DREF operation update

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Czech Republic: Floods

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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: 3 July to 30 September 2009.

Summary: CHF 295,187 was allocated from the International Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) on 3 July 2009 to support the Czech Red Cross in delivering assistance to some 5,000 beneficiaries.

The Czech Red Cross local branches, of the registered 924 application forms for the financial contribution to clean private wells, have paid out 513. The Czech Red Cross remains confident that all will be settled by early November. Lessons learnt in this innovative operation are being gathered and analysed.

This operation is expected to be implemented in four months, and completed by early November 2009. In line with Federation reporting standards, the Final Report (narrative and financial) is due 90 days after the end of the operation (by February 2010).

The major donors to the DREF are the Irish, Italian, Netherlands and Norwegian governments and ECHO. Details of all donors can be found on http://www.ifrc.org/what/disasters/responding/drs/tools/dref/donors.asp

The Czech Red Cross mobilized volunteers quickly to meet the initial needs, and were involved in clean-up too. Photo: Czech Red Cross, Moravia

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The situation

The floods came quickly and were devastating. Here water sweeps away cars and other debris in Moravia. Photo: Czech Red Cross

Three regions of the Czech Republic- Silesia, Olomouc and South Bohemia- were hit by heavy rainfall in late June, leading to severe flooding. Eastern parts of the country were the first to be affected on 26 June, with the rains moving to the south-western regions in the evening of 27 June.

The flooding was very different from that which the Czech Republic experienced in 2002. This time the rainfall was sudden and extremely heavy, quickly leading to flash floods, but after this intense downpour of around two hours the sun came out and shone brightly. The damage to people's homes and the water supply had, however, been done.

In total 13 people lost their lives. Across the three regions officials put the number of people whose houses were seriously damaged at around 14,450. These are distinctly rural areas of the country, where many senior citizens live for at least the majority of the year, and where there are also a number of weekend homes or cottages.

In the immediate aftermath of the flooding most people were able to stay with their neighbours or relatives, as they wished. Those without alternative temporary places to stay were accommodated in schools and gymnasiums. The south of Bohemia suffered further flooding in early July, complicating the initial clean-up efforts and action plans for recovery because it flooded already cleaned wells and also those which were not flooded in the first place. The hold-up meant that the water analysis could not be done. The hygienists do analyses also of well of citizens who do not need them as a source of drinking water.

Some three months after the floods, the situation is stable, with rivers back to their normal levels; often they are no more than streams that one could scarcely believe, as the director of one Red Cross branch exclaimed have "flooded with such raw ferocity."

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The Red Cross branches in the affected areas and the headquarters monitored reports coming from the metrological centre, updated every 30 minutes. As the rains descended quickly, there was no advance warning to prepare. Local branches started working immediately addressing the needs of people for drinking water, and occasionally with accommodation, but often not required because people prefer living with friends or relatives.

The main crisis emergency unit of the Czech Red Cross immediately after the first flooding began providing first aid, advice and monitoring the relief operations. Approximately 500 volunteers and staff were involved.

One of the priorities identified early on, in consultation with the authorities and people affected was to clean the wells used by the households as the only source of drinking water. The wells had been flooded and contaminated, limiting the access and availability to potable water. The Czech Red Cross had had limited experience with cash distributions, and called upon support from the International Federation to assist them draw up a plan of action and the financial means to clean 1,000 wells in the most affected areas, thereby returning the drinking water supply to an estimated 5,000 people.

Coordination and partnerships

Partnerships have been extremely important in this operation. In the early stages, just after the DREF allocation had been approved, a team made up of two experts from the Austrian Red Cross deployed by the International Federation visited the Czech Republic to work with the headquarters team and the local branch of Prachatice. Such cooperation and sharing of experience and technical knowledge was much appreciated by the Czech Red Cross, especially as it came at a timely point in the design of the operation.

Through this operation, close cooperation has developed between the Czech Red Cross and the International Federation's Europe zone office. The disaster management coordinator has been in regular contact with the operation coordinator, providing much valued technical assistance and advice, while taking a keen interest in this highly innovative approach to meeting the needs of affected people to floods. Learning lessons and developing a bank of knowledge in this way of working is important and can be transferred to other National Societies in the zone who may meet similar situations in future. The zone's planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting manager visited the Czech Red Cross in late September to help capture some of these lessons and also introduce the society to the beneficiary satisfaction tool, *Are people reached listened to?*, which will be conducted by the Red Cross branch volunteers in the course of October, as the cleaning of wells commences.

During a monitoring trip conducted in late September to Lcovice it was noted that the cooperation between the mayor of the village, the municipalities and the Red Cross branch directors was evidently of great importance to the success of the project. This was on a number of counts:

- The mayor, or municipality office, has detailed information on the people affected, as well as updated information on what assistance is available from other sources, and what has been received. Often, as these rural villages are very small, this information comes from personal contacts.
- Access to information sharing systems and media. Again in Lcovice, the municipality has a text messaging system in place that alerts residents of events happening in that locality, but also of imminent disasters such as extreme weather conditions.

Progress towards objectives

Water, sanitation, and hygiene promotion
Objective: Cleaning of 1,000 wells for 5,000 people.
Activities planned: • Assess the existing coverage with a view of ensuring availability of an adequate water supply. • Provide potable water and appropriate sanitation. • Set up the cash distribution procedure. • Deliver the fee to people to use for well cleaning by a specialized company. • Monitor the distributions and use of the money. This final accounting and evaluation will take about three months.

Progress:

Red Cross branches distributing receipts upon which the beneficiary receives a cash contribution is a new approach for the International Federation, so there is limited experience to tap into, although both the Czech and Austrian Red Cross Societies have implemented cash projects in the past. The Austrian Red Cross ran the reconstruction project after the floods in 2002 with a cash distribution aspect. To ensure not only the smooth running of the operation but also to tackle possible challenges from the

Two staff from the Austrian Red Cross, experienced in flood operations and well cleaning, inspect a contaminated well in Poderiste as the householder looks on. Photo: Czech Red Cross

beginning, the Austrian Red Cross was approached by the International Federation to assist and share its experience with the operations managers of the Czech Red Cross.

The local Czech Red Cross branches, in cooperation with the municipal offices and hygiene stations, have collected the application forms for financial contribution for cleaning of the wells which are the only sources of drinking water for people affected by the floods. After judging legitimacy of the application forms and satisfying the conditions- cleaning of the well is documented by the analysis of water – this analysis confirms that the water is drinkable again- the financial contribution is provided.

Location	Application forms received	Cash paid out to beneficiary
Jesenlik	120	107
Novy Jicin	338	208
Prerov	178	164
Prachatice	161	0
Pisek	26	0
Strakonice	68	34
Ceske Krumlov	0	0
Tabor	0	0
Decin	33	0
Klatovy	0	0
Totals	**924**	**513**

Table showing status of applications on 29 September 2009. Source: Czech Red Cross.

At the present time financial contributions have been paid out largely in North Moravia, as most of the application forms satisfy the conditions for providing the contribution. The situation is more complicated in South Bohemia. A large number of wells were affected by reflooding. The applicants for the financial contribution for the well-cleaning from the Czech Red Cross often lack a record about the analysis of the water from their wells because the hygiene stations are very busy. The application forms which do not satisfy the conditions of the project will be rejected from the registry.

By 29 September, the Czech Red Cross local branches had registered 924 application forms for the financial contribution to clean well, according to terms of this project. 513 application forms satisfying all the conditions have already been paid out.

In Lcovice, the first distribution of cash to 26 householders was held on 2 October at the mayor's office. All people were extremely grateful for this contribution from the International Federation.

With support from the International Federation's Europe zone the beneficiary satisfaction tool, *Are people reached listened to?* will be conducted in the coming weeks with a selection of people who received the financial assistance

While challenges in fulfilling all criteria have emerged (see *challenges and lessons learnt* section below for details), the operations coordinator is confident that all, or very close to all, of the applications will be processed and paid out. As such, there are no plans to revise the operation, either in numbers of beneficiaries or in adding additional activities to support the people affected by the floods. The close cooperation with the municipalities, and in turn the affected people themselves, means that the Red Cross is aware of any outstanding needs.

Challenges and lessons learnt:

- Meeting the criteria for distributions was a challenge, and took more time than expected to assemble a “full application” that could be paid out.
- Definition of “only source of water” and “private source of water” was tested as several villages have both a village water line, as well as private water sources in people’s gardens. Public owned water lines were not available for Red Cross support, as other funds were available for cleaning. However, as the criteria stipulated that the private well must be the *only* source of water, there was some controversy. The lesson learnt here is twofold. Firstly, the criteria was felt to be just and fair and initial reviews suggest would be used as the basis of future operations. However, establishing effective communication channels, through the municipalities as well as through the Red Cross systems is vital to head off confusion that can translate into anger if not assuaged quickly by referring to the criteria and how they were respected. Printed copies of the criteria were distributed.
- The hygiene stations are often very busy, and the Red Cross is not the only client. Many of the hold-ups in completing the payouts to people lie with the hygiene stations not issuing the necessary paper verifying the contamination.
- However, a linked lesson learnt is that potential beneficiaries cannot always be relied upon to act in ways that serve their best interest. Anecdotal cases of people affected going shopping when the hygiene stations came to take samples, or simply not completing the application forms in time have emerged and taken resources from the municipalities or Red Cross to help overcome.
- The solidarity within the communities that was praised also had a negative side. People from unaffected areas came to flooded villages directly offering support, both material and labour, rather than through organisations. This led to cases of the more vocal amongst the affected receiving lots of help and goods, and others being left to go without. Such “unprofessional” assistance goes on and is maybe inevitable, but it heightens the emphasis Red Cross branches place on getting reliable, credible data from authorities and other sources to ensure wide, fair distribution of its services.
- Using transfers to bank accounts was considered as it would have been easier for the Red Cross than cash distributions. Additionally, though not considered, it would have been more secure as large amounts of cash would not have had to be kept and transported. The decision to go with cash stems from the local culture and familiarity of making transactions with cash rather than through banks. It was felt that departing from this accepted way of dealing would be an innovation too far and could damage the success of the operation and people’s willingness to be part. However, in other localities, such a bank-centred approach could work and would bring advantages of speed and automatic accountability trails, rather than the current paperwork-heavy system of signed receipts.
- Experience from the 2002 floods was used in this response, showing that collective memory is being developed. The leadership of the Czech Red Cross, aware of how reflecting back had informed some of their current practices that are well regarded within the country and with the authorities, are taking steps to add this operation to that bank of knowledge and are willing to share with sister National Societies. Floods are not new to the Czech Republic, or indeed to Central Europe, so taking the time to learn from the lessons emerging from this innovative operation is much needed.

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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