

CENTRAL AMERICA

20 August 1999

Hurricane Mitch: transitional relief and first phase rehabilitation

appeal no. 02/99 (programme extension to 31 December)

situation report no. 2

period covered: May to July 1999

Emergency phase relief programmes have given way to community rehabilitation projects covering agricultural support, water and sanitation and health initiatives, and capacity building, especially disaster preparedness. The much needed reconstruction of housing for the tens of thousands still in temporary shelters is being held up by difficulties in acquiring land rights. The programme has therefore been extended to 31 December 1999.

The context

Seven months after the Central American countries of Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala were devastated by Hurricane Mitch, memories of the terror and destruction of the worst hurricane this century have been replaced by the problems facing the thousands who are still displaced and homeless. Issues now include the legal difficulties of acquiring land for new housing and the potential for temporary accommodation deteriorating into slums, with the attendant social consequences. Funding promised during the Consultative Group Meetings convened by the Inter-Americas Development Bank is being released very slowly. Political concerns add to the uncertainty within the region. Finally, the hurricane season will reach its peak very shortly.

Mitch accentuated the economic difficulties in all of the countries, especially in the rural sector. Prices are rising (inflation is predicted to reach 14% this year) decreasing buying power and making the poor even more vulnerable. The destruction in the agricultural sector has led to rising unemployment with big banana producers laying off workers for 18 months. Access to cheap staple food is also threatened as big producers of rice and beans consider diversifying into the more profitable production of tobacco and sugar. Thousands of small scale farmers who have little or no access to credit have also abandoned traditional crops, increasing rural migration to the cities, particularly the capitals. People waiting for a solution to their long term housing problems have begun settling in unsafe areas prone to flooding and land slides.

Latest events

Various international agencies, NGOs and governments, meeting in Stockholm in the last week of May, agreed on a multi- million aid package for Central America. However, concern has been expressed as to the capacity of regional governments to ensure transparency and to implement ambitious plans, despite undertakings that the money will be well spent.

In Nicaragua and Honduras the Federation, with strong support from the National Societies, signed Country Status Agreements with the respective governments. *The Canadian Red Cross* has provided a Regional Disaster Response Delegate to be based in Santo Domingo, serving both the Caribbean and Central America. *The French Red Cross* has supplied a DPP Delegate for Nicaragua.

Honduras: The total damage of Hurricane Mitch in Honduras is now calculated at USD 3,800 million or 70% of the country's GDP. Most damage was in the agricultural sector, with the storm wiping out nearly 70% of the crops.

Recent rains and storms have impacted on an already weakened infrastructure. The sewage system in Tegucigalpa is not able to handle seasonal rains and streets in the old part of town are frequently flooded. Two causeways leading to Mitch-damaged bridges in southern departments of the country were washed away in the end of May, isolating communities of up to 60,000 people. Temporary solutions, such as Bailey bridges, are being put up all over the country, but it is feared they will not withstand floods. Roads remain un-repaired and work is progressing slowly on dragging and deepening rivers such as the Choluteca which have risen dangerously. Access to some of the communities where the Red Cross is working is only possible with 4WD vehicles.

In the past three months a series of local disasters -- a tornado, a tidal wave, hurricane winds and rain, and a landslide -- left thousands homeless and brought the HRC into action.

Nicaragua: The housing shortage continues to be the chief concern. Land tenure issues remain unsolved, leaving thousands in unsatisfactory temporary shelters. Their worsening situation will only be resolved when land for house building is acquired. In the last week of July seasonal rains in increasing frequency and strength caused alarm once more in areas where the most vulnerable population is situated.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Honduras

The Red Cross is represented in Honduras by the Federation Delegation and five PNSs -- *the Spanish, American, German, Swiss and Netherlands Red Cross Societies* -- with bilateral agreements with the HRC, with *the Italian Red Cross* having just signed an agreement to support the blood bank. The *Austrian* and *British Red Cross* work through the Federation in Water and Sanitation ERU and Agriculture Support respectively.

* **Relief:** With the ending of post emergency relief, limited food was distributed during the reporting period. The *American Red Cross* completed distributions in Gracias a Dios, along the isolated Mosquito Coast and the riverbanks of Rio Coco. There is a monthly distribution in the three Macro Shelters in Tegucigalpa. In May the Federation distributed food parcels, provided by the *American Red Cross*, to 1,624 families in shelters. WFP also distributed in the shelters, alternating months with the Federation. This will be diminished to encourage the inhabitants to look for jobs and become self sufficient.

* **Food for Work.** The remaining Red Cross food in stock in Honduras will be used for specific Food for Work projects. A Federation delegate visited HRC branches to request proposals for food for work projects in 201 communities in four departments: Valle, Choluteca, Paraíso and Olancho. 145 projects were approved and work by the beneficiaries has already started. These small projects will take one or two months to complete and deal with reconstruction and rehabilitation of houses, schools and communal centres, road clearing and small scale water and sanitation improvements. *American Red Cross* provided a total 12,583 parcels of locally produced food for projects, most of which were to be completed by the end of September. To date, some 4,871 families had received their food parcels, under HRC branches supervision. The Federation has been evaluating the project proposals, packing and distributing the food and monitoring progress.

* **Macro Shelters:** According to the Honduran Government around 40,000 people still live in macro shelters, established all over the country. Because of the urgent need to move people from unsafe areas, the population of all the macro-shelters is growing. Of special concern are the ever growing health problems. The shelter in San Pedro Sula, housing 200 families, was declared a health hazard as a result of communal diseases and accumulation of garbage.

The HRC is running three shelters for over 5,000 people in Tegucigalpa, with the support of the Federation and the PNSs. A recent census in these three shelters reveals that the inhabitants are on average very young, the children are not going to school and less than 60% of the men and 38% of the women are formally employed. Social problems in the Tegucigalpa shelters seem to be growing and the HRC has therefore started a psychological support programme, with education being provided for around 300 children.

The Honduran Government has bought land in Amarateca where houses will be built for some of the inhabitants of the three HRC-run shelters. The *Spanish Red Cross* has planned an ambitious USD 15m construction of 1,200 houses, with the *American Red Cross* providing the water and sanitation systems. The Federation has commissioned a comprehensive survey of the situation, to serve as a basic tool for everybody involved in this project.

* **Housing Reconstruction & Rehabilitation:** Around 450,000 people had their homes destroyed or severely damaged. The Red Cross is encouraging people to reconstruct houses by delivering food packages to communities who organise rehabilitation and reconstruction projects.

The Federation is distributing food packages, provided by the *American Red Cross*, to communities which are building houses with the help of the *German Red Cross* which has already completed 50 houses in Choluteca and 25 in Villa Menica de Mencia in Malpaso. A further 416 houses are under construction in the southern departments of the country. Construction work on 200 more houses is about to begin in the north and an evaluation is underway for the construction of 30 houses in the Isla de Tigre in the south. In total the *GRC* is building 700 houses which should all be finished by August. *The American Red Cross* has co-ordinated with the *GRC* to provide Wat/San services, training and materials to these projects, and to one in Neuva Marcovia in Choluteca.

The *American Red Cross* in co-operation with the HRC has identified five housing projects in the Departments of Olancho, La Paz, Intibuca, Francisco Morazan where construction is about to begin along with chapter house reconstruction. The *Spanish Red Cross* has completed rehabilitation of 8 schools in Tegucigalpa and 5 more schools in the north. It is also planning a housing project that will benefit 1,798 families.

* **Water & Sanitation:** Hurricane Mitch caused the temporary breakdown of water supplies for 4.2 million people. Seven months after the disaster, many poor farming communities are still without access to clean water or proper sanitation. The Federation has four water and sanitation projects underway in the southern province of Choluteca and two in Valle. Of a planned total of 413 latrines and two water systems, mainly in new houses that have been built by the *German Red Cross*, work is finished on about 100 latrines and one water system. The projects are funded by ECHO and carried out through the *Austrian Red Cross*. Work was to be finished by the end of July. These projects focus not only on providing water and sanitation to homeless victims of Mitch but also on providing service to the nearby communities.

Projects	Communities	Latrines	Water systems
1	Malpaso (Villa Meneca de Mencia)	50	
2	Barrial Centro	83	

4	Limon de la Cerca	250	
5	San Lorenzo	50	1
6	La Caucara		1
TOTAL		413	2

Other water and sanitation projects in the south depend on a substantial Federation Health, and DPP application to ECHO, to be considered end September. These will provide water systems for communities which lost their traditional water source during Mitch and are now forced to walk up to 2 km every day to fetch dirty water in buckets. The SRC has identified 16 water and sanitation projects in the north of the country and work began in June.

A technical co-operation group which meets weekly with the HRC has been formed by all the PNS Wat/San delegates and has established a co-ordinated approach to identification and evaluation of projects.

*** Agricultural Support Programme:** The Federation has completed a distribution of an agricultural rehabilitation package, consisting of fertiliser and high quality maize and bean seeds, aimed to help small subsistence farmers. The distribution, to a total of 10,516 families started on May 11 in the three departments of Valle, Paraíso and Choluteca. The package was donated by the *British Red Cross*. A detailed Final Report on this programme is available.

*** Health:** The Red Cross is now focusing its attention on reconstructing and fortifying the emergency health service through the HRC branches, training volunteers in primary health care and reinforcing maternal and childhood health care and prevention of diseases. The HRC blood bank is also being strengthened. Cases of cholera have recently been detected in two areas and the poor state of water supplies remains a concern. Dengue is spreading alarmingly fast with 5,000 new cases reported, while 73,000 cases of diarrhoea and 7,000 of dysentery have been reported. The Federation Regional Health Delegate, Guatemala, is co-ordinating the Red Cross health programmes of the region and visits Honduras regularly to meet with health and wat/san delegates and PNSs.

*** DPP and Response:** With rains causing flooding and damage, the whole infrastructure of the country weakened and a bad hurricane season predicted, the HRC, the Federation and the PNSs are engaged in a co-ordinated DPP and Response contingency strategy. The Federation Regional DPP programme has been distributed to all the PNSs.

The *American Red Cross* is pre-positioning canned food, blankets and plastic sheets and other relief essentials for 10,000 persons in warehouses across the country and working on prevention of disease outbreaks following disasters. Public Service Announcements, reminding the population to be prepared for hurricanes, have been disseminated to radio stations. The HRC held a two day seminar in June with heads of all the HRC branches and representatives from the Federation and the PNSs with the aim of consolidating the lessons learned from Mitch into concrete recommendations. Two Federation delegates (Relief and Logistics) will from now on focus specifically on disaster preparedness co-ordination with the PNS. The HRC recently appointed a new co-ordinator for Rescue Operations and local DPP/Relief seminars are to be held. Three of four ERU water supply containers have been pre-positioned in the north of the country.

*** Capacity Building and Institutional Development:** The Federation assisted the HRC establish a Special Project Office, now fully manned by a manager, construction co-ordinator, and health, wat/san and social co-ordinators who have put together guidelines in their respective areas to help the PNSs to take a standard HRC-approved approach when implementing projects. A multi-partite agreement, between the HRC, the Federation and the PNSs, stating the exact role of each player, has been signed. Co-operation is further ensured by biweekly co-ordination meetings and weekly technical meetings.

The Federation and the PNSs are also concentrating on strengthening the infrastructure of HRC headquarters and its 43 branches around the country. This includes rehabilitation or reconstruction of HRC offices damaged during Mitch, funding of various administration costs, purchasing of vehicles and equipment and fortification of the volunteer base, through training. The review of the Rehabilitation Plan of Action continues and the Federation is currently recruiting a Development Delegate to support this long -term work.

Nicaragua

The Federation, Delegation and PNS in Nicaragua continue activities in support of the NRC rehabilitation and reconstruction projects. House building, both temporary and permanent, remains the main activity, but is slowed down by difficulties in acquiring sufficient land for construction. However, work continues on those houses which have already been started, as does the building of temporary housing under the USAID/OFDA programme. In addition, building professionals will be contracted for the restoration of four schools.

* **Relief Distribution:** Food Aid distribution by *the American Red Cross* and the Federation with the NRC were concluded in July with the termination of the WFP contract. *The Spanish Red Cross* distributed various products in its activity area. Distributions in the Departments of Rivas, Leon and Managua were partly financed by *the Spanish* and *American Red Cross*, and in the RAAN Region *the American Red Cross* completed its distributions.

* **Water/Sanitation & Health:** In May, Water, Sanitation and Health Seminars took place in Montelimar Resort, the first organised by the *American Red Cross*, and the second by the Federation with the support of *the American and Spanish Red Cross*. Delegates from PNSs in the Region, ONS personnel and Federation Delegates participated in both Seminars. Water and Sanitation work for the USAID/OFDA temporary housing programme started. The Federation wat/San delegate started a small scale project for clean water and as a first step twelve ceramic water filters were acquired, from a total of 100 programmed, for the area of Nueva Segovia, Ocotal.

In Health, funding from *the Spanish Red Cross* for the Tropical Illness Project was confirmed: the first beneficiaries from this project will be school brigades. Other health activities include psycho-social assistance to children.

The Federation visited various construction sites for permanent and temporary housing in Villanueva, Nueva Segovia, Rivas, and Chichigalpa. Remote areas identified for the ECHO application were visited and amendments agreed with the ECHO representative.

* **Housing – rehabilitation/reconstruction:** *The French Red Cross* continues construction work in Matagalpa and Ciudad Darío and has completed the first 62 houses. In the Nueva Segovia region, the *Netherlands Red Cross* and the local Red Cross Chapter acquired land from the Municipality for the construction of 70 houses in this Department, and 80 in Madriz. In addition, three housing committees with working brigades have been formed in Nueva Segovia to construct permanent housing and OFDA temporary housing. The OFDA project was launched with the purchase and distribution of the necessary materials: a total of 254 families received tool kits and other materials.

In addition to the *American, Netherlands, Spanish, and French Red Cross*, agreements have been signed with CARE and JHC (Jubilee House Community), incorporating these new partners into the OFDA programme. Under these agreements 125 houses are assigned to JHC in Nueva Vida (Managua), and 350 to CARE in Posoltega. CHICA (Coordinación de Hermanamiento e Iniciativas de Cooperación Austríaca), is in charge of a permanent house building project funded by the *Austrian Red Cross*. On 24 June the inauguration of the first completed houses took place in the presence of the President of Nicaragua. Material for 510 temporary houses has been delivered. This programme, which is managed by the Federation, NRC, and *the American Red Cross* by the end of the month had a total of material requirements for 1,534 homes.

While waiting for clarification from the local authorities regarding further land acquisitions for the construction of permanent housing, various PNSs are concentrating their efforts in other activities such as community organisation and land preparation. The remainder of the house construction in Jinotega was taken over by the *American Red Cross*. The acquisition of roofing for 104 houses, from a total of 545, was completed.

* **Agricultural Support:** In June the Agricultural Support Programme, financed by the *British Red Cross* and carried out by the Federation and NRC, was concluded. This four month programme aimed to promote the quick recovery of 11,765 families by providing supplies so that they could plant their crops before the first rains. For more detailed information, please consult the Final Report which is now available. A new agricultural support programme which includes the distribution of basic grains, plantain as well as livestock assistance, is under consideration by the *Spanish Red Cross*.

* **Capacity Building and Training:** *The Netherlands Red Cross*, through the Nueva Segovia Chapter, continued with capacity building for the community leaders in Disaster Prevention Committees. *The Spanish Red Cross* ran a training workshop for 30 volunteers in the operation of water purification units. *The American Red Cross* with the Federation, supporting Red Cross Youth, carried out a DPP workshop for capacity building and training in schools in the Nueva Segovia, Jinotega and RAAN. A Contingency Plan has been drawn up for the NRC, PNS and the Federation Delegation in Nicaragua. In Nueva Segovia, Red Cross participated in the capacity building of community leaders in a project for the structuring of Disaster Prevention Municipal Committees. The restoration of the NRC headquarters in Managua by the *American Red Cross* continues, as does the launch of rehabilitation activities in the Madriz chapter by the *Netherlands Red Cross*.

Guatemala

In Guatemala, less impacted by Mitch than Honduras and Nicaragua, the Federation's Mitch activities in support of the Guatemala Red Cross (GRC) are co-ordinated by the Regional Delegation in Guatemala City, along with PNS support from the *American, Spanish, and Netherlands Red Cross Societies*.

* **Relief:** In May, 651 mixed food parcels were distributed in Coban, completing the GRC food distribution phase. *The Spanish Red Cross* completed its distribution of food aid in Izabal. *The American Red Cross* combined food and agricultural supplies distribution in the departments of Jalapa, Jutiapa, Tzacapa, Chiquimula, El Progreso, and Santa Rosa was completed in July.

* **Reconstruction/Rehabilitation:** The GRC/Federation completed the *British Red Cross* funded Agricultural Support Programme (ASP) with the distribution of seeds and tools to 5,150 families. Monitoring and follow up were carried out by GRC teams (see detailed ASP Final Report). *The Spanish Red Cross* was involved in the provision of additional food support while the ASP project was under way, plus the training of agricultural volunteers in basic fumigation and harvesting and distributing additional seeds and tools in Izabal. *The American Red Cross* provided seeds and tools in the departments under its responsibility. In May, additional support was provided in Santa Rosa (953 families). In Jalapa and Jutiapa, a final distribution to 5,744 families in these departments took place in July.

* **Water & Sanitation:** With Federation support, the Medical Brigades continued their capacity building and training and completed their work in Suchitepequez. In June, the GRC, with 95 volunteers, and the Ministry of Health jointly carried out a vaccination project reaching 3,433 persons. *The American Red Cross* provided logistic aid, blankets fuel and training for the campaign. Its wat/san delegate was identifying longer term projects in consultation with the Federation and other agencies and in Quatepeque it was preparing a campaign against parasites.

* **DPP, Capacity Building and ID:** The Federation assisted the GRC with the formation and identification of projects for the National Disaster Plan. Workshops on Governance and Management and Planning were carried out in May. *The American Red Cross* supported the GRC in

DPP planning in Jalapa. The Federation, Spanish Red Cross, American Red Cross and GRC participated in a workshop for Contingency and Emergency organised by OFDA and the American Red Cross. *The American Red Cross* has prepared a contingency plan to supply 10,000 persons with relief supplies and emergency equipment.

El Salvador

The Federation has one representative from the Regional Delegation in El Salvador. PNS support is provided by the *Spanish, American and Swiss Red Cross*. The main relief effort is over and the rehabilitation phase is primarily geared towards DPP and capacity building. Annual rains have started and the SRC has identified the most vulnerable communities as part of ongoing DPP and contingency planning.

* **Relief/Rehabilitation:** The Federation food programme, carried out in co-ordination with the *American Red Cross*, ended after providing relief to some 10,830 families. *The Spanish/American Red Cross* have also completed their food support projects. *The British Red Cross* Agriculture support programme assisted 3,000 families in El Salvador. *The American Red Cross* carried out a similar project in co-ordination with the Federation. The first crops from this programme were successfully harvested in July. *The Spanish Red Cross* is planning to construct a community centre in Santa Rosa de Lima, a youth centre in San Vicente, housing in Golfo de Fonseca and three schools in Leon and Usulután. The *American Red Cross* expects to provide improved water and sanitation to over 6,000 persons in the areas of the country where it operates.

* **Capacity Building:** The SRC with the support and technical assistance of the Federation and the PNS is placing considerable efforts into capacity building in various sectors. **Youth:** First Aid Training, especially in schools, health matters (HIV/Tropical diseases), DPP, reintegration of juvenile offenders, old persons visit scheme, environmental training. **Women Volunteers:** Child care, health, Emergency Clinic support, social services, support to the blood centre. **Lifeguard Training:** Training in each province in basic techniques, Search & Rescue. **Relief Workers:** DPP training. The *American Red Cross* is providing support towards the SCS Ambulance service. The *Swiss Red Cross* is working with the *Spanish and American RCs* on a tripartite Integrated Community Development project in Las Burras, which comprises housing, water and sanitation, multi-user buildings and health and community development training.

* **DPP/Planning:** The SCS carried out a DPP workshop in July, supported by the Federation and the PNS. The *American Red Cross*, as in the other countries, has provided emergency relief supplies for 10,000 persons. The Federation and the PNS have been supporting the SRC in reviewing and developing a National DPP and Contingency Plan and a Country Rehabilitation Plan of Action.

Outstanding needs

The recruitment of three Development Delegates (one of which would become Deputy Head of Regional Delegation) is a major hurdle. The American Red Cross have offered support in funding. DPP funding frameworks and projects are being reviewed with a number of PNS. A review of objectives identified in the Santo Domingo Declaration have highlighted the need for a Regional Communications Assessment mission that needs support.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

Discussions took place with ECHO and EU representatives in Honduras and Nicaragua on progress on the Federation application for water and sanitation projects, and with USAID in Honduras and Nicaragua on ongoing activities. Press conferences were held to launch the World Disasters Report. Contact is maintained with UNDP/OCHA/ECHO as well as diplomatic missions. Closer co-ordination and co-operation with existing PNS and agencies is evident and dialogue is maintained with ONS and PNS in the field.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

Although the immediate emergency phase is well over, reconstruction and rehabilitation needs remains huge. In some areas, such as in the agricultural sector, the consequences of Mitch are only just becoming apparent. The Red Cross is highly respected in Central America and both the population and the government look to it for continued leadership in assistance. A continuous long term presence and commitment is essential to fortify the ONS capacity and aid them in their efforts to assist the vulnerable communities and prevent a further escalation of poverty and destitution. The serious problem in all four countries related to land titles has not yet been solved, and continues to slow down permanent house building projects.

The Federation, despite the complexity of the undertaking, has compiled a Global Report on the operations from November to March which is being sent separately to PNS. Future operations have reached a point where a more integrated approach of all players is called for, chiefly because the Red Cross remains the dominant humanitarian agency in the region and additional challenges are likely to come its way.

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