

Operations update



International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Costa Rica and Panama: Floods

Emergency appeal n° MDR43005
Glide Nos. FL-2008-000158-PAN
FL-2008-000232-CRI
Operations update n° 1
16 January 2008

Period covered by this Operations Update: 1 December to 31 December 2008.

Appeal target (current): CHF 693,779 (USD 571,953 or EUR 450,336) in cash, kind, or services is sought to support the Costa Rican Red Cross and the Red Cross Society of Panama to assist a total of 12,500 beneficiaries (2,500 families) for nine months.

Appeal coverage: 27%

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Appeal history:

- This Emergency Appeal was initially launched on a preliminary basis on 1 December, 2008 for **CHF 693,779 (USD 571,953 or EUR 450,336)** for nine months to assist 15,000 beneficiaries.
- CHF 270,000 (USD 222,580 or EUR 175,260) was allocated from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) to support the initial relief activities of the Red Cross Society of Panama, and CHF 110,500 (USD 96,507 OR EUR 75,685) to support the Costa Rican Red Cross in starting relief actions.



Children in the shelter of Bataan (Limón) received PSP support from CRRC Youth volunteers, who carried out several recreational activities. Source: CRRC

Summary: During the month of November, 2008 continuous heavy rain and floods damaged infrastructure affecting thousands of people in **Panama** and **Costa Rica**. The objectives in this appeal have been established based on identified needs: relief items, the completion of damage and needs assessments for early recovery activities (shelter, water and sanitation, and other sectors), and the strengthening and scaling-up of disaster risk reduction activities to contribute to building community safety and resilience for the future. This Operations Update will report on the progress of activities towards meeting the objectives established in the appeal.

This Operations Update reflects a decrease in beneficiary numbers for Costa Rica from 1,500 to 1,000 families. This was agreed between the **Costa Rican Red Cross (CRRC)** and the International Federation, after the Costa Rican Red Cross received generous contributions from the civil society, private enterprises and the national government. The Costa Rican Red Cross is currently revising its plan of action in accordance with the situation.

The **Red Cross Society of Panama (RCSP)** has started distribution of relief items in several of the affected provinces. Also the RCSP will implement a micro project that includes the distribution of a reservoir water tank

for an entire community.

This operation is expected to be implemented in nine months, and will be completed by 1 September 2009; a Final Report will be made available by 1 December 2009 (three months after the foreseen end of the operation).

The situation

After continuous heavy rain and floods in November 2008, the government of **Panama** declared the provinces of Bocas del Toro, and Colon, as well as the Ngobe Bugle indigenous reservation under yellow alert, and green alert in the province of Chiriquí. A total of 10 fatalities were reported, 36,158 people were affected and 3,300 houses were damaged or destroyed. 58 shelters were set up initially; as of 10 December only four remained open (two in Bocas del Toro and two in Panama's northeastern area. Major roads were blocked and but are now for the most part cleared. Most of the communities that were isolated in zones of difficult access have now been reached. Livelihoods were damaged including banana plantations, and commerce and tourism have as well been severely affected. The total damage caused by the floods is estimated at USD 10 million. Relief and recovery efforts are slowing down although the cleaning of several water wells is still needed since they are contaminated and the affected population is at risk of water borne diseases.



Red Cross Society of Panama personnel performing assessments of a water system in Changuinola, Panama. Source: RCSP

The National Government continues to collect and dispatch essential relief items through the office of the First Lady and the National System of Civil Protection (Sistema Nacional de Protección Civil - SINAPROC). SINAPROC has been distributing water, food items and blankets to the affected communities.

In **Costa Rica**, according to the National Emergency Commission (Comisión Nacional de Emergencias - CNE) floods and high winds associated with low pressure centers generated strong winds and daily rains in the Caribbean region, Northern and Central Valley. The most affected areas are Siquirres, Matina, Battan, Valle de la Estrella, Talamanca and

Sixaola in the province of Limón. Other provinces including Alajuela, Cartago, San José and Heredia were affected.

According to local authorities, water levels from three major rivers (Sixaola in the south, Reventazón and Parismina in the north) broke containment walls and flooded up to two kilometres inland with three-metre high tides. This lasted for fifteen days, submerging many of the farms and communities within the area. In addition, the basin of the rivers Chirripó, Sixaola, Matina, Barbilla, Palacios, Hone Creek, Rojo and Sarapiquí in coastal areas overflowed. An official report issued by CNE reported that 118 communities were affected, 4,000 people were evacuated and sheltered in 65 shelters, 28 roads and communication routes were affected and three dykes and three bridges were totally destroyed. Also, more than 2,205 water wells were contaminated with flood waters. In the agricultural sector, crops of banana, cocoa and plantain were affected as well rice, corn, bean and yucca in a minor scale.

Coordination and partnerships

The International Federation through its Pan American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU) and the Regional Representation for Central America and Mexico based in Panama have been actively coordinating with and supporting the Red Cross Society of Panama (RCSP) and the Costa Rican Red Cross (CRRC).

In Panama, the RCSP coordinated early relief activities with SINAPROC and the Ministry of Health in regards to the monitoring of water related issues and water borne diseases. All governmental institutions, embassies and the civil society supported the relief efforts. The International Federation, Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), UNICEF and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) are working on health and shelters, water and sanitation and nutrition. Other UN agencies have been assisting the emergency including the World Food Programme (WFP), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Country Team (UNCT), among others. The Spanish Agency for International Cooperation for Development (AECID) has donated 14 tons of humanitarian supplies, among them blankets, mosquito nets, family kitchen kits and hygiene family kits. The governments of Japan, Colombia, United States and Germany have also made substantial contributions to this emergency.

The Costa Rican government through the CNE is closely monitoring the emergency since the beginning and activated all regional and local emergency committees. The government has been supporting and coordinating all institutions responding to the emergency and has dispatched relief supplies including blankets, mattresses and basic food items to the most affected areas. The president of the country visited the affected province of Limón on 16 December and assured the communities visited works will be done in order to prevent the overflowing of rivers to affect homes and schools.

National Society Capacity Building:

During the pre-hurricane meeting held in Panama from 3 to 6 June 2008, National Societies from hurricane-prone countries in the Americas participated actively in the revision of the regional contingency plan (previously elaborated during the 2007 pre-hurricane meeting). The development of the regional contingency plan helped to explore disaster preparedness tools, available capacities within the region, possible response strategies and operating procedures, which provided participants with hands-on practice in readiness for such a response.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The local branches of the **Red Cross Society of Panama** have deployed a search and rescue unit and 225 volunteers to the affected areas. A total of 350 volunteers have worked around the clock for this operation. International Federation staff has been supporting the operation in Disaster Management, Water and Sanitation, IT/telecom and Communications and other Federation personnel has been volunteering at the Panama Red Cross headquarters to provide general support in logistics and the reception of in-kind donations. The National Society also maintained close coordination with the regional Centre of Operations for Emergencies (Centro de Operaciones de Emergencias – COE) in charge of performing damage and needs assessments and coordinating actions in the field. Moreover, qualified Red Cross volunteers have been providing emergency first aid care to the most affected people.

Over 525 persons have been safely evacuated or rescued by the National Society's Search and Rescue teams in very challenging conditions. The Red Cross Society of Panama has deployed to the field National Intervention Team (NIT) members, volunteers specializing in water and sanitation, logistics and information. All local branches are monitoring the situation and have personnel on standby to deploy to the areas that have not been reached. In addition, the National Society mobilized family kits for 400 families and 10,000 water purification tablets by ship to the province of Bocas del Toro.

The Red Cross Society of Panama has opened centres throughout the country to receive donations to be sent to the affected areas. To date, the general public has donated 75 tons of food and hygiene items. 25-lb food parcels containing rice, pasta, cooking oil, sardines, ham, salt, sugar, coffee, milk, cereal and 14,745 gallons of water have been dispatched to the affected areas. Up to 23 December 2008, the Red Cross Society of Panama, thanks to generous contributions from the government, private companies, several non profit organizations and civilians has assisted the following number of families:

Province	District	Communities	N° of Families	N° of People
Boca del Toro	Changuinola	41	2,587	13,997
	Chiriquí Grande	29	582	4,074
	Bocas Del Toro	5	38	233
Veraguas	Santa Fe	14	525	3,169
Colón	Costa Abajo	7	27	122
Chiriquí	Bugaba	6	86	531

Panamá	Panamá	5	94	461
Total		107	3,939	22,587

In **Costa Rica**, the Emergency Operation Committee headed by the President of the Costa Rican Red Cross and the National Relief Director has been active since the onset of the emergency. CRRC has focused its initial actions on performing search and rescue operations, providing pre-hospital care and completing damage and needs assessments. The National Society has started setting up and managing temporary shelters for people who have had to leave their homes.

63 Red Cross auxiliary committees (branches) are on alert and seven are currently operating. Two National Intervention Team (NIT) members in the province of Limón and approximately 100 volunteers are providing support in the response to the emergency. Volunteers are being mobilised in more than 40 vehicles (4 x 4 vehicles, rescue vehicles, ambulances), two all terrain vehicles (Unimog) and three boats.

The Emergency Operation Centre, based in the capital city of San José, was active since the beginning of the emergency and it is collecting, processing and communicating all information received from the field and other agencies. The CNE has dispatched a helicopter with three rescue volunteers from the CRRC in order to access isolated communities like Sixaola, which lies in the south-eastern region of Costa Rica in the province of Limón and borders with Panama.



CRRC relief staff performing damage and needs assessments in houses that were affected by the floods.
Source: Costa Rican Red Cross

In addition, 200 people in the communities of Yorkin, Talamanca and Limón (in the district of Talamanca) as well as 250 people in the communities of Chinaquicha, Turrialba and Cartago (in the district of Turrialba) received first aid care and relief items. Costa Rican Red Cross Youth volunteers carried out recreational activities and provided psychosocial support (PSP) for children in the shelters of Bataan and Matina using the “Retorno a la Alegría” (Return to Happiness) methodology.

Aside from its involvement in the floods response, the CRRC is currently involved in two other emergency operations. The first operation funded with DREF funds started in 17 September 2008 to respond to the floods caused by the influence of tropical storms in the Pacific and Chorotega region. Recently, the CRRC has had to respond to the earthquake of 6.2 in the Richter scale that struck Costa Rica on Thursday 8 January affecting over 3,000 people. The President of Costa Rica has declared the situation National Emergency due to the magnitude of the disaster. DREF funds have been allocated on 13 January 2009 to support the National Society carrying out disaster response activities. The efforts of the CRRC are concentrated in assisting communities affected by this current disaster. The three concurrent emergencies have stretched the CRRC capacity to its limits as hundreds of volunteers have been mobilized throughout the country to attend the needs of those affected.

Progress towards objectives

The Costa Rican Red Cross and the International Federation have agreed to reduce the number of beneficiaries thanks to the considerable amount of relief items received from civilians, private companies and other organizations. The number of beneficiary families was reduced from 1,500 to 1,000 and with the additional funds the CRRC will elaborate a plan of action with activities in water and sanitation. The next operations update will detail the revised plan of action for the CRRC, but the following objectives already reflect that change.

Relief distributions (food and basic non-food items)

Objective: 2,500 families (1,500 families in Panama and 1,000 families in Costa Rica) will benefit from the provision of essential food items and non-food items to recover from the effects of the floods.

Replenishment of the relief stock of both National Societies' relief stocks is also planned, therefore strengthening and re-establishing their response capacity for future relief operations.	
Expected results	Activities planned
2,500 families will receive essential relief items.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct rapid emergency needs and capacity assessments • Develop beneficiary targeting strategy and registration system to track intended assistance • Coordination with public institutions • Verification and survey of the most affected population • Local procurement of food items • Purchase of non-food items by Regional Logistics Unit (RLU) • Transport, customs and logistics arranged by RLU. • Distribution of food and non-food items. • Monitoring and evaluation.

Panama

Thanks to the contribution from the national government and to the improvement of the situation in the affected areas, the last damage and need assessment performed indicated there is no need for additional relief items therefore the estimated overall quantities of tarpaulins, jerry cans and blankets were reduced.

The following chart shows the amount of items the International Federation through PADRU has already delivered to the Red Cross Society of Panama, the amount distributed to date and the amount pending to be distributed shortly:

Items	Amount Requested	Amount Distributed	Balance
Hygiene kits	1,500	709	791
Kitchen kits	1,500	598	1,197
Blankets	2,500	2,355	145
Tarpaulins	1,000	450	550
Jerry cans	1,000	400	600
Food parcels	1,500	1,000	500
Mosquito nets	3,000	0	3,000
TOTAL	12,000	5,512	6,783

These items were distributed among different provinces (Panama Este, Chiriquí and Bocas del Toro) depending on the needs of the affected people. During the first distribution rounds, the RCSP distributed relief items covered with this appeal and relief items donated by the national government, civil society and private sector to reach as many people affected as possible.

Costa Rica

The following items will be distributed to the most affected families:

- 1,000 kitchen kits (1 per family)
- 1,000 hygiene kits (1 per family)
- 2,000 jerry cans (2 per family)

In Costa Rica during the month of December, the implementation of activities was set back as many businesses were closed due to the national holidays. This factor delayed the quotation of relief items. Quotations of all the relief items (kitchen kits, hygiene kits and jerry cans) have now been received. However, the distribution of the articles is still pending due to changes in the priorities of the CRRC Plan of Action.

In addition, the Costa Rican Red Cross has procured 5,000 labelled plastic bags to pack donated clothes received from several organizations and from the general public.

Water, sanitation, and hygiene promotion

Objective: The risk of waterborne and water-related diseases has been reduced through the provision of safe water, adequate sanitation and hygiene promotion and education to 2,500 households for six months.	
Expected results	Activities planned

2,500 households have safe drinking water and receive educational hygiene promotion.	Assessments of water quality in the affected areas.
2,500 households will receive mosquito nets to diminish the risk from vector related diseases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deployment of a RIT specializing in water and sanitation. • Provision of potable water to 2,500 families in the affected area by providing operation costs for a water purification plant. • Provision of water purification tablets for household water treatment for 1,500 households in Panama. • Purchase and shipping of 6,000 mosquito nets. • Transport, customs and logistics arranged by RLU. • Distribution. • Monitoring and evaluation.

Panama

A water purification plant with the capacity to generate 5,000 litres of water per hour was dispatched to Changuinola in the province of Bocas del Toro. The water purification plant is property of the Red Cross Society of Panama and all operation costs are being covered through this appeal. The Red Cross Society of Panama in coordination with the Ministry of Health activated six aqueducts in the rural communities Changuinola. 10,000 water purification tablets have been distributed in Changuinola to 1,000 families. Each family received ten water purification tablets (2 per person). 3,000 mosquito nets will be distributed to the affected families in Changuinola (2 per family).

The Red Cross Society of Panama will implement a micro project that includes the distribution of a reservoir water tank for an entire community.

Costa Rica

Chemicals for water treatment and purification have been provided by the Costa Rican Red Cross to ensure safe drinking water to the affected communities.

A proposal has been made to revise the plan of action of the CRRC and include the cleaning of contaminated water wells in the Caribbean region. The results of damage and needs assessments have identified the areas of Bataan, Guácimo, Matina and Siquirres to receive assistance, but specific families have not been identified yet.

Early Recovery and Risk Reduction

Objective: Food security and livelihood early recovery activities are assessed, planned and implemented, to benefit 600 affected households in Panama and Costa Rica. Based on the identified vulnerabilities, awareness is raised and capacity of the community exposed to risks is strengthened to build community safety and resilience.	
Expected results	Activities planned
2,500 people benefit from food security and livelihood recovery activities.	A food security expert, water and sanitation expert and experienced volunteers will evaluate the communities during the relief phase to further define needs and plan programming in these areas.

Panama

Red Cross Society of Panama volunteers along with an early recovery specialist from the International Federation performed damage and need assessments in the communities within the Changuinola district. The floods in these communities completely destroyed family and community orchards and farm animals were lost. The families' subsistence was destroyed placing additional distress on the affected. Consequently, the International Federation with the support of the Ministry of Agriculture has designed sustainable micro projects for the affected communities that will include distribution of seeds and family agricultural tools to rehabilitate community and family orchards and distribution of chickens. This activity is possible due to the cost reduction in the relief items objective mentioned above and in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture.

Costa Rica

CRRC is revising its plan of action, more information on early recovery activities will be available in the next Operations Update.

National Society Capacity Building

Objective: The capacity of the Red Cross Societies in disaster response and preparedness will have been strengthened.
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Expected results	Activities planned
The Red Cross volunteers will be better prepared in disaster response.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct several NIT capacity building trainings and workshops. • Provide security gear and equipment for volunteers to operate safely.

Panama

The procurement of visibility materials, relief equipment and radio equipment has begun. The Red Cross Society of Panama crisis room will be equipped and renovated with items such as computer, screen and radio equipment. The procurement process of materials to repair a damaged vehicle has begun.

In addition, the National Society has scheduled Water and Sanitation and community risk management trainings.

Once the operation is completed, a project evaluation will be carried out in order to identify the lessons learned.

Communications

Objective: The Red Cross Societies will facilitate adequate visibility of the response activities through the development of a comprehensive communications strategy.

Expected results	Activities planned
Red Cross volunteers will have proper visibility equipment. National and international media, as well as the International Federation's internal information system, will be fed interviews, videos, photographs, press releases and stories to ensure visibility for the National Societies' activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design, production and distribution of visibility material (stickers, t-shirts, caps, etc.). • Local and international interviews. • Drafting and distribution of press releases.

Panama

The Red Cross Society of Panama published two pages in the local newspaper thanking the generous support from the people and to inform the various activities performed in the affected areas. The president of the RCSP, the relief director and the International Federation representative offered two interviews to the media. Also the RCSP provided weekly press releases.

Costa Rica

The Costa Rican Red Cross has published three articles on its national website (<http://www.cruzroja.or.cr>) and three articles in the regional Red Cross website (www.cruzroja.org) to inform on the status of the situation. Also a considerable quantity of photographs and micro-videos of the activities so far completed have been taken.

Logistics

Objective: Operational support is provided to the National Societies to effectively dispatch relief items upon arrival, including clearance, storage and forwarding to distribution.

Expected results	Activities planned
The Red Cross Societies of Panama and Costa Rica receive operational support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leasing of 4 x 4 vehicles • Leasing of trucks for distribution • Mobilisation of volunteers and Red Cross personnel

Panama

A considerable amount of funds were allocated to cover the initial operational and transportation costs of relief items included in this appeal, donated items, as well as mobilisation of volunteers.

Thanks to the general contribution UNETE provided which covered the leasing costs of the trucks, the RCSP will be able to lease additional 4 x 4 vehicles and cover for additional operational costs.

Costa Rica

The CRRC has designated an operation coordinator. Expenditure of funds allocated to cover expenses for initial operational costs has been set back as the CRRC is revising its plan of actions.

IT & Telecom

Objective: A well functioning and reliable communications system to ensure effective communication and security for all Movement partners for the immediate response to the disaster has been established.	
Expected results	Activities planned
Data communication and office facilities are available for the operation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct assessments • Procure and install communication equipment • Re-establish family links in Changuinola and Almirante

Panama

An International Federation IT & Telecom specialist was deployed to the field in order to evaluate the communications needs and to install a VHF repeater antenna to support the operation. Additionally, the International Federation has provided internet connection for five laptops belonging to the National Society to use during the emergency, along with ten handheld radios in an IT/telecommunications kit.

The RCSP handled 48 requests to re-establish family links in Changuinola and Almirante.

Communications – Advocacy and Public Information

Maintaining a steady flow of timely and accurate information between the field and other major stakeholders is vital for advocacy, maintaining the profile of the emergency operation and for fundraising. During an operation, communications between affected populations and the Red Cross and Red Crescent, as well as with the media and donors, is an essential mechanism for effective disaster response and the cornerstone to promoting greater quality, accountability, and transparency. The communications activities covered by this appeal are aimed at supporting the National Societies to improve their communications capacities and develop appropriate communications tools and products to support effective operations. These activities will include training, capacity building, as well as material support and are closely coordinated with the Communications Department of the International Federation's Secretariat in Geneva. **The Red Cross Society of Panama** has provided six press releases and one press conference. The **Costa Rican Red Cross** has published three articles on its national website (<http://www.cruzroja.or.cr>) and three articles in the regional Red Cross website (www.cruzroja.org) to inform on the status of the situation. In virtue of a partnership with Albatros Media, the International Federation has deployed to the field in Panama photography and video team comprised of a RIT in information and Albatros Media staff with the aim to produce video material for the press.

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.

The International Federation's activities are aligned with 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.

Contact information

For further information specifically related to this operation please contact:

- In Panama: Michele Detomaso, Programme Coordinator, Pan American Disaster Response Unit; email: michele.detomaso@ifrc.org; phone: (507) 316-1001; fax: (507) 316-1082.

- In Panama: Jose Beliz, Director General, Red Cross Society of Panama: email: cruzroja@pa.gbnet.cc ; phone (507) 315-1388; fax: (507) 315-1401
- In Costa Rica: Walter Zarate, Relief Director, Costa Rican Red Cross: email: walter.zarate@cruzroja.or.cr ; phone (506) 2528-0030; fax: (506) 255-3098
- In Panama: Fabricio Lopez, Regional Representative for Central America and Mexico; email: fabricio.lopez@ifrc.org; phone: (507) 380 0250; fax: (507) 317 1304
- In Panama: Maria Alcázar, Resource Mobilisation Coordinator for the Americas; email: maria.alcazar@ifrc.org; phone: (507) 380 0250; fax: (507) 317 1304
- In Geneva: Pablo Medina, Operations Coordinator for the Americas; e-mail: pablo.medina@ifrc.org; phone: (41) 22 730 4300.

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