

# ***SUDAN: DROUGHT***

*10 December 1996*

*appeal no. 17/96*

*situation report no. 2*

*period covered: 4 November - 4 December 1996*

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*The Red Sea Hills region of north-eastern Sudan is susceptible to chronic drought. Years of relief food assistance have affected the traditional coping mechanisms of its agro-pastoralist population and created a level of dependency on external aid. The current deterioration of food security in Red Sea Hills became evident in March 1996 when the price of sorghum began to rise sharply and the Sudanese Red Crescent Society (SRC) early warning system identified a rapid decline in the population's nutritional status. A Government/NGO assessment in early summer confirmed that the rising prices of grain, the imbalance of trade and delayed summer rains were already affecting nutritional status. Following a Federation/SRC assessment in late September/early October an appeal was launched for CHF 3,902,000 to assist 160,000 vulnerable people.*

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## ***The Context***

Two years of negligible rainfall and crop failure have left the majority of the Beja People in the Red Sea State of north-eastern Sudan seriously threatened by famine. Droughts in 1984-85 and 1991-92 led to large-scale international intervention to assist 500,000 people threatened by starvation due to food shortages. The present situation raises similar fears.

The most vulnerable among the population are migrating from remote areas to live in makeshift shelters on the outskirts of towns. Almost half of the displaced children suffer from malnutrition. Vitamin deficiencies are also evident. Some 7,500 people have been displaced, with up to 90% of men in some areas leaving their homes in search of work.

Two-thirds of the people's livestock have died and most of the remaining animals have been sold to purchase grain. The Beja people traditionally rely on livestock for survival, trading the animals for grain and other food items. However, the harvest failure has made grain prices rocket, while livestock prices have plummeted due to the animals' poor health.

Following an assessment mission to the Red Sea Hills from 28 September to 10 October the International Federation and the Sudanese Red Crescent launched an appeal to assist 160,000 people in Sinkat and Halaib Districts with rations of oil, pulses and cereals for three months. The SRC/Federation assessment team, and an Oxfam team visiting the area simultaneously, considered some 240,000 out of a total of 355,000 in need of immediate relief.

SRC/Federation will cover needs of 155,500 people while Oxfam will assist the remaining 84,500 in neighbouring Rural Port Sudan and North Tokar. According to recent assessments by SRC/Federation staff the situation is deteriorating rapidly as people are still awaiting the arrival of food.

UN Security Council Sanctions on Sudan Airways and other Sudanese airlines, scheduled to be imposed on November 15, have been postponed one month. This follows a request from Russia, France and Egypt for the Secretary General to assess the humanitarian effects of sanctions. The imposition of sanctions is expected to have severe impacts on domestic flights which might hamper relief efforts.

## *Latest Events*

A nutritionist from Khartoum University was sent to the area on November 28 to evaluate the situation. She found no significant signs of improvement since the last assessment at the end of October. Displacement to urban areas continues at the same rate as before and increased population movements are expected as no general food distribution has taken place in remote areas.

A team from MSF Holland which visited the area from November 3 to 14 verified that there were many cases of moderate malnutrition and that severe malnutrition was found in some areas. The team also confirmed high levels of vitamin A deficiency. The general analysis put forward by SRC/Federation and Oxfam was borne out: poor harvest, increasing sorghum prices, half the livestock dead and increased famine. It will take at least three years to recoup the loss in livestock, according to MSF.

The MSF mission concluded that "the numbers of displaced could reach catastrophic levels [if the local harvest fails], not only in terms of increased needs in emergency assistance but also by hindering development initiatives in the area".

UNICEF has also confirmed reports of widespread serious malnutrition.

Winter is making the health situation worse. In Sinkat province the need for shelter and blankets for displaced population is urgent. The winter rains are delayed and the January harvest is expected to be poor.

Supplementary feeding at six SRC centres is targeting 7,400 of the most vulnerable. WFP has donated 66 mt of beans and vegetable oil. Due to the lack of cereals and Unimix this activity cannot continue for the full period required.

Oxfam is providing food to displaced in camps outside the towns. SRC has been requested to take over this distribution in December in Sinkat, where SRC/Federation will provide a general food distribution.

Sorghum prices are still high but decreasing slightly due to the harvest in nearby Kassala and Gedaref States. After reaching its peak in September at 70,000 Sudanese pounds per 90 kg sack prices fell to 37,000 by the end of November. These prices are still out the reach of the Beja who have lost all sources of income.

Livestock prices are still very low and decreasing. In October the terms of trade were 15 goats to one 90 kg sack sorghum. In the end of November this had increased to 17 goats per sack.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent Action***

In the absence of adequate level of donor response, the Federation Secretariat has finalised procurement of 520 mt of beans and 195 mt of palm oil internationally. A further 726 mt of Unimix has been sourced in the region through the Regional Delegation in Nairobi.

SRC/Federation have received the necessary approval from the Ministry of Foreign Trade to purchase up to 6,100 mt of sorghum. The in-country tendering process took place in late November and bids are currently being compared by the Federation Secretariat. The final decision on whether to purchase internationally or in Sudan will consider cost efficiency and delivery period.

Due to the poor conditions of Federation vehicles in Sudan two Standard 1 Landcruisers have been purchased through the Regional Delegation for use in the operational area. They are due in Port Sudan by the end of December.

The Government's Humanitarian Aid Commission has committed itself to assist in facilitating all requirements for tax exemptions. A new Customs Agreement was signed by the Head of Delegation and the Customs Police on November 18. This agreement, valid for one year, will facilitate tax exemptions on imports of relief goods and other relief items such as vehicles, computers and spare parts. It is essential as the Ministry of Finance cancelled all such agreements with NGOs in June 1996. All consignments to Sudan must now be addressed to the Federation Delegation in Sudan.

The Federation Relief co-ordinator and logistics co-ordinator visited Red Sea State at the end of November to prepare a relief and distribution plan, which will form the basis of the logistical operation. In collaboration with SRC Port Sudan State Branch an allocation plan with 47 final distribution points located between 20 and 300 km outside the main towns has been elaborated.

The SRC Port Sudan State Branch and all local SRC Branches in the affected areas continue preparations for fulfilling their role in the operation including:

- Recruitment of volunteers for the loading/unloading process;
- Storing and distribution;
- Training of monitors;
- Maintenance of SRC vehicle fleet which will be used in part of the operation ;
- Arranging for storage of food and fuel;

- Finalising the construction of the main warehouse in Port Sudan, which can accommodate more than 3,000 mt of food;
- Making contacts with local authorities to secure access to the population;
- Gaining permission for delegates to travel in the area;
- Establishing a proper registration mechanism.

The relief operation is a joint SRC/Federation operation in which the roles and responsibilities of the National Society and the Federation Delegation have been specified in an Operational Protocol which was signed, on behalf of the Secretary General of the Federation, by the Head of Delegation and the Secretary General of the SRC on 15 November. The Protocol places special emphasis on the requirements for standard financial and reporting procedures of the Federation to be followed.

## *Outstanding needs*

Although some of the food supplies needed have been procured by the Federation, financial and material support towards this appeal is still urgently needed. In addition to items outlined in the Appeal (no. 17/96), the onset of winter means a supply of 70,000 blankets is now needed.

SRC/Federation still require the services of a second Relief Administrator and a Nutritionist

## *External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media*

### **NGOs •**

SRC/Federation continue to maintain close co-operation with Oxfam UK as both organisations are undertaking complementary relief activities in the affected areas. No other NGOs are present in the Red Sea Hills but MSF Netherlands and MSF France are considering involvement. Both agencies have been in contact with the SRC/Federation.

### **UN Agencies •**

As mentioned, UNICEF has confirmed the presence of severe malnutrition and quantities of Unimix have already been distributed. WFP has requested authorisation for an assessment mission to the Red Sea States. As numerous independent and inter-governmental assessment missions have already taken place, and all have reached similar conclusions, the authorities say that another assessment mission cannot be justified now that the population is anticipating relief assistance.

The Federation Head of Delegation has requested a meeting with the WFP country representative to discuss WFP's position and to assess the possibility of its participation in the delivery of food relief to severely affected communities.

### **Government •**

The Government, through its Humanitarian Aid Commission has requested International organisations to intervene to assist the population in Red Sea State.

## ***Contributions***

See Annex 1.

## ***Conclusion***

The recent decrease in sorghum prices and the arrival of winter rains will not help the targeted population whose purchasing power continues to remain low to non-existent. This is coupled with a level of malnutrition requiring immediate inputs of relief food.

The current needs and immediate actions to be considered by the Federation and its members will be discussed with interested Participating National Societies at a meeting in Geneva on 17 December.

In the meantime, international partners are urged to assist the SRC and the Federation to deliver humanitarian aid to the needy in Red Sea State.

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