

# DREF operation update



International Federation  
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

## Benin: Meningitis

DREF operation n° MDRBJ001  
GLIDE n° EP-2008-000027-BEN  
Update n° 1  
9 June, 2008

The International Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) is a source of un-earmarked money created by the Federation in 1985 to ensure that immediate financial support is available for Red Cross and Red Crescent response to emergencies. The DREF is a vital part of the International Federation's disaster response system and increases the ability of national societies to respond to disasters.

**Period covered by this update:** March to April, 2008.

**Summary:** CHF 50,000 (USD 44,000 or EUR 30,000) was allocated from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) on 21 February, 2008 to support the national society in delivering assistance to some 1.8 million beneficiaries, or to replenish disaster preparedness stocks.

With the outbreak of meningitis in four regions of Benin which had claimed 29 lives, the Red Cross has mobilized its team of volunteers for sensitization and social mobilization for vaccination in the affected regions. With support from the Federation DREF allocation, the national society has mobilized, trained and deployed its volunteers in the affected areas. For effective implementation, the Red Cross worked in partnership with community chiefs, local authorities and local radio stations. Through its activities, the Red Cross of Benin has reached 88% of its target beneficiaries with messages on the symptoms of meningitis, preventive measures, referral of cases to health centres and the importance of vaccination.  
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## The situation

A meningitis outbreak occurred in Atacora, Donga, Alibori and Borgou counties of Benin Republic between January and February 2008. During this period, a total of 289 cases were reported with 29 deaths as the epidemic was spreading. Thanks to an early warning from the World Health Organization (WHO), also due to the fact that the bacteria thrive during the dry season of January-May, the Red Cross of Benin carried out an assessment in the affected counties. With support from the Federation through DREF allocation, the national society volunteers have carried out sensitization and mobilization activities in the affected communities. Though the exercise delayed due to electioneering campaign across the country, the Red Cross volunteers carried their messages to the target communities and referred some cases to health centres.

## Coordination and partnerships

With support from the Netherlands Red Cross through the DREF allocation and technical support from the West Coast regional office of the Federation, the Red Cross of Benin has been working with the ministries of Health (MoH) and Family Affairs in the social mobilization campaign. As the lead agency in social mobilization for vaccination, the Red Cross of Benin is working with government authorities in the affected regions to implement the planned activities. The national society has been working in partnership with local radio stations in the affected areas to reach the target populations. The Red Cross also solicited the support of local chiefs and community heads in the mobilization activities.

# Red Cross and Red Crescent action

## Progress towards objectives

### Emergency health

**Objective:** Reduce the vulnerability of the population and the most vulnerable to meningitis in Atacora, Donga, Alibori and Borgou districts.

#### Activities planned:

Activities planned	Expected results
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Train 300 Red Cross volunteers;</li> <li>• Sensitize the affected population on the symptoms and preventive measures against meningitis through home visits and public discussions;</li> <li>• Mobilize the affected population for vaccination;</li> <li>• Detect and refer early cases to health centres;</li> <li>• Monitor the expanded programme on immunization;</li> <li>• Carry out advocacy to the government and other actors;</li> <li>• Produce and distribute IEC materials on meningitis transmission and preventive measures.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The knowledge and capacity of 300 Red Cross volunteers in the affected areas have improved;</li> <li>• Vulnerable communities are protected against meningitis through awareness activities of the Red Cross;</li> <li>• Population in the affected areas have actively participated in vaccination campaign;</li> <li>• The populations have been sensitized on early alert and have been able to detect first symptoms of the epidemic;</li> <li>• Affected populations have been referred to the nearest health centres for treatment;</li> <li>• IEC materials have been produced and distributed for awareness education.</li> </ul>

#### Progress and impact:

The Red Cross of Benin has set up eight training centres, one in each locality for Red Cross volunteers. Each centre has conducted 30 hour training for the 300 selected volunteers in the locality. All participants were present throughout the duration of the training facilitated by Red Cross officials and health officials from the MoH. The training focused on the techniques of reaching the population with the vaccination message, the symptoms and preventive measures against meningitis. During the training, Red Cross volunteers were also taught how to apply the door-to-door approach using local languages.

The training sessions have enhanced volunteers' knowledge in community mobilization. Volunteers have therefore carried out awareness campaigns on the effect of meningitis. The Red Cross volunteers have sensitized populations, particularly parents, on the symptoms of the epidemic and how to refer cases to the nearest health centre using local languages and IEC materials produced for this purpose. Some parents who could not read had the volunteers explaining the contents and messages in the leaflet to them.

In its efforts to reach the largest part of the population in affected areas, the Red Cross through its volunteers' network has organized public discussions on the epidemic. Under the guidance and lead of local branch supervisors, the Red Cross has delivered messages related to not only meningitis epidemic but also other diseases. The public discussions also included question and answer session with Red Cross volunteers. During the session, the Red Cross volunteers also performed drama play in local languages to disseminate messages. Some 59 out of the 61 discussion sessions have been carried out.

The Red Cross has produced 13 radio messages in French and local languages on the meningitis epidemic and the vaccination campaign in the affected area. The national society used this medium to further explain the symptoms of the disease, what to do when a case is suspected and the importance of vaccination.

The training has refreshed the knowledge of the volunteers in community mobilization and strengthening the capacity of the Red Cross volunteers at branch level. Through the house-to-house campaign in local languages, the Red Cross has reached many homes. The question and answer session and the home visit have shown that 88% of the people interviewed have understood the first symptoms of the disease and the immediate step to take in such case.



Red Cross volunteers during mobilization campaign

### Challenges:

The national society had to postpone the starting date of the campaign because of the legislative election. However, activities have been carried out smoothly.

## How we work

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.

The International Federation's activities are aligned with its 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.

## Contact information

### For further information specifically related to this operation please contact:

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