

DREF operation update



International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Costa Rica: Earthquake

DREF operation n° MDRCR005
GLIDE n° EQ-2009-000009-CRI
4 March 2009

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.

CHF 115,000 (USD 100,762 or EUR 76,143) has been allocated from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) to support the Costa Rican Red Cross in delivering immediate assistance to 500 families (2,500 people) affected by the earthquake. Unearmarked funds to repay the DREF are encouraged.

Summary: On 8 January 2009, an earthquake measuring 6.2 on the Richter scale struck central Costa Rica, on the eastern flank of the Poás Volcano (Alajuela Province). Major



A CRRC volunteer conducting search and rescue activities in province of Alajuela. Source: International Federation

landslides occurred as a result of the earthquake and persistent rainfall over the following period led to additional debris flows in river basins and washed out temporary bridges, further hindering access to affected communities. Revised figures report that 2,943 people were directly affected by the earthquake, whilst another 125,584 people have been affected indirectly.

On 13 January 2009 DREF funds were allocated to support the Costa Rican Red Cross (CRRC) emergency response operation which focuses on the provision of immediate emergency assistance, including: a) the organization of search, rescue and evacuation activities, b) the provision of emergency first aid and psycho-social support (PSP), c) on-going detailed needs assessments to identify the most affected families, d) the distribution of relief items, and e) National Society capacity-building activities.

This update reflects a DREF extension of CHF 65,000 to develop and implement a cash voucher programme for the purchase of essential tools and materials to enable 100 families to make emergency

repairs to their damaged homes. Additional support has also been provided to the CRRC to rent temporary warehouse space to store the vast amount of in-kind donations received from the public and private sector.

This operation is expected to be implemented over three months, and completed by 13 April 2009; a Final Report will be available three months after the operation's close (13 July 2009).

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The situation

On 8 January 2009, an earthquake measuring 6.2 on the Richter scale struck Costa Rica in the region of Vara Blanca-Cariblanco, 6 km east of the Póas Volcano and approximately 35 km from the capital city of San José. The earthquake affected the provinces of Alajuela, Heredia, San José and Cartago from the Central Valley, with greatest damage in the districts of Alajuela and Poás in the province of Alajuela, and Barva, Santa Barbara and Heredia in the province of Heredia. The main earthquake was followed by approximately 800 aftershocks measuring from 3.0° to 4.5° on the Richter scale over the next 24 hours and approximately 700 more in the two-week period thereafter. Continued aftershocks and persistent rainfall have exacerbated the gravity of landslides and mudflows in the affected areas. Major and minor roads are still partially blocked with dirt and debris from the earthquake leaving communities isolated.

By 19 January, with rehabilitation activities under way the National Emergency Committee (Comisión Nacional de Emergencias – CNE) ended the search and rescue operations whilst maintaining the municipalities of Alajuela, Grecia, Poás, Alfaro Ruíz, Valverde Vega, San Carlos in Alajuela province, and Santa Barbara, Sarapiquí, Heredia and Barva on red alert. Eleven days into the operation, the repeated aftershocks and multiple landslides had created unstable conditions threatening the safety of rescue workers searching for missing people in areas requiring extensive excavation.

Official reports at the close of search and rescue activities indicate that 23 people died, 100 sustained injuries, while 8 people are still missing and 370 are isolated. A total of 2,943 people were directly affected by the earthquake and 125,584 people were affected indirectly, in part due to losses in the agricultural and tourist sectors as well as through disruptions in basic utility services. Moreover, approximately 2,442 people were evacuated from affected areas to 22 temporary shelters, including schools, churches and community centres with many families housed in tents due to fears of continued aftershocks.

Detailed assessments by the CNE, the Ministry of Housing and the Institute of Social Welfare indicate that 1,087 houses have been affected, of which 423 were totally destroyed and 664 were partially damaged. Efforts were made to relocate evacuated families to empty schools before classes began in February. The Ministry of Housing and the Institute for Social Welfare are implementing plans to find longer term solutions for families whose homes were destroyed and/or whose properties or communities are in seismically unstable locations. A few hundred people still remain in shelters and are gradually transitioning to temporary and permanent housing solutions. Current proposals indicate that 200 families would be transferred to temporary wooden homes to be built by Un Techo para Mi País (A Roof for my Country) in four transition shelter sites until a permanent housing solution is provided within an estimated period from three to six months. The Costa Rican government will provide grants to assist some 500 families to repair or reconstruct homes as part of a wider recovery effort. The government will also support local private organizations that have committed to purchase a plot of land to rebuild homes for 100 of the most vulnerable families.

The Ministry of Education reports that 22 schools suffered partial damage and require repairs that will delay the start of classes until the beginning of March, whilst the school in Poasito was completely destroyed and will have to be rebuilt. No major damage has been reported in the health infrastructure, and the Ministry of Health is monitoring the health situation in the temporary shelters. The CNE reports that 46 major and minor roads suffered significant damages and that 13 bridges and 20 water systems were damaged by the earthquake and subsequent landslides and mudflows. Preliminary estimates from the Costa Rican Institute for Water and Sewage (Instituto Costarricense de Acueductos y Alcantarillados – ICAA) indicate that 45,000 people were left without access to water. Following the earthquake, the electricity services were also interrupted. The main damages in this sector are reported in the communities of Montaña Azul, Vara Blanca, Los Cartagos and Poasito.

Damage to the local economy has been significant, with reports from the Ministry of Agriculture indicating that a total of 1,250 hectares of crops have been affected, with considerable losses to the local dairy industry

and to flower, strawberry and coffee plantations. Affected families have also seen their income reduced due to a sharp decrease in tourist activities as a result of continued road closures and damages in the region surrounding the Póas Volcano National Park. The government estimates total losses at over USD 100 million, with donations to the National Emergency Fund as of 20 January, from the Chinese, Spanish and U.S. governments and from international multilateral institutions including the World Bank, standing at USD 650,000. Additional support was received from the governments of Colombia and the United States which provided rescue equipment and personnel, including the donation of three helicopters to support aerial evacuations.

Coordination and partnerships

The International Federation through its Pan American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU) and the Regional Representation for Central America and Mexico have supported the CRRC since the onset of the emergency, providing both technical and financial assistance to support the CRRC Plan of Action developed in response to this emergency. The PADRU operations coordinator who was in field at the time of the earthquake has provided on-going support to the National Society in the review and extension of DREF financing to support the additional actions reflected in this update. Two Regional Intervention Team (RIT) members have been deployed to the field to support the CRRC: one RIT from the Paraguayan Red Cross specialized in reporting to assist in the collection of information on the emergency and to support on-going emergency response operations; and one RIT from the American Red Cross specialized in cash voucher programmes to assist the CRRC in the development and implementation of this initiative.

The CNE continues to support local Emergency Operations Centres and response efforts are coordinated with government agencies responding to the emergency including the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Housing, the Institute for Social Welfare, the National Social Security Fund, the National Fire Brigade, the Police Force, as well as the CRRC. The CRRC, as a permanent member of the CNE, has worked closely with government actors in the assessment of damages and needs, and in the design and implementation of its response operation. Relief items have been distributed in coordination with the CNE, which has distributed its own relief supplies (blankets, mattresses and food items).

Coordination meetings were held between national authorities, the UN Disaster Management Team (UNDMT) and the UN Emergency Technical Team (UNETT) who activated their emergency response plan in coordination with the regional UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) located in Panama. Support pledged to date, includes USD 40,000 in cash grants from OCHA, the provision of latrines and cleaning services in shelters, hygiene kits from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), as well as the donation of 28,000 water purification tablets and water testing kits by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

The CRRC continues to coordinate with the Institute of Social Welfare and the Reconstruction Commission to ensure appropriate targeting of beneficiary families, avoid duplication of efforts and maximize the effectiveness of its cash voucher programme. These necessary coordination efforts have led to delays in the implementation of the programme as government authorities have been slower than originally expected in gathering and sharing beneficiary information.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The CRRC has worked intensely since the onset of the emergency mobilizing its staff and volunteers to respond efficiently and quickly to meet the needs of the affected population. During the initial period following the earthquake efforts focused on: a) the organization of search and rescue activities to reach people trapped under mud and debris and in reaching communities isolated by blocked roads; b) the provision of emergency medical care to the injured and to those suffering from chronic conditions aggravated by the emergency; c) the provision of psycho-social support to affected families in temporary shelters; d) the distribution of emergency relief items; and e) supporting the CNE in the management and administration of the emergency shelters set up to provide refuge to evacuated families in the affected areas.

The wider CRRC Plan of Action, includes recovery actions, including the distribution of family food kits for a period of three months, the distribution of agricultural kits containing seeds and tools to assist in the reactivation of livelihoods, the repair of community water systems, the building of a bank of key construction materials for the repair of damaged houses, as well as a cash voucher programme jointly funded by American Red Cross and the International Federation. The voucher programme will enable families to purchase the tools and materials they require to make vital repairs to damaged homes.

At the close of search and rescue activities, the CRRC has demobilized its national rescue teams and scaled down its 24-hour central Emergency Operations Centre, with staff from the National Relief Directorate following up on the emergency response and developing longer-term actions, coordinated by the Institutional Relief Committee of the CRRC. Logistics support teams, a team of 22 volunteers and local staff are still operational at the main field base located at the San Miguel CRRC branch in Heredia, whilst a team of 20 volunteers, from the CRRC youth division, are active and visiting shelters to provide psycho-social support to children showing stress-related signs and symptoms caused by the earthquake and their subsequent displacement to temporary emergency shelters.



CRRC staff are monitoring the situation in shelters and providing PSP to children affected by the earthquake.

Source: Costa Rican Red Cross

The CRRC launched a nation-wide appeal requesting donations from the general public and the private

sector, setting up central collection points at warehouses located at its national headquarters in San José, as well as collection points throughout its regional and local branches nationwide. The support from civil society has been outstanding: at the close of the appeal on 22 January the National Society had collected over 80 tons of relief items, including food, water, clothing, blankets and hygiene items. These in-kind donations have been distributed to affected families from approximately 50 communities in 25 vehicles. DREF funds are being used to cover warehousing costs for storage and distribution of donations. The CRRC continues to distribute relief items to families located in temporary shelters and to families in affected communities according to individual needs. In coordination with the CNE staff, the CRRC is also monitoring national distribution points. Whilst the appeal has officially closed bank accounts remain open to those wishing to contribute to the reconstruction effort.

In addition to the RIT member specialized in cash voucher programmes, the American Red Cross has also mobilized a regional operations delegate to the field to assess needs as well as to identify and implement early recovery interventions and CRRC capacity building programmes. The German Red Cross has contributed with a donation of EUR 55,000 from the German Government to the CRRC for the repair of 3 water systems, and the purchase of construction materials and agricultural reactivation kits to assist 100 families.

The CRRC has responded to multiple emergencies that have affected the country over the last nine months, working at maximum capacity and mobilizing staff and volunteers from its national headquarters, as well as from its regional and local branches nationwide. Besides having recently completed emergency response operations to the earthquake, the CRRC also responded to floods caused by tropical storms during the month of September 2008 in the Chorotega region, responded to severe floods that devastated the provinces of Limón, Cartago, Heredia and San José in November 2008, as well as the northern provinces of Panama. Also, the CRRC is currently responding to needs caused by the overflow of several rivers in the Huetar and Heredia regions that occurred during the week of 2 February. These successive response operations to major disasters have severely stretched CRRC's resources. DREF financing has been allocated to assist the CRRC relief effort in the earlier floods with an Emergency Appeal launched in December 2008 to mobilize support for affected families in Costa Rica and Panama.

After the onset of the emergency, the CRRC published twelve reports on the Federation's Disaster Management Information System website, and disseminated twelve situation reports to national and international partners, in order to provide constant updates on the situation. Over 300 interviews have been

conducted on local and national media. Also, four articles have been published on the CRRC's website (<http://www.cruzroja.or.cr/>).

Progress towards objectives

This DREF operation has covered preliminary assessments to identify 500 of the most affected families (2,500 beneficiaries), immediate assistance in the distribution of emergency relief (basic non-food items), and the design and implementation of a cash voucher programme to enable families to purchase tools and materials necessary to repair damaged homes. An additional objective has been included to support National Society capacity-building in the area of emergency reporting.

Health in Emergencies

Objective: The Costa Rican Red Cross will complete vital response activities (search and rescue evacuations and damage and needs assessments) and will provide care to shelters.

Activities planned:

- Mobilization of CRRC volunteers and staff to affected areas.
- Field monitoring of earthquake-affected areas, especially in Vara Blanca and San Miguel.
- Conduct rapid damage and needs assessments.
- Conduct search and rescue evacuations.
- Provide pre-hospital care to injured people.
- Verification and surveys of the most affected populations.
- Maintain coordination and communications between headquarters and field Red Cross staff and public institutions.

Progress and impact:

National Intervention Team (NIT) members and national staff were deployed to the field, supported by 400 national and regional volunteers working in the initial emergency response. At the regional level, 20 local branches were activated whilst a further 60 branches were placed on alert to respond as required. The CRRC sent over 40 vehicles, including rescue vehicles, ambulances, 4-wheel drive pick-up trucks and one all-terrain vehicle (Unimog) to the affected areas to support the operation.

In coordination with the CNE and other governmental agencies responding to the emergency, the CRRC conducted damage and needs assessments led by staff from the national headquarters and supported by NIT members. Information collected from the field has been collected and processed in the CNE in the capital city of San José. Processed information is then shared amongst the diverse actors involved in the emergency response and used in on-going detailed assessments by the national authorities.

A total of 512 people were evacuated by land and air with CRRC search and rescue teams working in coordination with the CNE and other actors. A centre to receive injured people was set up at the Tobias Bolaños airport, receiving 43 patients requiring medical assistance.

Teams of volunteers from the youth division have organized recreational activities for children located in six temporary shelters (Poasito, Laguna de Fraijanes, Río Cuarto, El Roble and the Dulce Nombre School and Community Centre), reaching a total of 500 children in coordination with UNICEF under the "Return to Happiness" (Retorno a la alegría) programme which assists children in managing stress related to the shock of the earthquake and displacement to temporary shelters.

Challenges:

Initial challenges in the emergency response operation have centred on the extreme conditions in the field which have complicated access to isolated families and communities. These conditions in the field are also resulting in a difficult situation for those involved in the clearing of access routes and the repair of vital infrastructure.

Relief distributions (basic non-food items)

Objective: 500 families (2,500 people) will benefit from the distribution of relief items to recover from the effects of the earthquake.

Activities planned:

- Develop beneficiary targeting strategy and registration system to deliver intended assistance.
- Distribute relief supplies and control supply movements from point of dispatch to end user.

- Monitor and evaluate the relief activities and provide reports on relief distributions.
- Develop an exit strategy.

Each family will receive the following:

- 1 hygiene kit
- 1 kitchen set

Progress and impact:

As mentioned above, the CRRC launched a national appeal to receive relief items from the general public, mobilizing regional branches nation-wide to act as collection points for donations of food, bottled water, clothes and hygiene products. Articles received have been distributed directly to families, as well as being sent to strategic CNE distribution centres before being allocated to families housed in temporary shelters. DREF funds have been allocated to support the CRRC’s operational costs, including the rental of warehouse space to store donations, the transportation of relief items and the mobilization of volunteers to affected areas to assist in the sorting and distribution of relief items.

On 11 January, 500 hygiene kits and 500 kitchen sets were dispatched from PADRU. These items will be distributed to affected families following the finalization of government plans to relocate families to more permanent sites.

Challenges:

Whilst revised reports from the national authorities have assessed damages to homes and infrastructure, many people were initially hesitant to return home for fear of future earthquakes or landslides due to the number of aftershocks felt throughout the region. Work continues in the closure of temporary shelters and in the definition of longer term solutions for families whose homes are unsafe.

National Society Capacity Building

Objective: The capacity of the Costa Rican Red Cross in disaster response and preparedness will have been strengthened.

Activities planned:

- Deployment of a RIT specialized in reporting to support the CRRC.

Progress and impact:

A RIT member specialized in reporting was mobilized to San José from 19 to 25 January 2009 to support the CRRC in the collection of information on the national response to the earthquake, as well as to support reporting functions on the emergency response operations underway for Tropical Storm Alma (Appeal MDR43003). Information was gathered through a series of interviews with staff members from the Emergency Operations Centre and the National Relief Directorate, as well as field visits to meet volunteers and beneficiaries from the affected communities of Alajuela, Vara Blanca, San Rafael, Poasito, San Miguel, Cariblanco, La Virgen and Puerto Viejo in Sarapiquí.

A short workshop on reporting functions in emergency situations was organized for the National Relief Directorate staff including those responsible for the collection and dissemination of information in the Emergency Operations Centre, as well as staff from the national Communications and Press Department. The RIT member also reviewed existing reporting processes within the National Society and provided recommendations to improve the internal and external flow of information in emergency response and recovery operations.

Challenges:

The CRRC is recognized as one of the country’s key actors in emergency response. This is due not only to actions in the field but also in part thanks to effective communications strategies which ensure that the work of the institution is disseminated as widely as possible. Given the numerous emergencies that the institution has responded to over a relatively short period, the National Society faces some challenges in the collection and dissemination of information, in particular after the initial immediate emergency phase.

Permanent shelter

Objective: 100 families (500 people) will benefit from the transfer of funds to purchase tools and materials to repair homes damaged during the earthquake.

Activities planned:

- Deployment of a RIT specialized in the design and implementation of cash voucher programmes.
- Conduct damage and needs assessments in the affected communities along with a study of the capacity of the marketplace to absorb a cash voucher for shelter early recovery programme.
- Analyse local market conditions, create vouchers and establish agreements with merchants.
- Coordinate activities with relevant partner agencies.
- Develop beneficiary targeting strategy and programme eligibility criteria.
- Conduct training of Red Cross personnel who will participate in the programme and complete field interviews with affected families.
- Coordinate with engineers/geologists on repair feasibility issues.
- Beneficiary selection and programme transparency.
- Distribution of vouchers and programme description letter to beneficiaries.
- Payment to merchants.
- Monitoring and programme evaluation.

Progress and impact:

A RIT member from the American Red Cross was mobilized to San José on 25 January to support the CRRC in the design of a cash voucher programme. Damage, needs and market assessments were conducted and government supported recovery programmes were evaluated. Subsequently, a cash voucher programme for construction and repair materials was designed and eligibility criteria, beneficiary questionnaires, cash vouchers and other programme documentation were developed. Merchant agreements and payment systems are being finalized. Coordination with government agencies, which are implementing programmes with similar objectives, is also being actively pursued. The CRRC has formed a team of staff and volunteers and nominated a general coordinator with training on the development of similar programmes to implement, monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the programme and its impact on beneficiaries.

Challenges:

One of the main challenges for this objective is to avoid the duplication of efforts and assistance with government and privately funded repair and reconstruction programmes taking place in different areas. The CRRC will coordinate the local authorities to overcome this challenge.

The CRRC is also taking into consideration that some families still do not have access to their homes and communities due to seismically unstable land and road closures,

How we work	
<i>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.</i>	
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: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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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