

# INFORMATION BULLETIN



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies  
Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge  
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja  
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

## WEST AFRICA: FOOD INSECURITY

1 April 2005

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### In Brief

This Information Bulletin (no. 1/2005) is being issued for information only. The Federation is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time.

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### The Situation

A serious food crisis is developing in the Sahel region, particularly Mauritania, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso. The desert locust invasion which swept across the semi-arid Sahel region of West Africa in 2004 was the worst of its kind in 15 years and was accompanied by localised drought in many of the areas worst affected.

In October 2003, the FAO had warned about the impending invasion; however, concrete measures were only taken in the summer of 2004 when locusts ravaged crops in Mauritania, Niger and Mali, spreading further into Senegal, Gambia, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde and Chad. The FAO took the lead role in fighting the locusts, mainly by spraying pesticides from aircrafts, an action that has also led to health problems in some areas.

Though the spraying helped to control the swarms to a certain degree, it came too late for many farmers especially in isolated geographical areas because many had already lost most of their crops to the locusts before the spraying occurred. The effects are most severe in communities with limited coping mechanisms thereby leading to severe food insecurity.

The exact severity of the food crisis has yet to be assessed; current estimates indicate 60% of Mauritanian households are food-insecure. A further 3.5 million people in Niger, 3 million in Burkina Faso and 1.7 million in Mali are also affected. Recent price rises for basic goods in Niger resulted in a nationwide protest.

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An FAO report says that out of an estimated 3.5 million hectares infested with locusts, only about 2.3 million hectares were salvaged through spraying of pesticide by the end of 2004. The report further says that an estimated 9.3 million people have been negatively affected by the combined impact of the locusts and reduced rainfall leading to a serious food crisis and causing the workforce to leave their families and traditional villages in search of food and work. This migration has led to internal conflicts: 500 homes were burnt in Po province, Burkina Faso, in response to unwanted migrants. School attendance has also dropped considerably as children have joined the work force to help care for their families.

Tensions are also building up between farmers, migrants and nomads as the livestock of the nomads competes for what remained of the crops. Market prices for staple food have risen considerably. Livestock prices have fallen as farmers sell their animals so as to buy food; women are forced to sell their jewellery and spare clothes for similar reasons. Villagers collect tree leaves to prepare as food.

Desert Locust swarms are maturing in Northwest Africa and egg-laying has started in NE Algeria. Several immature swarms persist in southern Senegal and Guinea; one reached the Sierra Leone border. A few immature swarms have started to form near the Sudan/Egypt border where small hopper bands are present. These are likely to return in large numbers by mid-2005; this would lead to greater food insecurity in the Sahel countries. (Source: FAO, Desert Locust Information Service of the Migratory Pests Groups)

The United Nations has increased its 2005 appeal for West Africa by USD 38 million in order to help countries battling with the aftermath of last locust invasion and localized drought (Source: Reuters' AlertNet.org, 31 March 2005).



**A deserted village.**



**A farmer shows what remains of his harvest.**

## Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The Federation has participated in inter-agency and emergency meetings, in UN-OCHA seminars, and in a December 2004 conference organized by International Centre for Combating Drought in the Sahel (CILSS) in Niamey. The Federation is finalizing its action plan to address the above, and is preparing for a potential locust invasion by mid-2005.

Since the beginning of the crisis, the Federation Regional Delegation in Dakar:

- Is monitoring the situation through information received from the national societies of the affected countries (Burkina Faso, Gambia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal) and from UN organisations working in those countries;
- Is providing technical assistance to national societies on contingency planning and risk reduction;
- Is coordinating with governmental and non-governmental organisations in a bid to define the role of the Movement and necessary actions to be taken;
- Has issued two information bulletins<sup>1</sup> related to the locust invasion (10 October and 10 November 2004);

<sup>1</sup> West Africa: Locust Invasion, Information Bulletin no. 1 ([http://www.ifrc.org/cgi/pdf\\_appeals.pl?rpts04/wa041010.pdf](http://www.ifrc.org/cgi/pdf_appeals.pl?rpts04/wa041010.pdf)) and Information Bulletin no. 2 ([http://www.ifrc.org/cgi/pdf\\_appeals.pl?rpts04/wa041110.pdf](http://www.ifrc.org/cgi/pdf_appeals.pl?rpts04/wa041110.pdf))

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- Has deployed the regional disaster management coordinator to national societies and affected communities, along with DM officers and RDRT members of the national societies in Niger and Burkina Faso so as to assess the situation, discuss possible activities with affected national societies, meet with governmental, NGO and UN officials.

### **Coordination**

The Federation, represented by the Regional Delegation for West and Central Africa and the Sahel Sub-Regional Office, has been working closely with OCHA, WFP, FAO and other organizations based in Dakar. The national societies of the affected countries are also in close contact with their governments and other agencies monitoring the impact of the situation. Regardless, the lack of financial and human resources at all levels does not allow for proper assistance to vulnerable communities to cope with the current situation and prepare for the next locust invasion expected in mid-2005.

The national societies of some of the concerned countries have suggested certain activities to respond to the situation: in-depth analysis of the situation, assistance with food and cereal banks, volunteer mobilization from local committees, and awareness programmes for the most affected populations. However, a more concrete strategy needs to be developed through the following process:

- Assessment missions to the most affected countries (Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali), comprised of national society/DM coordinator, RDRT member from a neighbouring national society, and Federation staff;
- Consultation with WFP and FAO in affected countries to define the national society and Federation role;
- Planning workshop with assessment teams to share results of assessments and develop individual national society action plans;
- Implementation of action plans, monitoring and follow-up;

*All International Federation Operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.*

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*For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeals for Africa on the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org/where/appeals/africaappeals.asp>.*

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