

MADAGASCAR: CYCLONES AND FLOODS

13 March, 2000

Information Bulletin N° 02

The Disaster

The disastrous consequences of cyclones Eline (mid-February) and Gloria (early March) in the central and northern districts of Madagascar have now been more precisely assessed by the government's National Relief Council. Approximately 205 persons have been killed, 84,000 very seriously affected (either homeless or still isolated by the floods), and another 385,000 affected to a lesser degree with damage to housing, crops and heavy livestock losses.

Considered particularly critical is the situation in areas of Moroansetra (north-east) where about 60,000 people are still isolated by the flood waters, the areas of Vatamanory, Mananoro and Marotomba (central east) where Eline entered the country, and Marondava (central west), a low-lying area where Eline exited the island and where Gloria, coming from the north-west, subsequently hit.

Public health officers of some of the affected areas report the following increases in illness during the 15-23 February period: 434 cases of malaria (the norm: 350/week), 211 cases of diarrhoea (the norm: 156/week), 135 cases of dysentery (the norm 31/week), and 475 cases of upper respiratory infections (the norm: 322/week). Action to prevent the spread of these diseases, as well as cholera, of which there has been an upsurge in recent months, is an urgent priority for the Ministry of Health. A special health assessment is being initiated this week, in co-operation with WHO and other agencies, including the Federation and the Malagasy Red Cross Society (MRCS).

Despite progress made in the official general damage assessment (indicating the reopening of some strategic roads), the figures are still evolving, and information related to the damage to infrastructure and the economic impact of the two disasters is not yet available. The Ministry of Interior's provisional estimate for urgent assistance to victims is about MGF 25 billion (or about CHF 6.3 million).

Government Action and the International Response

On Thursday, 9 March, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched an International Appeal to assist in the purchase, transportation, warehousing and distribution of food, water purification items, medicines, hygiene articles, shelter, roof repairing items and to carry out a nutritional and agricultural needs assessment.

The National Relief Council, chaired by the Interior Minister (of which the Malagasy Red Cross is a member), is meeting almost daily with representatives of foreign governments and agencies supporting their action. WFP, UNICEF, FNUAP, OCHA, and other UN agencies announced the immediate release of roughly MGF 5 billion (or USD 720,000) last Thursday, 9 March.

As of 10 March, the National Relief Council had available 426.6 metric tonnes of food supplies from national stocks and UNICEF, MSF, and WFP donations. A detailed plan for the distribution of this food has been drafted, but the pace of its implementation remains slow given the damage to infrastructure (continued flooding of many roads, and lack of air transportation resources) Only 35 mt has been distributed to date, but the distribution pace is expected to improve this week with the opening of some key roads and the support of four French military helicopters launched from the French navy ship Jeanne d'Arc.

Red Cross and Red Crescent Action

CHF 50,000 has been released from the Federation's Disaster Response Relief Fund (DREF) to initiate the assistance and assessment operations.

The Malagasy Red Cross, which has a good decentralised structure, has been assessing the damage and needs in close co-operation with the National Relief Council, to which it has provided three experienced volunteers to assist in carrying out the evaluation. The National Society has also helped in the implementation of the Council's food distribution plan, and has distributed blankets and other relief items from its own limited stocks. As the potential for a worsening cholera situation is one of the country's main concerns, the National Society is intensifying its prevention education campaign within the affected communities.

An International Federation Delegate, who arrived in Antananarivo on Saturday 11 March, is co-operating with the National Society in the preparation of a plan of action and co-ordination with Government and other agencies. A Team Leader (the Head of Delegation for Tanzania), the Nairobi Regional Health Delegate, and the Nairobi Regional Information Delegate will arrive on Tuesday, 14 March. The French Red Cross Society, who had earlier completed an assessment of the effects of Cyclone Eline, in collaboration with the MRCS and in co-ordination with Nairobi Regional Delegation, are sending a logistics delegate who will arrive on Friday, 17 March.

The Netherlands Red Cross is sending an aircraft loaded with blankets, kitchen sets, plastic sheeting, water purification tablets and other medical-relief articles, due to arrive on Wednesday, 15 March.

Needs

The Federation is in the process of preparing a Preliminary Appeal containing the detailed list of needs and a Plan of Action, to be launched later this week. For the time being, the Federation and MRCS will support the needs and actions expressed through the National Relief Council.

Peter Rees-Gildea
Director
Operations Funding and Reporting
Department

Bekele Geleta
Director
Africa Department