

NIGERIA: PIPELINE EXPLOSION

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The Disaster

A burst oil pipeline near Jesse Town in Ethiope West Local Government Area in Delta State resulted in a fire and explosion which occurred on Saturday, 17 October, killing over 400 people and injuring hundreds of others. Because of the chronically severe shortage of petrol and diesel in Nigeria, thousands of people had been involved in the illegal siphoning of fuel from the burst pipeline. One eyewitness account indicated that a youth lit a cigarette, igniting the entire petrol-drenched area. Many of the injured were evacuated to neighbouring hospitals in Sapele, Nene, Eku and Mosogar, but many others were sheltered in the villages for fear that they might be arrested for stealing the fuel. Many of the burn victims died over the following days. Survivors were treated in the hospitals, with some of the worst being moved to the Benin University Teaching Hospital which has better facilities. The death toll of the explosion is now estimated to be in excess of 900.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

Within hours of the disaster, the Nigerian Red Cross Society (NRCS) Warri Branch in Delta State mobilized their volunteers to assist in the evacuation of people from the site, and to provide first aid treatment to some of the injured. The Edo State Red Cross Branch sent a team to the area to carry out an assessment of the situation, and to assist with the immediate needs of the injured. An assessment report was received by the NRCS Headquarters on October 20, followed up by an assessment by the Emergency Preparedness Officer (EPO) conducted on October 22. The Federation provided CHF 10,000 from the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) to support the Nigerian Red Cross interventions.

The assessment reports were shared with a number of diplomatic missions in Lagos, resulting in a number of contributions from the US, German, and Japanese embassies, as well as some private companies, in order to provide immediate assistance to victims in the form of medical materials and food. Over the following three weeks, relief supplies were transported to Delta State as and when they were made available, and distributed by the Nigerian Red Cross to the different hospitals that were treating the victims. The Edo State Red Cross Branch had 4 doctors and 12 nurses who assisted at the clinics and hospitals in and around Sapele from October 23 to November 4. 54 volunteers from the Warri Division were also mobilized during the same period to assist in the hospitals and in the distribution of the items, as well as tracing victims who had not been taken to the hospitals. The volunteers also carried out health education work in the villages. Red Cross vehicles were employed to ferry the injured from those clinics which could not cope with their injuries to other better equipped hospitals, particularly the Teaching Hospital in Benin. The operation was co-ordinated by the National Headquarters Emergency Preparedness Officer who was based in the area for much of this period. Monitoring visits were made by the NRCS Disaster Relief Adviser and the Federation Health Delegate.

Needs

A final assessment of outstanding needs carried out by the EPO on December 7 and 8 concluded that some of the hospitals which were still treating patients were running low on basic medical materials including antibiotics, bandages, bed sheets, etc. The EPO recommended that these supplies be re-enforced, as well as that the remaining patients and their relatives would benefit from a one-time distribution of high protein biscuits. This will be done during the week of December 21 -27. Funds remaining from the DREF and a donation of 6,250 USD from Chevron will be used to purchase these supplies. Following an assessment trip to the area in the second week in December, the US embassy advised the Nigerian Red Cross that they would provide a further 10,000 USD to procure medical materials.

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