

SUDAN: FLOODS

14 September 1999

SPECIAL REPORT: FLOODING IN DONGOLA

appeal no. 21/99

situation report no. 1

period covered: 25 August - 14 September

The flooding in Sudan has worsened since the launch of the Appeal on 25 August. With the limited funding made available, the Sudanese Red Crescent Society and the Federation have procured relief items to respond to the critical needs, but further support is required to assist those affected by the most recent flooding. This report focuses on flooding in Dongola.

The context

Unusually early and heavy rains have already caused severe flooding in a number of states in Sudan. On 2 August, the rains in Khartoum state caused extensive flooding in Umbada locality (west Omdurman), destroying or damaging thousands of houses. On 4 August the Commissioner for Umbada announced that the disaster was beyond the capacity of the government in an area that reportedly has not suffered a flood of this magnitude in 60 years. Reports from River Nile, Sinnar and North Kordofan states also indicated significant damage to a number of areas and consequent homelessness and lack of shelter for hundreds of families.

The scale of the disaster is noteworthy as it comes so early in the rainy season. Many of those affected not only lost their homes and livelihoods, they are now threatened with exposure to the elements and potential water borne diseases, while coping mechanisms are stretched to their capacity. More thorough surveys and assessments have been carried out, and reports coming in from three additional states (Northern, Red Sea and Kassala) indicate further damage and increasing numbers of affected people.

Latest events

Torrential rains in early September caused the Nile river to break through flood defences at Sheikh Sherif (some 10 km south of Dongola town in Northern state) late in the evening of September 10. Despite the recently improved flood defences, the combination of very high waters and strong winds overwhelmed the flood barriers, eventually swamping the town of Dongola and the surrounding area. People living further downriver started to evacuate as news of the floods spread.

While initial information and details on the extent of the damage in the remote northern area remain scarce, according to unofficial estimates 60,000 people have been affected, with many of their homes destroyed. Some 90% of the town of Dongola was inundated, and only some state government buildings and the hospital were left standing. The water supply and sewerage systems have collapsed.

The scale of the most recent flooding is considerable. Those people made homeless have relocated to higher ground or areas unaffected by the water. They lack shelter, and now have no access to safe drinking water, and food is in scarce supply due to the destruction of storage facilities. In addition to the loss of homes and livelihoods, there is now a danger of exposure to the elements and the potential for water borne diseases.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

The Federation had already launched an Emergency Appeal (21/99) on August 25 to respond to floods in Umbada locality (west Omdurman). This appeal has received limited funding, allowing for the procurement of some relief supplies which will be distributed on September 14.

On the morning on September 11, an assessment mission to Dongola was arranged by the Higher Council of Civil Defense, with the participation of a Sudanese Red Crescent Society (SRCS) Headquarters representative. The mission included the Federal Minister of Interior, and immediately became involved in the ongoing relief operation and assisting the people in stabilising the situation. The SRCS's Northern State Branch office is relatively undamaged and has been transformed into a temporary health clinic that could start operating with the support of medical supplies from the hospital, since the two permanent SRCS clinics in Dongola have collapsed.

In response to the Dongola flooding, some 100 SRCS volunteers have been mobilised and more are reporting to the Branch office. In addition, the SRCS HQ and adjacent State Branches are providing trained staff to support the Branch management.

At present the Civil Defense Force is coordinating the relief effort.

Outstanding needs

The major immediate needs for flood victims, including those recently affected in Dongola, are shelter (1-2 tarpaulins per family), blankets (2 per family), medical supplies to fight diarrhoea, and sprayers and chemicals to prevent the further spread of malaria.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The SRCS and the Federation will continue to meet and exchange information with other agencies including the UN and NGO's.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

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