

# 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

## **NAMIBIA: CAPRIVI FLOODS**

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### **In Brief**

This Bulletin is being issued based on latest developments reflecting the situation at this time. The Namibia Red Cross Society (NRCS) is responding to the disaster with a one-month operation assisting some 12,000 people with non-food items. The Federation, in support of the NRCS, has responded to the disaster by providing and procuring relief material. The United States and the Netherlands embassies in Windhoek have donated some USD 37,000 and the Harare Regional Delegation has submitted a funding application to ECHO seeking USD 150,000. The British Red Cross has donated USD 11,480 to assist in replenishing regional disaster preparedness stock. The emergency operation is foreseen to be over by the end of June.

### **The Situation**

The floods, which displaced some 12,000 people in the Caprivi region of north-eastern Namibia in the beginning of May, have finally started to subside. The floods occurred when the Zambezi River overflowed its banks after few days of torrential rains, and are said to be the worst in 21 years. Authorities in the region have reported that the floodwater is receding most places, although a few low lying areas are still affected to the extent that they are hard to reach. However, most places can now be accessed by road, which makes further relief distributions much easier.

The risk of outbreak of waterborne diseases such as malaria, cholera and diarrhoea remains high as it may take up to three months for the pools of stagnant water to completely disappear. Malaria is endemic in the Caprivi region, and water- and sanitation facilities are largely non-existent. Most villagers use untreated river waters for consumption as well as for washing and cleaning, and there are hardly any latrines available. Authorities have reported some increase in cases of diarrhoea, respiratory infections and skin rashes although there is no indication of serious outbreak of diseases according to reports from the Ministry of Health and Social Services.

Authorities estimated that it would take three months for the water to completely recede to the level it was before the floods, and only by then will the lowest lying areas be accessible by road. The process has however been faster than anticipated, and trucks can now reach most distribution points. Relief efforts have until now been carried out by government helicopters and boats or even by local canoes. The government has finished its first round of food distributions, but is now delivering hay to livestock as a matter of priority as grazing land is still largely under water. People living in areas where the water has already receded have now started reconstructing their homes, and many schools have now reopened although some are still being used as distribution points.

The situation of the affected population remains precarious. Caprivi has suffered droughts in recent years, and there is chronic food insecurity in the region. The Caprivi Strip, which comprises of Namibia, Zambia and

Botswana, has one of the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence rate in the world with up to 50 per cent of the population affected in some areas.

## **Red Cross and Red Crescent action**

The Red Cross Regional Disaster Response Team, which has been operational in the Caprivi region since 25 May, has worked tirelessly to ensure that beneficiaries were registered and supplied with the non-food items provided by the Namibia Red Cross with the support of the Federation's regional delegation in Harare. So far, the Red Cross has distributed relief items to some 7,000 beneficiaries in the Kabbe and Katima rural constituencies. By the end of this week, some 3,000 blankets, 4,000 mosquito nets, 2,000 water containers, 2,000 kitchen sets, 1,600 batteries, 350 tents and 180,000 water purification tablets will have reached the 12,000 target beneficiaries.

The Red Cross team consists of 23 people - 8 RDRT team members (4 from Namibia Red Cross and 4 from Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe Red Cross Societies) as well as 15 Namibia RC volunteers. The NRCS is already present in Caprivi through its cross-border HIV/AIDS home based care programme. The National Society has three full-time staff members, 20 trained home based care facilitators and 15 tracing volunteers in the area, who have all participated in the ongoing disaster response operation. RDRT members also carried out the initial assessment mission in the flood areas from 3-10 May, which was used as the basis for governmental response to the disaster.

The regional disaster response officer spent a week in Caprivi to give support and guidance to the RDRT members. The Secretary General and the disaster management officer of the Namibia Red Cross visited the Caprivi Region last week to monitor and support the Red Cross operation.

All needs have now been attended to, either by releasing relief items from the regional warehouse in Harare or procuring them in Windhoek/Harare/Geneva, and sent to Caprivi. This has partly depleted the warehouse in Harare of tents/blankets/water purification tablets and kitchen sets from the regional disaster emergency stock. If any National Societies are willing to assist in restocking these items they should contact the regional delegation in Harare in order to ensure as swift a response to future disasters in the region.

## **Operational developments**

The Red Cross has to date reached 1,150 households, but will have distributed relief items to all 2,000 households targeted by the relief operation by 21 June. The Red Cross team managed to immediately distribute 1,200 blankets, 400 kitchen sets, 400 water containers and 1,600 batteries, a consignment procured by USAID in Windhoek under the supervision of the Red Cross regional disaster management delegate, and immediately made available for dispatching to Caprivi. The total value of the USAID donation was USD 25,000 in cash and kind. Further donations were from the Netherlands Embassy in Windhoek, USD 12,000 in cash; UNICEF, 100,000 water purification tablets; British Red Cross, USD 11,480 in cash. The ECHO application for USD 150,000 is supported by the EU embassy in Windhoek.

The operation experienced some constraints when relief items sent from Harare (tents, mosquito nets, water purification tablets and the outstanding needs of kitchen sets and blankets) were delayed for four days at the borders of Zimbabwe and Botswana, and Botswana and Namibia. The total reliance on transport from the government further hampered the operation, as numbers of helicopters for distribution were limited, and the only boat able to operate in shallow water sunk outside a distribution point a week into the operation, and has been non-operational ever since. Four Red Cross team members were on board, and were narrowly rescued by local villagers on canoes.

The government prioritized the transportation of hay to remaining livestock, so no helicopters were available and therefore distribution of Red Cross non-food items was further delayed. However, the government has in recent days provided the Red Cross with a helicopter and if transport is readily available throughout the week the team foresees that they will have provided the targeted 12,000 beneficiaries with all relief items by the end of the week, which is within the intended timeframe for the Red Cross operation.

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As the consignment of urgent relief items were delayed in delivery, there was no longer need for the intended 1,000 tents to be distributed to the affected population, as many people had already by then returned to their villages and no longer needed preliminary shelters. There is however an urgent needs to provide shelter for children attending school, as they are unable to travel back and forth and have thus been forced to camp on the school-grounds. These children have now been accommodated in Red Cross tents, providing them shelter during the winter months as well as protection from mosquitoes. A few dislocated cattle-herders, who are minding the villagers livestock, will furthermore be provided with tents, as they are unable to return to their homes until the water completely recedes.

### **Federation coordination**

The Red Cross team has attended Regional Emergency Management Unit meetings from their first arrival. The government had already established some 12 distribution points for food distribution, and the Red Cross was assigned the same distribution points. The government carried out initial food distribution, but will continue to carry out food distributions for 3 months in partnership with the WFP. The government also provided tents, and is distributing some 3,000 blankets donated by a Namibian newspaper, the Republican, procured after local fundraising. By keeping in constant touch with other stakeholders and donors, local and international, the regional delegation managed to ensure that all budget line items were covered and duplication was avoided. Thus, the Red Cross has been able to cut down on these items initially budgeted for the operation as they have already been provided by other partners.

### **National Society Capacity Building**

The RDRT team has trained some 15 Namibian volunteers in conduction distributions, identification of beneficiaries, registration, warehousing, as well as code of conduct and the six core principles on sexual abuse and exploitation during a crisis situation. Furthermore, some 7 volunteers have been trained in providing health education to disseminate health and sanitation messages to the affected population through the local radio and community meetings.

### **Communications – Advocacy and Public Information**

The RDRT team has arranged with the local Lozi Service Radio in the area to disseminate information on health issues in the local language. NRCS staff members at the Caprivi office as well as volunteers would be used for this purpose. The Lozi Service has also agreed to train volunteers in basic broadcasting and presentation skills to enable them to carry out their work effectively. A massive mobilization campaign on the promotion of health standards at community level in flood areas is necessitated by the possibility of outbreaks of waterborne diseases, although so far the situation has remained stable. The NRCS (headquarters) continues to give updates of the flood situation through the Namibia Broadcasting Corporation and the print media. The entire flood operation has heavily relied on radio to disseminate information on relief distributions and health.

For a full description of the National Society profile, see [www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org)

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