



PARAGUAY: DENGUE OUTBREAK

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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 185 countries.

In Brief

Period covered by this update: 24 March – 26 April 2007

History of this Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF)-funded operation:

- CHF 68,000 (USD 54,530 or EUR 42,060) was allocated from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) to respond to the needs in this operation. Unearmarked funds to repay DREF are encouraged.
- This operation is expected to be implemented over a 3 month period, and will be completed by 29 April 2007; a Final Report will be made available three months after the end of the operation (by 29 July 2007).

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.

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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>

Background and current situation

As of 14 April 2007, the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare (MoH) recorded a total of 25,955 confirmed cases of classic dengue fever since the start of the year and throughout the current dengue fever outbreak. There are 52 cases of the hemorrhagic strain of the virus confirmed by laboratory to date, and an additional 43 suspected cases.¹ Thirteen deaths have been officially claimed by the virus, with six deaths attributed to hemorrhagic dengue/shock, five to classic dengue/visceral, and two with serotype unknown.

There are still doubts regarding the official number of cases of dengue fever in the country. Health workers continue to argue that official figures fall between 80-100 percent short of actual cases registered by the MoH and that the actual number of suspected cases may therefore be in the realm of at least 100,000. The results of a survey undertaken by authorities in the Central Department indicate that the 19.9 percent of the department's population have been infected by the virus since the start of the year.² The MoH maintains that real figures are lower than this, and furthermore that more precise figures will only be recorded at the end of the outbreak with assistance provided by the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO).

At the beginning of April, the Government recorded an overall decline in the number of consultations and new cases of dengue in the country, although there are significant variations across the country. According to the MoH's recent estimates, the number of dengue consultations has reduced by 70-80 percent in the capital, Asunción and in the Central Department, and is replaced by a rapid increase in the number of consultations due to high rates of Acute Respiratory Infections (ARIs) after heavy rains and abrupt fluctuations in temperature. However, whilst the Commission for the Closure of Cases reports that there has been a slow decline in the number of potential dengue cases in the cities of San Lorenzo, Luque and Fernando de la Mora, in other areas the rates of infection are still worryingly high, for example in Lambaré, where 50 new cases are still being reported per day.

Since the Government declared a state of national emergency due to the dengue outbreak, national and local authorities have carried out several actions: The Secretariat of National Emergencies (SEN), who is coordinating the national campaign and joint activities conducted by the Ministry of Environment and the MoH, mobilised teams of health promoters working on dengue prevention at community level, and teams of personnel conducting fumigations with insecticide. The MoH accepted the Central Department's plan to jointly fumigate neighbourhoods to eliminate the mosquito vector starting in Villa Elisa, Ñemby and Itá, where it is hoped that more precise data (on morbidity and mortality rates, decline rates of the virus and of the adult mosquitoes following fumigation activities) will be recorded during the implementation of this departmental plan.

To illustrate the proportions that the issue is taking nation-wide, the authorities in the capital city of Asunción have identified and are set to prosecute 19 property-owners (under Law 716, which sanctions procedures against those who commit offences to the environment) who failed to comply with regulations to clean empty or abandoned plots that have been identified as prime locations where mosquito larvae are produced. These measures have been taken within the framework of the dengue prevention campaign and in the fight against the disease.

Red Cross action

From the onset of the emergency the Paraguayan Red Cross (PRC) has been working to support communities affected by the dengue outbreak. In January 2007, the PRC prepared a three-month Plan of Action to support the

¹ Ministry of Public Health & Social Welfare (MoH), *Boletín Epidemiológico Semanal*, (Epidemiological Week 15, 08-14/04/2007).

² Survey undertaken by the Health Council of the Central Department and executed by the Office of the Study of Public Opinion, in which among the 599 people interviewed, 19.9 percent had been infected by the dengue virus since January 2007. Central Department Survey, March 2007.

work of the MoH to improve the living conditions of the population affected by the dengue outbreak and help prevent the further spread of the disease. The Plan of Action, which is currently being implemented, targets five departments at the regional level: Alto Paraná, Itapúa, Ñeembucú, Concepción and Amambay; and five areas at the sub-regional level: San Lorenzo, Mariano Roque Alonso, Ñemby, Itá and Capiatá, as well as the capital city of Asunción. Technical support has been provided by the Federation’s Regional Delegation in Lima and the Pan American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU).

The PRC’s Plan of Action focuses on two main areas of action, the provision of medical equipment and medicines for patients with the disease, and raising awareness among local communities on dengue prevention to stop the further spreading of the disease. The beneficiaries targeted by the Plan of Action include those who are most seriously affected by the disease and those who are most vulnerable to infection. The beneficiary numbers for each individual intervention are indicated below.

Relief

Objective 1: Distribution of 1,000 impregnated mosquito nets to MoH health centres to protect hospitalized patients.

To date 855 mosquito nets have been distributed to PRC branches, 765 of these were delivered to over 60 public health centres according to needs designated by the MoH in the Central Department, Alto Paraná, Itapúa, Ñeembucú, Concepción and Amambay. The remaining 145 nets will be allocated according to the needs confirmed by the authorities in the departments outlined above. A total of 14 health care centres were originally foreseen as recipients of the nets, this figure was expanded following an increase in the number of health care centres requiring nets.

To date, 765 beneficiaries have benefited from the use of the mosquito nets, as the number of beneficiaries is one person per mosquito net. It is likely that the nets will be used more than once during and after the operation; therefore beneficiary numbers could be higher than 1,000 people.



Above: A mosquito net in use by a young child at a health centre in Alto Paraná.

Table showing number of mosquito nets distributed to PRC branches and to MoH health centres:

Location	Distributed (to regional branch)	Delivered to MoH health centres
Asunción	257	257
Sub-regional Branches	432	362
Regional Branches	166	146
Total	855	765

Health

Objective 1: Affected communities benefit and increase their knowledge through national public awareness campaigns and community activities on dengue prevention.

Community Education Campaign: “Prevenamos al dengue” (“Lets prevent dengue”)

The PRC has aimed to mobilize 365 volunteers to implement the national education campaign at community level on the prevention of dengue.

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From 20 February, awareness raising talks with communities began in all of the PRC regional and sub-regional branches as listed above. These talks will continue until the end of April following individual regional branches work-plans. Community awareness raising, carried out by trained volunteers working on a house-by-house, community-by-community basis, is taking place in 28 of the most vulnerable communities of the five aforementioned regional branches (Alto Paraná, Itapúa, Ñeembucù, Concepción and Amambay), and in 21 communities of Asunción and the Central Department.

In order to carry out dengue prevention talks at the community level, the PRC has mobilised 690 volunteers, of which 249 are from PRC and 441 are students / community volunteers. Students were mobilized into school teams working in their local communities in the Central Department to increase the campaign's reach.

The PRC has conducted a total of 10,579 visits, and **9,545 families** or **47,725 beneficiaries** (five people per family) were reached. Volunteers managed to reach 90 percent of houses; the remainder were either closed or abandoned. In general, volunteers have said that those visited were very receptive to the talks and that this greatly facilitated the work undertaken. The information available from other sources to communities during the outbreak varied and not all has been accurate. The talks have therefore served to clarify doubts and dispel commonly held myths on the disease, as well as providing clear information on how to prevent dengue or how to identify symptoms of the disease.



Left: A PRC volunteer on a family visit to raise awareness on dengue prevention

Right: Leaflets were also distributed to families during the visits to ensure information is made available on how to identify the symptoms and what prevention measures to take.

The talks were further supported by the 6-page leaflet, which the PRC has disseminated widely to raise awareness amongst families on dengue prevention, and links elements of the national-awareness raising campaign (below) to ensure continuity of information. The leaflets were distributed during community awareness raising talks and were well-received.

The talks have also served to highlight community needs and requests for government action. In the environmental sector, most communities visited requested more fumigations, effective waste collection and disposal systems, and cleaning regulations with regard to abandoned or empty plots of land. In the health sector, communities repeatedly requested more medical assistance, in the form of mobile medical units to diagnose and transfer patients to local health care centres, and in the provision of more health care workers, supplies and overall support from local health care centres.

National awareness raising campaign: “Gotas de Amor” (“Drops of love”)

This national campaign was designed to raise the general public's awareness on voluntary blood donation. The campaign aims to challenge common myths and fears prevalent in Paraguay regarding blood donation, which are due in part, to lack of appropriate information on the subject.

The national campaign started on 20 March, when spots were launched on national radio channels. From 26 March, television spots were aired and these will be followed up in the national press. The PRC is in contact with media channels to ensure increased coverage so that the campaign reaches a maximum number of beneficiaries.

The PRC also continues to circulate information regarding all dengue prevention activities, including detailed radio interviews and press articles in the national press.

National awareness raising campaign - media outreach to date:

Radio

From 20/03/07: 3 AM radio stations and 3 FM radio stations.

Television

From 26/03/07: televised spots on Canal, 2, 4, 9 and 13 and cable channels.

Press

Zeta Magazine, April Edition, and the ABC daily newspaper. (Others to be confirmed.)

Objective 2: The PRC medical-attention centre opened to treat those affected by the virus, benefits from the provision of medication and other supplies required to effectively treat the disease.

Two 24-hour medical attention consultations for adults and children located in the Mother-Child Hospital of the PRC in Asunción were opened in February to diagnose, treat and transfer dengue patients. Treatment is provided free of charge to both adults and children, in order of urgency, and particular attention is provided to those from the most vulnerable sectors of society.

Medicines and other medical items (blood bags for extraction and transfusion, test kits, syringes etc.) for potential classic and hemorrhagic patients, have been provided to the dengue medical-attention consultations and are being used according to demand.

As of 23 April, 198 medical consultations have taken place and 115 cases of classic dengue have been identified. Of those who presented for consultations, 58 percent were women, 27 percent were men and 15 percent were children under the age of 14.

In addition to diagnosis, treatment and transfers of patients, the consultations have provided information on dengue prevention to the potential dengue patients and the general public requiring information on the subject.

Coordination

The PRC coordinates on a regular basis with the MoH and has shared its preliminary results at this stage of the operation in order to continue to coordinate actions to ensure that efforts are not duplicated in the fight against the disease. At regional and sub-regional levels each branch continues to coordinate with local community leaders, local and regional health assistance centres, as well as with the local authorities to ensure that all activities undertaken support the work of the Government.

The Secretariat of National Emergencies (Secretaría de Emergencias Nacionales) has also been coordinating between the various actors working to respond to the dengue outbreak.

The PRC has received ongoing technical support from the Lima Regional Delegation and PADRU in planning and implementing activities. Regular contact has been maintained with the National Society to ensure that up to date information is available in monitoring the situation.

Communications

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Through the national awareness raising campaign, as mentioned above, the PRC has prepared radio and television spots to raise the general public's awareness on voluntary blood donation. The PRC have also given and promoted radio interviews and articles in the national press have been published and broadcast in the national media.

Situation reports have been issued through the Disaster Management Information System (DMIS) on the global Federation website. The communications plan has been developed to support activities in response to the spread of dengue and has five main target audiences: affected communities, population vulnerable to contracting dengue, local authorities, donors and the Red Cross Movement.

Different channels of communication include national media in Paraguay and the PRC and Federation regional and global websites. Special sections have been created on the Federation's regional website – www.cruzroja.org – and on the PRC website www.cruzroja.org.py.

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