

DREF operation update



Guatemala: Food Crisis

**DREF operation n° MDRGT001
GLIDE No.OT-2009-000169-GTM
Update n° 1
22 October 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.



Guatemalan Red Cross volunteers during an evaluation, measuring the burner perimeter. Source: International Federation

Period covered by this update: 15 September to 15 October 2009.

Summary: CHF 30,000 (USD 28,907 or EUR 19,832) has been allocated from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) to support the Guatemalan Red Cross (GRC) in performing assessments in the high risk areas where the population's livelihoods have been lost. This operation is expected to be implemented over 3 months, and will be completed by 11 December 2009.

A Final Report will be made available by 11 March 2010 (three months after the end of the operation). The possibility exists that the operation may be extended through an appeal, depending on the conclusions gathered from the assessments.

The European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) contributed CHF 30,000 to the DREF in replenishment of the allocation made for this operation. 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>

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The situation

Since March 2009, the Guatemalan government has been implementing an emergency food assistance contingency plan. On 8 September 2009, the Guatemalan President declared a state of public calamity informing that there was a high incidence of malnutrition resulting from the loss of crops caused by persistent drought and high food and fuel prices. According to the authorities, approximately 54,000 families reside in areas prone to extreme weather conditions.

Lack of rainfall has led to the degradation and loss of crops especially in the Eastern Dry Corridor (departments of Baja Verapaz, El Progreso, Zacapa, Jalapa, Chiquimula, Santa Rosa and Jutiapa) since July 2009.

Reports of the Ministry of Environment of Guatemala indicate that half the country's territory is threatened by desertification due to high susceptibility to drought, affecting the lives of nearly two million people. The Guatemalan government has been on alert since 8 September 2009 and declared a state of public calamity to act against hunger and dengue. Although the disaster is nationwide, the most affected areas are in the Eastern Dry Corridor (El Progreso, Jalapa, Santa Rosa, Jutiapa, Chiquimula, Zacapa and Baja Verapaz), where nearly 700 communities are affected.

Although food insecurity is a chronic problem in Guatemala, the past year had a devastating effect on agriculture that has made the situation even more critical with declining food stocks and rising food prices.



A Guatemalan Red Cross volunteer interviewing a family and visiting grain storage. Source: Guatemalan Red Cross

In the last harvest of 2008, floods weakened the crops, mostly maize and bean crops. The yield of the first harvest of 2009 was 60 to 80 per cent lower than normal due to the lack of rainfall and the persistent drought. The crops being in a fragile state and the lack of access to fertilizers to strengthen them are worrisome indicators as the next harvest's yield in December is crucial to the well-being of the population. Assessments conducted over the past months in the communities most affected indicate there are only enough food stocks until December (for the next two months).

Although the yields of the major national producers have not been affected, it is expected that the price of staple grains would rise due to speculation by traders of crop losses, especially in the affected areas.

Coordination and partnerships

From the onset of the food crisis the Guatemalan Red Cross has been coordinating with the National Health Office, the Disaster and Development Office and with the Partner National Societies (PNS) on the emergency response. The GRC is participating regularly in municipal meetings in order to coordinate actions and avoid duplication of efforts.

The GRC has been coordinating with all the local branches in the affected areas as well as participating in meetings with the civil protection and other humanitarian organizations specialized in food security.

The GRC participated in a joint assessment with the humanitarian network to provide an overview of the Dry Corridor and interagency analysis of the situation. Assessments provided a better overview of the situation as well as helped identify the specific needs for the affected communities. Furthermore, the information gathered provided data to address the chronic problems the country faces in terms of food security and malnutrition not only in the emergency response phase but in the medium and long-term as well.

The agencies of the United Nations System in Guatemala are working together with government authorities, to meet the basic needs of food, health, water and sanitation, nutrition and agriculture for 65,000 families in the Dry Corridor. A USD 5 million allocation of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) was approved to be implemented in the next three months.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The Partner National Societies in country (the Netherlands Red Cross, the Norwegian Red Cross and the Spanish Red Cross) have been coordinating with the Guatemalan Red Cross on an intervention implementation in addition to participating in the Humanitarian Network meetings to coordinate immediate actions.

The International Federation Zone Office in Panama, the Pan-American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU) and the Regional Representation for Central America and Mexico, also based in Panama, have been in constant communication with the GRC to launch the DREF and to assist and support the GRC in all activities to respond to the food crisis. Public health in emergencies and disaster management delegates were deployed to Guatemala to provide support in assessment planning and assistance in the elaboration of the plan of action.

Federation's assessment methodologies (How to conduct a food security assessment — a step-by-step guide) and tools (questionnaire developed in conjunction with the training) specifically designed for the food crisis are being used in the operation. A National Intervention Team (NIT) used these tools in the field to perform rapid assessments in the affected communities. Additionally, the Guatemalan Red Cross used the personnel trained in food security during previous emergency operations, such as the Hurricane Felix operation.

The NIT teams were mobilized to perform the assessments in the three areas where GRC branches are located: Jalapa, Chiquimula, and Izabal. Additionally, GRC volunteers assisted the NITs in performing needs assessments. This assessment served to identify nutrition patterns, food intake, source of food items and income generating activities carried out by each family in an effort to determine the appropriate intervention. After the completion of the assessments, a plan of action was drafted. Ongoing assessments are under way in order to integrate detailed information on recovery activities and livelihood needs.



A Guatemalan Red Cross volunteer assessing the affected crops.
Source: Guatemalan Red Cross

Progress towards objectives

| Damage and need assessments | |
|--|---|
| Objective: 50 Guatemalan Red Cross NIT members will perform damage and need assessments in the affected departments due to the food crisis and will elaborate a plan of action. | |
| Expected results | Activities planned |
| A plan of action will be elaborated to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable people affected by the food crisis and the dengue outbreak. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct assessment workshop for NITs • Conduct emergency damage and needs assessments. • Elaborate a plan of action |

Progress:

From 14 to 26 September, the GRC has implemented the following activities.

Trainings:

To date, 24 NIT members were trained in conducting assessments that included guidelines and methodology. Training was held over a two-day period and included guidelines, methodology, drafting of an assessment questionnaire and simulation to review feasibility and communication techniques. The trainings were facilitated by the GRC department of Relief and Health in Emergencies.

On 16 September the NITs were contacted and printed materials for the training were prepared. The first training for the Jalapa and Chiquimula Team was held at the GRC's headquarters. The Izabal Team was trained the next day.

Assessments:

Over an eight-day period, damage and needs assessments took place in three of the most affected and vulnerable departments within the Dry Corridor: Izabal, Chiquimula and Jalapa.

The assessment included the following aspects:

- Breastfeeding and complementary feeding.
- Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion
- Access, Availability and Use of Food
- Logistics and Security
- Malnutrition (Monitoring the arm circumference in children)

A total of 31 GRC volunteers participated in the assessments. The 24 trained NIT members were divided into two groups (Izabal Team and Jalapa and Chiquimula Team), both were led by the National Disaster Secretariat, in coordination with the National Health Secretariat of the GRC. In the three branches, GRC local volunteers joined the team. In addition, seven people from the National Society's headquarter participated in planning, training and field visits.

The selection criteria of the communities assessed was based on the following:

- High risk of food insecurity communities declared by SESAN (Government Secretary for Food Safety) within the Dry Corridor
- Infant morbidity and mortality cases
- Livelihood background
- Rainfall
- Food access
- Isolated communities
- Accessibility to water
- Beneficiaries that did not receive any assistance
- Presence of delegation of the GRC and local logistical capacities.

The communities identified were:

21 Communities / 2,053 Families prioritized for rapid assessments

| Izabal | Jalapa | Chiquimula |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 8 communities | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3 communities | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 10 communities |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 620 families | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 315 families | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1,118 families |

Methodologies and Tools:

Primary Information: interviews with healthcare professionals, community leaders, direct observation, discussion groups with community focal persons, seasonal calendars and mapping.

Tool: Questionnaires:

- 40 questions in the following sectors: breastfeeding and complementary feeding, water, sanitation and hygiene promotion; access, availability and use of food; logistics; and security.
- Measurement of arm circumference for boys and girls aged 6 to 60 months.

Secondary Information:

- Previous diagnosis of Analysis of Capacities and Vulnerability of the communities available
- Information gathered by the GRC branch
- Information of: Health Area/Health Center/SESAN/Municipality/COCODEs (Community Committees)

First conclusions:

Preliminary Needs Assessment:

- Food items (from two and a half months)
- Distribution of seeds and fertilizers
- Water and sanitation and hygiene promotion
- Control of dengue fever vectors*
- Technical assistance in crops recovery
- Livelihood recovery
- Organization of community cooperatives
- Community Health and Nutrition Education

*Following the results of the assessment and the concern about dengue fever, the assessment results were shared with the humanitarian and health community in country. The GRC and the International Federation submitted a proposal to ECHO to respond to the specific health needs identified. This response to health needs will undoubtedly help improve the overall well-being of the population affected by the food crisis.

Plan of Action:

Following the initial assessments GRC, a draft plan of action was developed to respond to the immediate needs of the affected population, which includes the following sectors: crops rehabilitation; water, sanitation and hygiene promotion; community health; recovery and alternative livelihoods.

Coordination meetings and joint assessments indicated the chronic issues to be addressed and the need to take into account medium and long-term needs. Hence, the GRC will be conducting additional assessments with a focus on early recovery to take the results into consideration in the finalization of the plan of action.

Ongoing, assessments and monitoring of the situation:

As the situation will be evolving over the next two months and the next harvest will be critical to determine the needs for the medium-term and longer term, the GRC is monitoring the situation closely and assessments are on-going. The affected population depends on the crop yields for both income and food supplies. Additionally, the supply seeds for the next year's harvest depend on the results of the harvest.

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:

- **In Guatemala:** Teresa Marroquin, Relief Director, Guatemalan Red Cross; email: teresa.marroquin@cruzroja.org; phone: (502) 2381 6565; fax: (502) 2381 6575.
- **In Panama:** Fabricio López, Regional Representative for Central America and Mexico; email: fabricio.lopez@ifrc.org; phone: (507) 380 0250; fax: (507) 317 1304.
- **In Panama:** Mauricio Bustamante, Operations Coordinator, email: mauricio.bustamante@ifrc.org; phone: (507) 316 001; fax: (507) 316 1082.
- **In Panama:** Natalia Garcia, disaster management delegate of the Pan American Disaster Response Unit, email: natalia.garcia@ifrc.org; phone: (507) 316 001; fax: (507) 316 1082.
- **In Panama:** Maria Alcázar, Resource Mobilization Coordinator for the Americas; email: maria.alcazar@ifrc.org; phone: (507) 380 0250; fax: (507) 317 1304.
- **In Geneva:** Pablo Medina, Operations Coordinator for the Americas; email: pablo.medina@ifrc.org; phone: (41) 22 730 4300.

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