Guatemala limited to 832 subsistence farmers until the end of the year. The regional coordinator, deployed by the Pan-American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU) to the Guatemala regional delegation, is working closely with the regional disaster preparedness delegate, the national disaster preparedness delegates in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, and the head of the delegation in Nicaragua (also in charge of disaster preparedness and response).

Coordination

Between 16 and 18 April, the heads of relief departments of all the Central American national societies, the national and regional disaster preparedness delegates, the regional programme coordinator for drought and food insecurity programmes and a representative of the American Red Cross took part in a coordination meeting in Guatemala to discuss and agree on a common strategy regarding contingency planning and to review the impact and lessons learned during the drought operation.

Close cooperation has been achieved with the PNS working in the region to ensure maximum impact at country level. For certain projects, the PNS have shared logistics and technical personnel coordinating both schedules and activities with the national societies to promote the most effective assistance; for example, the Honduran Red Cross, the American and Netherlands Red Cross Societies and the Federation shared technical personnel to implement the agricultural recovery component of the programme.

In order to avoid duplication, Red Cross personnel have actively taken part, at regional, national and local level, in meetings with the Ministries of Agriculture and Health, United Nations agencies, governmental and non governmental organizations and NGOs such as Acción contra el Hambre (Action against Hunger), Acciones Futuras (Future Action), CARE, Catholic Relief Services, Christian Development Commission, Doctors without Borders, Save the Children, Visión Mundial (World Vision) and others.

Furthermore, the National Societies have agreements with some of these institutions and organizations to work together in the field, especially in the relief, health and community capacity building components. For example, as mentioned above, the Guatemalan Red Cross signed an agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food (MAGA) to obtain fertilisers at a low price in order to cover all vulnerable beneficiary farmers; Action against Hunger has trained 20 Guatemalan Red Cross volunteers from Jalapa and Chiquimula, who have facilitated training for health promoters, midwives and community leaders in issues such as early warning for malnutrition in children under 5 years old in 13 communities where AAH is working with affected children.

Facing an eventual *El Niño* phenomenon, the National Societies' relief staff and Federation delegates have taken part in several meetings with representatives of Central American governments, and agencies such as WFP, OPS, UNICEF and NGOs involved in relief, health and agricultural recovery to identify appropriate response criteria.

Outstanding needs

Given the current appeal coverage, the national societies, supported by the Federation delegations, have taken initiatives to develop strategic alliances with UN agencies, such as WFP and UNICEF, and NGOs to achieve a decrease in costs or some zero-cost activities. Such cooperation has resulted in reducing considerably funding needs. However, several projects remain on hold and additional funds are urgently required. Donors are encouraged to provide contributions to alleviate the effects of the ongoing drought in the region and the suffering amongst the vulnerable population of subsistence farmers.

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>.

John Horekens
Head
Relationship Management Department

Santiago Gil
Head
Americas Department

Central America - drought and food insecurity						ANNEX 1
APPEAL No. 31/2001		PLEDGES RECEIVED			22.05.2002	
DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE	COMMENT
CASH						
REQUESTED IN APPEAL CHF ----->				3'507'865		TOTAL COVERAGE 60.0%
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
AMERICAN - RC		8'034	USD	13'489	09.01.2002	DIRECT SUPPORT TO GUATEMALA RC
ANONYMOUS		17'912'736	JPY	228'835	20.12.2001	HEALTH & REHABILITATION
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
ICELANDIC - 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/RC		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/RC		800'000	SEK	120'400	24.09.2001	
SWISS - GOVT				80'410	04.12.2001	DIRECT SUPPORT TO HONDURAS RC
PRIVATE DONORS		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				2'022'420	CHF	57.7%
KIND AND SERVICES (INCLUDING PERSONNEL)						
DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE	COMMENT
WFP		49'395	USD	82'193	16.05.2002	FOOD DONATION, TRANSPORT, INS. & STORAGE, DIRECT TO GUATEMALA RC
SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED IN KIND/SERVICES				82'193	CHF	2.3%
ADDITIONAL TO APPEAL BUDGET						
DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE	COMMENT
BRITISH - RC		20'130	USD	33'391	12.02.2002	TRUCK, BILATERAL
SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED				33'391	CHF	