

# Operations update



International Federation  
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

## Uganda: Floods

Emergency Appeal MDRUG006

GLIDE no. FL-2007-000138-UGA

27 September 2007

### Operations Update no. 1

**Period covered:** 20 to 26 September 2007.

**Appeal target:** CHF 8.9 million (USD 7.4 million or EUR 5.4 million).

**Appeal coverage:** 2.5%.

**Outstanding needs:** CHF 8.7 million (USD 7.23 million or EUR 5.3 million).

[<Click here to go to the donor response report>](#)

**Summary:** The flooding situation in Uganda is worsening daily and plans are having to be readjusted accordingly. Despite a short stretch of sunny weather, water levels continue to rise, due to run-off from higher ground to the east. Even where the land has dried out, extreme ground saturation means that flooding resumes following the slightest rainfall. The rainy season is predicted to continue into November.

Access to the most affected areas remains a huge challenge. The main road between Kampala/Kenya and the Red Cross operations base in Soroti has been cut off and convoys transporting relief goods have had to be re-routed via Lira. Road access to outlying communities (particularly in the most affected district of Katakwi) is seriously restricted and many communities have been cut off for a number of weeks. This has hampered both assessments and distribution of relief goods.

Distribution plans are being revised so as to meet the most immediate needs for emergency shelter, clean water and sanitation. The Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS) and the Federation's Field Assessment and Coordination Team (FACT), together with the World Food Programme (WFP), are coordinating closely to ensure that limited helicopter transport – being provided by the UN as from 1 October 2007- will be used to deliver both food and essential non-food items to the most affected communities.

There is an urgent need for tarpaulins, mosquito nets, jerry cans, buckets and water purification sachets. Where access is possible, the URCS has continued to distribute family kits from its own stocks, regional stocks brought in from Nairobi by the Kenyan Red Cross Society (KRCS), as well as from stocks supplied by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Disaster Relief Emergency Funds are being used to procure essential non-food items (NFI) locally. As from early September 2007, URCS has distributed 4,312 family kits. Due to ongoing and unpredictable flooding following any rainfall, distribution has had to be suspended on a number of occasions since mid-September.



The Federation Field Assessment and Coordination Team (FACT) was mobilized during the week starting 16 September 2007. FACT members are working closely with their Uganda Red Cross Society counterparts.



Initial assessments show that the main priorities are emergency food and non-food relief items (including tarpaulins) and basic hygiene and health care support.

There is also concern about a possible deterioration in the health situation, with reports of a rise in cases of bloody diarrhoea and increase in the rate of malaria. There are also concerns regarding the possible outbreak of cholera. A KRCS mobile basic health care unit has been deployed, with technical assistance from the Finnish Red Cross, to provide basic health care, medication and to raise health awareness.

An information technology and telecommunications (IT/Telecoms) Emergency Response Unit (ERU) is being deployed by the Danish Red Cross to provide technical support to field operations and to build capacity in URCS branches in the affected areas. The ERU is expected to arrive early next week.

URCS and FACT members are participating actively in UN cluster meetings and technical working groups in order to avoid duplication and to ensure overall

coordination of humanitarian aid. The URCS has been actively soliciting funds in-country. Contributions have been received from Barclays Bank, the US Embassy, East African Breweries and Standard Chartered Bank. The Irish Government has also pledged approximately EUR 300,000 through the Federation's [Emergency Appeal](#).

Main challenges remain the constantly shifting situation, as flooding affects different areas depending on rainfall, along with the related problem of limited access. Operational plans and budgets are being revised accordingly and may need to be further readjusted as the extent of the need becomes clearer.

## Background

Due to an early onset to the rainy season, compounded by unusually heavy rainfall since July 2007, severe flooding is occurring in the eastern parts of Uganda – primarily in the districts of Amuria, Katakwi, Lira, Bukadea, Kumi and southern parts of Pader. Affected communities are for the most part internally displaced people living in long-term camps or settlements and are generally vulnerable to disaster, with few resources to fall back upon. Preliminary information – based on initial assessments carried out by the Ugandan Red Cross Society (URCS), UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and government sources – estimate the number of severely affected at close to 90,000 households. These figures remain to be confirmed, and may rise if current weather patterns persist.

Crops have been destroyed, food is rotting and a number of dwellings have either collapsed or are seriously destabilized as the water erodes the mud-brick bases. Water sources are contaminated and proper sanitation is non-existent. Cases of malaria and bloody diarrhoea are said to be on the rise. Although no outbreaks of disease have been reported to date, there is concern that the on-going damp conditions, limited health care facilities and the lack of clean water and/or proper sanitation could lead to a progressive deterioration in the health of the population. There has been some displacement of people, but on the whole, communities still seem to be staying close to their fields, taking refuge during the night in schools and other buildings set on higher ground wherever possible. However, increased population movement remains a possibility, especially with the steep rise in food prices noted in local markets, linked to decreasing food supplies. If the situation persists, people may be forced to move, even at the risk of fording the rising waters.

Despite five days of sunshine over the past week, which has helped to dry off some of the land, the ground in the most affected areas remains saturated and is also subject to run-off from the more mountainous areas further east. As a result, water levels continue to rise and flooding re-occurs as soon as it rains. Latest reports indicate that the situation is worsening, and the affected terrain is changing daily. This state of affairs is likely to persist, at least until the end of the current rainy season in November, leaving the affected population vulnerable and facing uncertainty.

Initial assessments show that the primary needs are for emergency food and non-food relief items (NFI), shelter and basic health care support, including the provision of clean water, improved sanitation and hygiene promotion.

To date, more detailed assessments and emergency distributions have been hampered by a lack of access to the worst affected areas. Many roads have been cut off and a number of crossings are impassable due to collapsed bridges and/or erosion of crossings. Access should nevertheless be facilitated over the coming days thanks to the availability of helicopter support being provided by the UN, for use by humanitarian agencies. The World Food Programme (WFP) is actively working on providing food relief to the most affected communities. To date, only the URCS has been distributing emergency relief in the area.

## **Operational developments**

The URCS is the main actor in the area of shelter and NFI distribution. Red Cross activities are currently focusing on the badly affected areas in Amuria and Katakwi Districts, in the north-east of Uganda. URCS has been actively supporting the affected communities in these districts since the onset of the floods, primarily from its main operations base in Soroti – undertaking an initial assessment, mobilizing its volunteers and distributing family kits from its emergency stocks, as well as from contributions provided by the ICRC and UNICEF. Some 4,312 households (21,560 people) have been assisted to date. URCS, together with ICRC, has also been carrying out preliminary assessments in the southern regions of Pader district and in Kitgum district, with a view to provide relief as needed.

A Federation's FACT was mobilized during the week of 16 September 2007. Team members specialized in shelter, relief, logistics and WatSan undertook their first assessment in the affected areas on 17-21 September, following a short spell of dry weather, when the situation seemed to have stabilized. However, as of 25 September, the situation has worsened, with flooding occurring in new areas and road access increasingly hampered. As a result, relief distribution plans are being revised to target the most affected communities with essential shelter and NFI such as tarpaulins, mosquito nets, water purification sachets, jerry cans and buckets. Procurement of items in short supply is underway. In the meantime, distribution is being carried out with existing stocks.

The URCS and FACT members are working together from the main operations base in Soroti and at the national headquarters in Kampala. IT and telecommunications support is being provided to both locations. As an immediate priority, FACT members are focusing on:

- Assisting URCS in the set-up and implementation of the emergency operations;
- Refining assessments in the field and monitoring the health situation, in particular the potential for epidemics;
- Revising relief distribution plans according to the changing needs;
- Sourcing transport alternatives to ensure immediate access to the affected population;
- Procuring and arranging transport of NFI and establishing additional warehousing facilities in Lira and Soroti;
- Coordinating with UN, other agencies and local authorities in order to avoid overlap and duplication.

The immediate operational priorities remain emergency shelter and NFI relief distribution to communities in Katakwi and Amuria districts, as well as prevention and education activities in the areas of water and sanitation (WatSan) and health. An IT/Telecoms ERU has also been requested and is expected to arrive in country during the coming week, in order to enhance communications and to reinforce security in the field.

The Federation has released an emergency health kit from the emergency stocks in Nairobi. A total of 10,000 family kits have also been transported from available emergency stocks in Nairobi. Additionally, the Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) has been providing assistance to the emergency operations from the outset. KRCS has also deployed two water treatment plants with trained technicians, as well as a basic health care unit with essential staff, with technical support from the Finnish Red Cross.

International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Movement) partners are working in close cooperation to ensure that activities undertaken as part of the emergency response are complementary and well coordinated. Due to uncertainty related to weather patterns and incomplete information caused by problems of access, the operation is striving to maintain a fair degree of flexibility and continues to plan for contingencies – with a view to adjusting the emergency response as the situation demands.

## **Red Cross and Red Crescent action**

### **Objectives, progress, impact and challenges**

#### **Emergency relief (food and basic non-food items)**

**Objective 1.1: To provide emergency shelter and essential household items to at least 20,000 vulnerable households.**

#### **Progress**

The URCS began emergency relief operations in the affected areas at the end of August 2007, using in-country disaster preparedness (DP) stocks, complemented by 500 family kits from ICRC, and additional contributions from UNICEF and the Danish Red Cross. The quick response of URCS can be attributed to its commitment to disaster preparedness, supported through long-term programming by the British and Danish Red Cross Societies.

The financial support from the Federation's Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF) is being used to procure relief items locally, to make up an additional 2,000 family kits. These, along with 10,000 family kits being brought in from stocks in Nairobi and an additional 1,300 kits provided by ICRC, are currently being transported to bases in Lira and Soroti for warehousing and distribution. As of 24 September, there were sufficient quantities of family kits in-country to distribute to 6,640 households. Due to problems of access to affected communities in Amuria and Katakwi districts, URCS has been distributing family kits to other affected communities nearer to Soroti and still accessible by road, pending the availability of helicopter transport. This is anticipated to help with disaster preparedness in those communities before they are also cut off by floodwater.

Although there are slight differences in the make-up of the family kits provided by different organizations, every effort is being made to standardize these as the operation moves forward. Procurement is currently underway to provide beneficiary households with full family and shelter kits (as indicated in table 1 on page 5).

However, it must be stressed that full distribution plans are being revised, to take into account the worsening situation and growing needs. Based on immediate needs and the limited capacity of the helicopters, distribution of essential shelter and NFI, specifically tarpaulins, mosquito nets, jerry cans, buckets and water purification sachets will be prioritized; the distribution of these items will be undertaken in close coordination with food distribution being undertaken by WFP.

**Table 1: Family and shelter kits<sup>1</sup>**

<b>Family kits</b>	
<b>Item</b>	<b>Quantity (per household)</b>
Blankets	3
Kitchen set	1
Jerry can	1
Bucket	1
Soap (750g pieces)	3
Tarpaulins	2
Mosquito nets	2
<b>Shelter kits</b>	
<b>Tools</b>	<b>Quantity (per household)</b>
Wood saw	1
Claw hammer	1
Machete (panga)	1
Pliers	1
Hoe	1
<b>Material</b>	<b>Quantity (per household)</b>
Wooden poles (3"x3")	8
Wooden sticks (1"x1")	20
Tie wire (2mm)	5 m
Rope (5mm)	20 metres
Nails (headed, 2")	1 kg
Grass thatch	tbd

Eight URCS relief teams are on stand-by, and the National Society is considering mobilizing additional teams to ensure a steady rotation of volunteers and staff. The operation is focusing on distribution of essential NFI so as to meet needs as quickly and efficiently as possible, whilst taking account of local capacity and the challenges of access. The aim is to reach up to 1,000 households per day once air operations are up and running and road conditions allow. Alternative means of distribution are also being considered.

In terms of emergency shelter, two tarpaulins will be distributed per household during the first round. In the present circumstances, tarpaulins are considered to be a most useful and multi-purpose commodity which households will be able to use not only as a means of shelter, but also for drying clothes and foodstuffs as well as to sleep on (often used as a folded sheet, keeping people off the damp ground, thereby helping to prevent respiratory tract infections and other diseases).

The procurement and distribution of tools and material for the shelter kits (as specified above) has been put on hold, pending results of ongoing assessment in the field. Should the distribution of shelter proceed, it will be undertaken as a staged process so as to enable on-going assessment of their usefulness and relevance, in light of increased population mobility and weather uncertainty. However, should needs change and delivery prove difficulty, then the operations would consider redirecting funds to other areas of greater need, including livelihoods support to assist with recovery.

Logistics support is being provided to the emergency operations, with a priority on organizing helicopter access and establishing warehousing facilities. Four Rubb halls donated by the Norwegian Red Cross have been delivered and are being set up near the branch offices in Lira

<sup>1</sup> Tarpaulins have been included under family kits – recognizing that they are also a key component of the emergency shelter kit.

and Soroti to supplement existing URCS warehouse space. The UN is also providing warehousing at the airfield in Soroti, in addition to two helicopters which are being made available for humanitarian assistance over a period of two months, as from 1 October 2007. The FACT is coordinating closely with WFP/UN to ensure that the air operations are used as effectively as possible in meeting the most urgent needs of the affected communities.

Relief goods arriving by road from Nairobi, thanks to transport provided by KRCS and ICRC, have had to be diverted through Lira as of 20 September, due to the collapse of key bridges on the direct route. This has extended transport time by over nine hours.

A detailed and up-to-date mobilization table is available on the Federation's Disaster Management Information System (DMIS). The Federation is working on mobilizing specific relief items to respond to needs in the field and intends to fill existing gaps through local procurement whenever possible, in order to maintain flexibility. Procurement of additional DP stocks will enable the emergency operation to boost its relief distribution to an extra 5,000 households if required, as part of its contingency planning.

#### **Constraints:**

- The situation is changing daily, affecting assessments.
- Lack of access to the worst affected areas.
- Helicopter transport available only as from 1 October, with limited capacity.
- Limited supply of NFI currently available in-country.

#### **Health and Care**

**Objective 2.1: To contribute to improved health status, health awareness, and reduced incidence of water-borne and vector transmitted diseases among at least 20,000 households.**

#### **Progress**

The main priority is distribution of water purification sachets (along with jerry cans and buckets). Quantities of water purification sachets have been revised to double the amount being distributed. This should now be sufficient to meet the needs of 10,000 families for two months (providing for 15 litres per person per day, as per SPHERE standards), given that the rainy season is likely to continue until the end of November. This increase in supply will also provide flexibility to meet the needs of a greater number of households, if needed.

In conjunction with the above, rapid Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Transformation (PHAST) training of trainers (over 4 days) is to take place next week, focusing on the most probable types of diseases, ways of preventing and controlling them, and how to implement prevention measures within the communities. Trainers will also give demonstrations on the proper use of water purification tablets. URCS has mobilized four trainers who will be training two teams of 25 participants each from the Katakwi and Amuria districts respectively. Although access problems have somewhat delayed the identification of community volunteers, URCS has extensive experience of training in the area and systems for selecting volunteers are already in place. Relevant training material and leaflets are being produced and will be distributed. A 'cascading' approach will be implemented, with trained volunteers recruiting an additional 20 local volunteers, who will then go into the affected communities for 3 days/week over a period of 5 months, providing education and follow-up on proper use of the previously distributed water purification sachets.

Two water purification plants, along with technicians, have been deployed by the KRCS. The plants have the capacity to produce 10,000 to 15,000 litres per day of drinking water – with possible trucking to remote locations.

Following an initial assessment, the request for a mass sanitation ERU has been cancelled. This solution was considered to be inappropriate in the context of the flooding and the rapidly changing situation. It was also found not in line with local customs. The current plan is to provide 4,000 temporary latrines (i.e. reaching 20 per cent of the overall target), using locally procured materials. Latrines will consist of squatting plates, wooden poles (depending on location), and plastic sheeting for walls and roofs. The URCS WatSan field programme officer is identifying key sites and assessing household willingness. In the medium-term, once the situation has stabilized and waters receded, the plan calls for the rehabilitation of 15 boreholes and 800 family latrines.

### **Constraints**

- Flooded areas are shifting, making planning difficult.
- Community health infrastructure is poorly developed and stocked.
- Lack of access is impeding proper assessments, surveillance and the recruitment of participants for PHAST training.
- Volunteer commitment and availability may be constrained by their own needs.

### **Objective 2.2: To reduce exposure to and risk of contracting malaria.**

#### **Progress**

Distribution of two long lasting insecticide-treated mosquito nets (LLITNs) per household is a priority, as reflected in the relief plan. Procurement is underway to ensure sufficient supplies to meet this target. The distribution will be followed up with information, education and communications (IEC) campaigns.

#### **Constraints:**

- The ground is either flooded or damp.
- Clothing is damp and difficult to dry.
- Huts have been damaged or destroyed.
- On-going problems of access and uncertainty.

### **Objective 2.3: To provide life-saving first aid to selected health centres and schools in the affected communities.**

#### **Progress**

With technical support from the Finnish Red Cross, the KRCS has deployed a mobile basic health care unit – with 24 technicians and staff – which is being set up alongside one of the water treatment plants. The length of deployment is dependent upon needs. The unit is being set up in coordination with the Ugandan Ministry of Health.

There are increasing concerns about the health status of the affected population, with the incidence of malaria and bloody diarrhoea reported to be on the rise, as well as concerns over the possibility of cholera. More detailed assessments are currently being undertaken, and the presence of the health clinic will help in this regard, especially because the national infrastructure in the region is poor. Clinics are understaffed and many medicines are not in stock. As a result, the population does not go to the clinics, making proper surveillance difficult. Health promotion will therefore be an integrated on-going action in this area.

An emergency health kit has been provided by the Federation from its Nairobi Zone Office stocks. In addition, one cholera kit has been pre-positioned in Soroti while an additional four cholera kits are available for deployment from Nairobi when required.

As flooding continues and cold rains drench an already weakened population, it is likely that the health of the affected population will deteriorate. Health activities are therefore focusing on education and increased surveillance so that appropriate action can be taken quickly to prevent the spread of epidemics. Close coordination with the World Health Organization (WHO), the Ugandan Ministry of Health and local authorities remains essential.

## Constraints

- The ground is either flooded or damp.
- Clothing is damp and difficult to dry.
- People's resistance to diseases may be lowered.
- Surveillance data is weak due to the poor clinic infrastructure in the affected areas.

## Recovery and rehabilitation

**Objective 3.1: To assess, plan and implement early recovery activities together with the affected communities and key local, national and international stakeholders.**

### Progress

An early recovery delegate is joining the FACT on 27 September. Recovery and rehabilitation activities will be developed in close coordination with URCS, in line with its Strategic Plan (2007-2010) as well as with ongoing long-term activities being carried out with assistance from the Danish Red Cross.

Shelter kits are being phased in as part of the relief operation, as described under Objective 1.1, and their usefulness will be carefully assessed and adapted as necessary. A livelihoods kit (consisting of a pick, sickle and axe per household) may also be procured should assessments confirm their usefulness, particularly for water and sanitation activities.

## Capacity Building

**Objective 4.1: To prepare for effective, timely and appropriate monitoring and response to emergencies and vulnerabilities.**

### Disaster Preparedness and Response

There is a clear desire to build the URCS's capacity in needs assessment and information management. Lessons learned and the overall outcome from the current emergency operation will be fed into the National Society's long-term programming in disaster preparedness. In addition, the Appeal budget allows for procurement of emergency stock for 5,000 households in Lira and Soroti branches. Procurement of 200 volunteer kits is underway.

### IT & Telecommunications

The FACT IT/Telecoms delegate has been providing essential support to the operations base in Soroti and at the national headquarters in Kampala, to ensure rapid and effective communications from the field, and for the operations as a whole.

A preliminary assessment of URCS's capacity in this area has been carried out. The conclusions are as follows:

- **High frequency (HF) radio network:** There are seven branches located in or close to the disaster area but Global System for Mobile communications (GSM) is good in only two of the branches. HF installations are functioning well in two branches; there are no HF installations in Katakwi, Amuria, Soroti and Lira branches. To ensure reliable long distance communication in the disaster area, four new HF installations, one base station upgrade at URCS national headquarters and one unit replacement are urgently needed.
- **Very high frequency (VHF) radio network:** Twelve handheld radios have just been procured by the URCS for use in Lira region in case of a cholera outbreak. However, the number is insufficient as there is a need to use handheld radios for local communications within the disaster area as well as for relaying operational and security related information to branches and the national headquarters. An additional 30 handheld radios are therefore urgently needed for the operation.

- **IT equipment:** There is an urgent need to strengthen IT capacity in the disaster area, particularly in Katakwi, Amuria, Soroti and Lira branches. Five personal computers (PCs), four printers, four uninterruptible power supplies (UPS), one generator and a dial-up I-net have been requested by URCS. Also requested are two very small aperture terminals (VSATs) to be installed at the national headquarters and in Soroti.

A Danish Red Cross IT/Telecoms ERU is being deployed and is scheduled to arrive in the coming week.

## Coordination and partnerships

The URCS has taken the lead in coordination efforts, with support from FACT. Meetings of a Movement task force on floods are being convened twice weekly at the national headquarters to enable partners to exchange information and to coordinate activities better; two meetings have so far been held.

The URCS has assigned counterparts to all Federation FACT members; they are working in close coordination with each other. Team members are participating in various UN cluster and technical working group coordination meetings, both in Kampala and Soroti, on a regular basis, as well as in meetings called by Ugandan government authorities.

## Communications- Advocacy and public information

The URCS has been pro-active in its media relations, initiating press conferences on a regular basis in order to update the public on developments, needs and to promote fundraising activities. The National Society is actively meeting with private sector entities and others, such as embassies, to share information and to raise funds. So far, private sector contributions totaling USD 300,000 have been received in country.

Visibility is being ensured in the field, through URCS tabards, caps and T-shirts. International media coverage has been good, with recent reports specifically focusing on the situation in Uganda being broadcast by BBC World and Channel 4 in the UK.

## How we work

*All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations \(NGO's\) in Disaster Relief](#) and is committed to the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.*

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**The International Federation's activities are carried out under its Global Agenda, which sets out four broad goals to meet the Federation's mission to "improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity".**

### Global Agenda Goals:

- Reduce the numbers of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.
- Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.
- Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.
- Reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion and promote respect for diversity and human dignity.

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