

HONDURAS: HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

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Given the vulnerability of Honduras to natural disasters, disaster preparedness and response continue to be priority activities in this country. Strengthening the Honduran Red Cross Society (HRC) is the key component of the Country Assistance Strategy and continues to be actively supported by the Federation and the Participating National Societies.

The context

In November 1998, Honduras was devastated by Hurricane Mitch, considered to be the worst natural disaster ever to hit the country. Strong winds, floods and landslides caused by torrential rains destroyed entire communities, agricultural crops, roads and bridges. The total damage caused by Mitch in Honduras was approximately 70 % of the Gross National Product (GNP) of the country. The death toll reached 5,657, while 8,085 people disappeared. The number of people directly or indirectly affected by the hurricane reached 1.5 million. Poverty, population growth and deterioration of the environment exacerbated the effects of the hurricane, creating a human disaster. Over one and a half years later, the country is still involved in an extensive and difficult rehabilitation process.

Latest events

Preparations for Easter Week were started well in advance by the Honduran Red Cross (HRC) branches and first-aid teams, with training and awareness campaigns for the public carried out to reduce accidents over the busy holiday season. During the week itself, first-aid posts were set up on the main roads of the country. The mortality rate this year has reduced considerably compared to former years, with a total death toll of 98.

The rainy season has started and resulted in floods in parts of the country. According to reports from the Costa Rican National Meteorological Institute, a total of 11 tropical storms have been announced

for this season. At least one of the seven hurricanes that will form in the Caribbean and Central American area could directly affect the isthmus. Lately, Honduras has reported only one death and dozens of damaged houses, the most affected people being those who live close to the rivers.

The inhabitants of Lima, in the north of the country, had to temporarily abandon their homes in view of the threat that the Chamelecón and Ulua rivers would overflow. The level of the rivers rises easily. After only a couple of hours of continuous rain, the rivers reach their highest level of 2.7 meters above normal. The rescue teams in the area have been coordinating in preparation for whatever kind of emergency or disaster that might happen. The Armed Forces have been working actively in constructing containing walls, to confront possible overflowing and the Permanent Contingency Commission of Honduras (COPECO) has called the population to be on alert.

The annual Human Development Report published by the United Nations Development Programme, underlines the fact that the living standard in Honduras has dropped by 80 % as a consequence of Hurricane Mitch. A special report on Honduras will be published by October this year.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

With support of the Federation and the Participating National Societies (PNS), the Honduran Red Cross (HRC) organized several activities to celebrate 8 May, World Red Cross Day. The Honduran Red Cross handed an award to the PNS and the Federation for their work during the reconstruction and rehabilitation process of the country. The Federation organized a photo-exposition and the Honduran Red Cross carried out its traditional parade through the streets of the capital.

The Federation continued to focus its work on disaster preparedness and institutional development activities. As of June, the finance and administration functions are being carried out by a local staff member. Participating National Societies are working together with the Honduran Red Cross in reconstruction and rehabilitation, as well as health, disaster preparedness and institutional development. A representative of the Japanese Red Cross (JRC) visited Honduras during this period in advance to the JRC support to the Federation's programmes.

Disaster Preparedness •

The Federation and the PNS are preparing contingency plans to deal with any potential emergencies during the current rainy season. As noted above, floods have already affected the North Coast resulting in one death and some infrastructure damage.

Activities to strengthen the disaster response capacity of the HRC are ongoing. The HRC Disaster Administration Office (OPADE) has now a staff member responsible for disaster-related documentation, statistics and information. During past emergencies, it became clear that it was necessary to strengthen this area, in order to have correct data and information on which to base the National Society's disaster response.

At the community level, the HRC with the support of the Federation, is carrying out a Community Education Programme, which consists of three main components: healthy home, disaster preparedness and finally the management of temporary shelters.

The table below represents progress in the Community Education Programme:

Department	1st level	2nd level	3rd level	Financed by
La Paz	1			Federation
Copán	1			Federation
Cortés	3	3	2	Federation

Water and sanitation - The provision of water and sanitation systems is included as an integral part of most of the Red Cross housing projects and is being implemented in a coordinated manner by the Participating National Societies. A total of 12,643 families will benefit from the various water and sanitation programmes being implemented or about to be initiated.

The Honduran Red Cross has signed a letter of intention with the SANAA, Action against Hunger and the Environmental Sanitation Unit of the Pan-American Health Organization. The purpose is to identify each organization's commitment in the execution of the different projects they are carrying out with the support of the American, German and Spanish National Societies.

All communities receive training in adequate maintenance and management of the water systems installed by the Red Cross. Community education is focused on the rational use and management of water, hygiene practices and management of urban solid waste as well as other aspects related to health and environment. All these efforts are directed to secure the feasibility of projects and to have a higher impact in the community.

Health •

The HRC is developing a long-term plan for community health and social well-being, focused on preventive health, child diseases, reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and health in case of disasters. Within the Honduran Red Cross a permanent structure will be developed to execute the health plan.

The Federation supported the HRC and the Pan-American Health Organization in the celebration of World Health Day. The slogan of this year was 'Safe Blood', with a focus on health promotion and protection, based on the donation of safe blood. In Honduras, a press conference was held and the commemorative activities will continue throughout the whole year.

In May, there was a cholera outburst in the Yarula municipality, more precisely in the Chaugiton community, where nine cases of cholera were reported as well as one death. The response from the Marcala branch was effective and timely. In this operation, the HRC has worked closely together with the Secretary of Health, forming brigades that went from house to house to encourage the population to take the adequate preventive measures to avoid propagation of cholera, giving instructions to the community on the handling of foods and water purification. Thanks to the intervention by the HRC and the Secretary of Health the outburst was controlled on time.

With support from the Canadian Red Cross, the HRC has carried out a workshop on "Review and Adjustment of the Community Primary Health Care Information System". This workshop forms part of the project the Canadian Red Cross is carrying out in Primary Health Care, striving to reduce the mother-child mortality/morbidity rates in the Comayagua department. The project benefits more than 30,000 people.

The Italian Red Cross continues its support to the National Blood Programme of the HRC. The Italian Red Cross is also developing a regional project to promote voluntary blood donations, which will include Honduras.

Institutional Development •

The Participating National Societies together with the Federation are supporting the strengthening of the management capacity of the National Society and its general structure in order to consolidate its financial and administrative bases and substantially improve compliance with its humanitarian mandate.

The Federation and the PNS work closely together with the branches, collaborating with strengthening their capacities regarding identification, formulation, execution and evaluation of community projects, providing the volunteers with experience in the management of community projects.

In April, the HRC National Rehabilitation Plan was finalized. The Federation's Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) was approved by the Executive Committee in May. The strategy outlines the main priorities and objectives of the HRC regarding institutional strengthening and achievement of its mission, as well as the role the Federation plays in this process and the support it gives to the HRC. Representatives of the PNS have been included in the process.

In collaboration with the Honduran Red Cross, the Federation has prepared a Communications Programme, which was approved by the President of the National Society in June. This programme, which is designed to support the Federation's on-going disaster preparedness and institutional development activities, consists of four projects: a disaster preparedness awareness campaign; the regional distance learning course for Red Cross communicators; an emergency information simulation; and activities related to the second anniversary of Hurricane Mitch including a video and a magazine promoting the work of the Red Cross in Honduras. Funding is sought for the implementation these projects.

Outstanding needs

Further funding is required in order to fully implement the Federation programmes in the areas of disaster preparedness and institutional development. Funding is also sought for the implementation of the communications projects.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

Meetings have been held with different international organizations (UNDP, World Bank) to promote the work of the Federation and to obtain information on potential funding.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

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