

ZIMBABWE: DROUGHT RELIEF

16 April 1999

appeal no.06/99

situation report no.1

period covered: January, February and March 1999

Responding to a series of severe droughts in southern Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Red Cross Society and the Federation launched an Appeal primarily intended to provide supplementary feeding assistance for four months. The initial response to the Appeal has been encouraging and the planned activities have been initiated. However, an additional CHF 158,000 is required to meet the total needs of the intended beneficiaries.

The context

Since 1991, southern Zimbabwe has been affected by a series of droughts. Insufficient, short rains severely affected the harvest in 1998, resulting in a critical food shortage. The Government of Zimbabwe declared Matabeleland South Province a disaster area on 21 August 1998. In September/October, 1998 the Zimbabwe Red Cross Society, together with the International Federation, carried out an assessment of the most severely affected areas; namely the Matobo South, Gwanda South, and Beitbridge Districts in Matabeleland South Province, and Mwenezi and Chiredzi Districts in Masvingo Province.

Based on the findings, a plan of action was prepared seeking assistance to feed approximately 40,000 children under the age of five for eight months, and to launch an integrated water and sanitation programme. With funding from the German Red Cross, the water and sanitation programme was implemented in late 1998. Funds and food were secured through the Netherlands Embassy and UNICEF respectively to begin the feeding programme in Matobo South District for 13,000 beneficiaries. An Appeal for CHF 480,000 was launched on 22 February, 1999.

Latest events

On the basis of consultations with the Government, UNICEF and other NGOs, responsibility for conducting supplementary feeding programmes in the different Districts of Matabeleland South Province were allocated to specific agencies. The Red Cross was given the responsibility to work in Matobo South District with 17,450 under five year old children. With funding and food support from the Netherlands Embassy and UNICEF totalling the equivalent of CHF 122,000, the Zimbabwe Red Cross started the feeding programme in Matobo South on 9 February, 1999.

While the lack of initial funding meant fewer beneficiaries have been reached than originally planned, over 12,000 under-five children have been receiving food every day. With the more recent response to the Appeal now making additional funding available, the feeding programme was launched in Masvingo Province immediately after the Easter holiday. Nutrimeal porridge was also delivered to the Province

The longer-term food prospects for the country appear promising with unusually heavy rains in many parts of Zimbabwe, including areas in southern Zimbabwe. Initial crop assessments indicate good prospects for the harvest in some areas.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

In Motobo South District, training of 150 village health workers and Red Cross volunteers took place in January. The purchase of 81 tonnes of nutrimeal porridge was made, and the food was distributed to 17 holding points. Subsequently, 354 feeding points were established and feeding commenced on 9 February. Over 12,000 children received a cooked meal 7 days a week.

Stock control and monitoring reports are now being collated and final figures established. On-going monitoring and weighing of the children is taking place. Ministry of Health is assisting with the weighing.

An interim evaluation found that there had been good community mobilisation for registration of beneficiaries; that stock controls and systems were in place, and that the food was reaching those for whom it was intended. The problem of reaching the under one year old children has been discussed and alternative approaches are being investigated as these beneficiaries obviously cannot consume the full ration at one "sitting".

Training of more than 150 village health workers and Red Cross volunteers has recently taken place in Mwenzezi and Chiredzi Districts in Masvingo Province. Holding centres and feeding points are set up. Some of these are located at schools, and with school holidays taking place there has been some delay in distributions. An agreement has been made with Life Sowing Ministries (a local NGO) to use their existing facilities in Chiredzi, thereby assuring an early start to the programme. Funds are now available in-country to purchase the 54 tonnes of nutrimeal porridge necessary to launch the supplementary feeding in this Province.

The water and sanitation programme financed by the German Red Cross (but not included in the appeal budget) has been completed. 9 boreholes were constructed, 25 boreholes were rehabilitated, and 25 VIP latrines were built. Training has been given to local communities to maintain the water points. An official handover of the project was made in March by the Chairman of Zimbabwe Red Cross and was well covered by the media.

It should also be noted that the experience gained by Zimbabwe Red Cross staff in managing this programme, with technical support and guidance from the Regional Delegation, made an important contribution to increasing the Society's capacity. The officer responsible, with enhanced technical skills, undertook an assessment in the part of the country worst affected by cholera, and the subsequent proposed plan of action is to be the subject of a separate Federation appeal.

Taking the opportunity of this operation, the International Federation has drafted terms of reference for a study to be made on how the Red Cross can best respond in the future to food security problems. This study will focus on Southern Africa as a region, given the fact that the area is particularly drought prone, but will draw partly on the experience in Zimbabwe. With the assistance of British Red Cross, it is hoped that this assessment will take place starting in May, drawing on the skills and experience in the region.

Outstanding needs

With adequate funding, priority is now being given to launching the supplementary feeding programme in Masvingo Province. In Motobo South District of Matabeleland South Province, three of the seventeen

Given the operational priorities that still must be met, the planned capacity building activities, including first aid training for all Zimbabwe Red Cross volunteers, have not yet taken place.

The Regional Delegation is also awaiting the delivery of a vehicle to facilitate the management and monitoring of the operation in the field. The vehicle is expected in the near future and will certainly relieve some of the existing pressure on the ageing Zimbabwe Red Cross vehicle fleet.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The Government, and in particular the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare, has been most supportive, and an important partner in the training of volunteers. They also assist with monitoring at feeding points.

Part of the Matobo programme is resourced by UNICEF and cooperation has been very close. Zimbabwe Red Cross and Federation personnel have been invited to participate in a further needs assessment to be made by UNICEF.

The official handing over of the water and sanitation project, as well as the official opening of the feeding programme in Matobo, was well attended by the media with news items at both the local and national level.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

Support for the operation has been encouraging, but additional funding is needed to meet the objectives of the appeal. Though the launching of the appeal was delayed, efforts are being made to compensate. It is hoped that the shortened programme can be sustained for the period until the harvest and the availability of sufficient food for households in the affected area.

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