



GABON: CHIKUNGUNYA VIRUS IN LIBREVILLE

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The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 185 countries.

In Brief

This DREF Bulletin is being issued based on the situation described below reflecting the information available at this time. CHF 40,000 (USD 33,058 or EUR 24,390) has been allocated from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) to respond to the needs in this operation. This operation is expected to be implemented over three months, and will be completed by the end of August 2007. Unearmarked funds to repay DREF are encouraged.

[<Click here to go directly to the attached Map>](#)

This operation is aligned with the International Federation's Global Agenda, which sets out four broad goals to meet the Federation's mission to "improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity".

Global Agenda Goals:

- Reduce the numbers of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.
- Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.
- Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.
- Reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion and promote respect for diversity and human dignity.

Background and current situation

For about a month now, cases of a disease unfamiliar to the Gabonese population have been registered in hospitals in Libreville and Owendo. The symptoms of the disease include fever, headache, fatigue, muscle soreness and severe joint pain, and are at times accompanied by skin disorders and digestive problems such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. Samples taken from some patients were sent to Marseille, France, for laboratory analysis. The analysis revealed that the 'unfamiliar' disease is caused by the chikungunya virus, which is transmitted to human beings by the bite of an infected mosquito.

Presently, no vaccine or specific antiviral treatment for chikungunya fever is available. Treatment is symptomatic in order to relieve symptoms of the fever as well as aching. The use of an experimental vaccine cannot be seen as an element of medium-term response to a chikungunya epidemic. According to a Ministry of Health official, over 5,500 cases have been registered during the past one month in Libreville alone. There is a concern that if nothing is done fast, the larger population of Libreville and surrounding localities might get infected with the virus, whose effective treatment is yet to be found. However, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, no deaths, neuroinvasive cases, or hemorrhagic cases related to chikungunya infection have been conclusively documented in the scientific literature.¹

¹ For more on Chikungunya (from the CDC's website), refer to: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/Chikungunya/chikvfact.htm>

Gabon: Chikungunya virus in Libreville; DREF Bulletin no. MDRGA001

Libreville – the capital of Gabon – is a cosmopolitan city that brings together all the ethnic groups existing in Gabon, people from other African countries and from Europe. The city is located on the estuary of the Komo River, which flows into the Atlantic Ocean, near the Gulf of Guinea. It is close to a key industrial and seaport zone in the south (Owendo). According to 2005 statistics, the estimated population of Libreville is 578,156, representing over one third of the country's total population (1.38 million inhabitants).

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

As soon as Gabonese Red Cross Society (GRCS) authorities were informed of the situation, they appointed members to represent the National Society in the crisis committee that has been put in place by the Ministry of Health (MoH) to respond to the disaster. The National Society has been requested by the MoH to handle the social mobilization aspect of the intervention. To enable the National Society to effectively play the role assigned by MoH, the International Federation has allocated CHF 40,000 from its Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF).

Action by the Government and UN agencies

After being informed of the health emergency, the Government of Gabon held a cabinet meeting on 10 May 2007 in Libreville. During the meeting, an ad hoc committee was established to fight the chikungunya virus. This committee is composed of Ministry of Health representatives, Libreville and Owendo council authorities, military health authorities and the Gabonese Red Cross Society.

Patients with the chikungunya virus are currently being taken care of at the “Centre hospitalier de Libreville”, “Hôpital d’instruction des armées”, the China-Gabon Cooperation Hospital, the Estuaire Regional Hospital in Melen and the Jeanne Ebori Hospital. Additionally, the government recommended the reinforcement of environmental hygiene by removal/proper disposal of refuse that retains water. Sensitization campaigns are also planned over the radio and television to help curb the spread of the disease.

United Nations (UN) agencies, particularly the World Health Organization (WHO), have been providing a multi-faceted support to facilitate the work of government in responding to this health emergency.

Needs

The spread of the chikungunya infection is facilitated by poor hygiene and sanitation conditions, particularly since stagnant water, refuse and waste water provide ready mosquito breeding sites. At individual level, infected persons should be protected from further mosquito exposure (by staying indoors and/or under a mosquito net during the first few days of illness) so that they avoid contributing to the chikungunya transmission cycle.

The best way of avoiding contracting the disease is by using physical prevention tools like clothes (by wearing long sleeved shirts and pants) and staying under mosquito nets, as there is no vaccine or preventive drug. The use of insect repellents is recommended, but pregnant women and children below 12 years must observe certain precautions. Repellents should not be used for new-born babies (less than two months old); rather, insecticide-treated mosquito nets should be used.

At community level, vector control actions should be taken day and night because some mosquitoes are daytime biters. The most efficient medium and long-term procedure is to eliminate mosquito breeding sites by ensuring that there is no stagnant water in and around houses. Where this is not possible, larvicide should be used to disinfect the environment. In case of an epidemic, insecticides should be sprayed all over to combat the spread of adult mosquitoes within a short-term period and to reduce the risk of infection.

Short term needs: In order to stop the spread of the virus, there is an urgent need for the Gabonese Red Cross Society to organize effective sensitization campaigns. To that effect, sensitization materials such as folders and posters are needed. The sensitization will be done following the door-to-door approach to ensure behavioural change at household level.

Medium term needs: Individual and environmental hygiene, and advocacy before administrative authorities.

Long term needs: Volunteers from Libreville and Owendo local committees of the Gabonese Red Cross Society need to be trained on the ARCHI 2010² approach and the Participatory Health and Hygiene Transformation (PHAST) methodology – a methodology that empowers people to respond to health emergencies adequately.

² ARCHI 2010- refer to: <http://www.ifrc.org/what/health/archi/>

Proposed action

Goal: Improve the health condition of the populations that are exposed to the chikungunya virus.

Objective 1: To sensitize the populations to the signs and symptoms of chikungunya, and encourage them to go to the nearest health centre.

Objective 2: To promote individual and environmental hygiene in order to stop the chikungunya transmission chain.

Activities:

- Training 70 Red Cross volunteers on behavioural change communication (BCC) and on information, education and communication (IEC);
- Promoting individual and environmental hygiene, with emphasis on destruction of potential mosquito breeding sites, drainage of stagnant water, refuse disposal and drainage of waste water;
- Disseminating simple messages on cleanliness;
- Advocating before administrative authorities and partners.

Expected results:

- Red Cross volunteers have become community watchers (to act as an early alert system), liaison officers between health centres and the community (to promote prevention and timely treatment), and a communication channel linking the community, the Red Cross and government authorities;
- 80% of the population knows the signs and symptoms of chikungunya infection and go to the nearest health centre at the first alert;
- 80% of the population observes simple individual and environmental hygiene rules, and knows how to destroy larva breeding sites.

For further information specifically related to this operation please contact:

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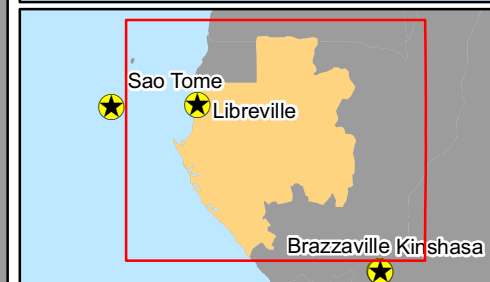
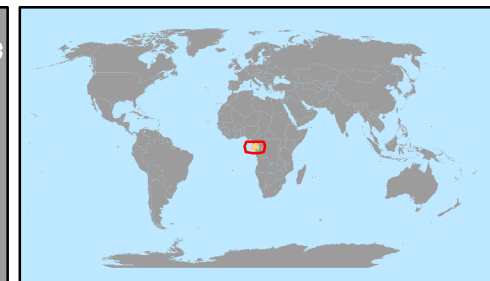
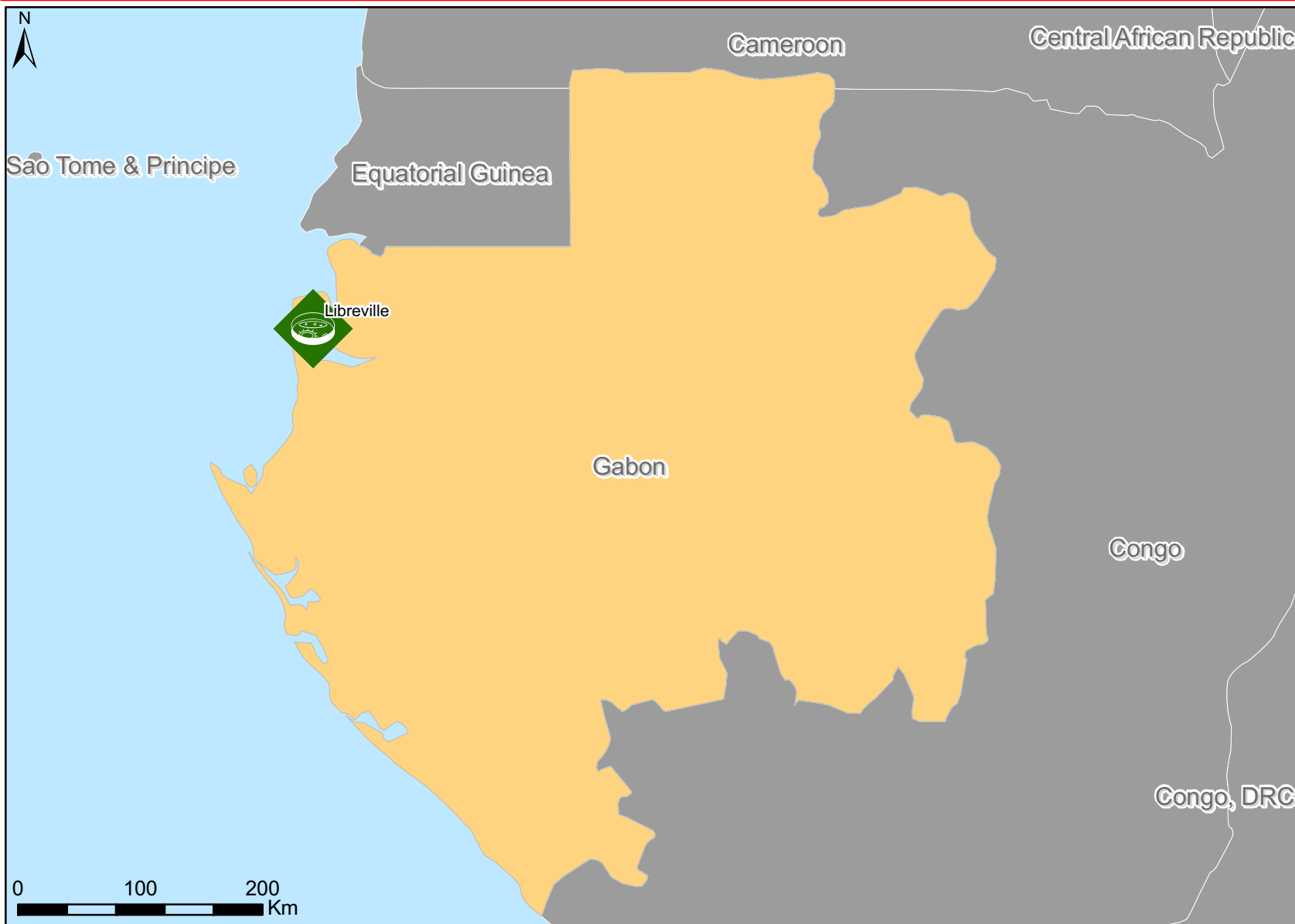
All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations \(NGO's\) in Disaster Relief](#) and is committed to the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

For longer-term programmes in this or other countries or regions, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal. For support to or for further information concerning Federation programmes or operations in this or other countries, or for national society profiles, please also access the Federation's website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

[<Map below; click here to return to the title page>](#)



Gabon: Epidemic



Libreville, the capital city of Gabon, has been hit by an epidemic of chikungunya which has claimed more than five lives among the 5,500 reported cases with about 300 new cases being added to this toll daily.

The epidemic started about four weeks ago when cases of a strange disease were being registered in hospitals of Libreville and Owendo



Chikungunya



Capitals