

# **WEST AFRICA: FLOODS**

30 December 1999

*appeal no. 26/99*

*situation report no. 1*

*period covered: 20th October - 23rd December 1999*

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*The damage caused by the annual floods this year in West Africa was exceptional, affecting almost every country in the region. Bilateral, UN and NGO assistance has played an important role in flood affected areas. The response to the Federation Appeal has been low, and assistance has been prioritised in favour of those beneficiaries who received little aid from other sources. Nevertheless, the contributions will provide much-needed support to the flood victims, mostly in the form of non-food items, to assist the most vulnerable. The impact of the floods on vulnerable communities who live in precarious circumstances has served to highlight the importance of the Regional Disaster Preparedness Programme.*

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## ***The context***

Between June and September, 1999, West Africa experienced exceptionally heavy rainfall, flash floods and tropical storms. Benin, Burkina-Faso, the Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal were the most severely affected countries. Respective National Red Cross Societies in each country have played a key role in disaster preparedness and response, working side by side with the government authorities, NGOs and communities. Evaluation teams were sent as soon as possible to the flood-affected areas in order to assess the situation and provide immediate emergency assistance. Flooding has caused widespread population displacement, loss of crops, destruction of property and jeopardised livelihoods. Those affected are, in the majority of cases, subsistence farmers and subsistence workers.

## ***Latest events***

The flood victims in West Africa continue to live in difficult conditions, sheltered in makeshift, temporary housing, and largely relying on the goodwill of their neighbours. The unprecedented nature of the flooding this year resulted in significant and timely assistance from UN bodies, particularly WFP, USAID and ECHO. In a coordinated approach with these other agencies, Federation assistance has been concentrated on non-food relief items. Since the Appeal has not been fully funded, those National

Societies which benefited from bilateral funding or from generous contributions from other partners, will not at this stage receive additional allocations from the International Federation in the interests of ensuring that each and every population receives a quota of assistance.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent action***

### **Benin w**

Funding has been received in response to the Appeal from the Finnish and American Red Cross for the flood operation in Benin. Thanks to interventions from the government, CARITAS and WFP, the level of vulnerability has decreased. However, the risk of epidemics remains high since latrines, water storage systems and wells have not been repaired. Access to clean drinking water remains a problem. The National Society conducted an additional needs assessment on December 3 and 4, concluding that in the worst affected areas the health risks are compounded by malnutrition in young children. The National Society proposes to assist 6,915 beneficiaries in Djidja, Ouèssè, Zangnanado, Zogbodobé, Bohicon and Bantè. Second-hand clothing, blankets, impregnated mosquito nets, essential medicines and beans, maize, oil and sugar will be distributed by Red Cross volunteers. The National Society will continue its work to familiarise local communities with means of prevention of disease related to flooding.

### **Burkina-Faso w**

With funding made available in response to the appeal, the Red Cross Society of Burkina-Faso is assisting 1,000 of the most vulnerable in Markoye, Saimossi and Titao. Since the need for food remains paramount, 12 kgs of cereals per person per month will be provided over a three month period, and mats, blankets and second-hand clothing will be purchased and distributed by Red Cross volunteers.

### **The Gambia w**

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) provided support for the renovation of houses in two districts of the Upper River Division. Between October 24-31, the Gambia Red Cross Society conducted a needs assessment in this area which affected 35 villages, partially or totally damaged 1,064 houses, and affected 9,211 people. Construction materials (cement, corrugated iron sheeting, wood and nails) are being purchased in December by the CRS and handed over to the National Society for distribution to the flood victims. In September, thanks to private donations from individuals and companies, a one month's supply of food was provided to most of the flood victims. In the Central River and Upper River Divisions, WFP also distributed 27 mt of cereals and 17.5 mt of oil. UNICEF is also providing medicines, health education and sanitation. The Federation plans to provide blankets which are urgently needed with the arrival of the cold weather. The British Red Cross has also contributed to further assistance to the flood victims which will be used to procure non-food items.

### **Ghana w**

The Swiss and German Red Cross, and USAID, provided contributions to the Ghana Red Cross to assist flood victims. Second-hand clothing donated by Swedish Red Cross was distributed to the flood-affected areas. A total of 5,000 blankets, ORS salts, and cholera information leaflets were distributed, and education sessions were provided on how to prevent the spread of cholera.

Various United Nations agencies envisage the provision of food for 50,000 people in the Northern, Upper East, and Upper West Regions. More food assistance will be needed to carry people over until the next harvest. UN agencies also report that agricultural assistance will also be required in the form of seeds and tools since there will be an estimated 50%-60% reduction in crop yields. WHO and UNICEF are providing mosquito nets, vaccines, syringes, and vitamin A capsules.

### **Mali w**

Immediate assistance was provided by the German and American Embassies. In view of the scale of damage and losses in eight regions, including the capital Bamako, increased assistance is essential. Many of the flood victims lived in houses made of mud situated in low-lying areas or river beds. Building norms are not respected and deteriorating facilities, including sanitation systems, are not well

maintained, resulting in increased levels of disease or health related problems. With funding and assistance made available in response to the Appeal, the National Society will provide blankets, second-hand clothing and kitchen utensils to the most vulnerable in Kayes, Koulikoro, Sikasso, Ségou, Mopti, Tombouctou, Gao and Bamako, most of whom lost all their possessions during the floods.

#### **Mauritania w**

The Spanish Red Cross, through ECHO funding, provided 500 tents for the worst-affected in the regions of Trarza, Brakna and Gorgol. The provision of shelter came at a crucial time with the approach of the cold season as families gathered under trees and flimsy huts of branches and leaves. Beneficiary selection was carried out by representatives chosen by inhabitants of the regions, with the supervision of the Mauritanian Red Crescent and the Spanish Red Cross. 10 mt of food rations, oil and sorghum were distributed in the region of Trarza where the flood victims were hardest hit. Outstanding needs remain particularly non-food items, blankets, mats and kitchen utensils. There is also the intention to set up co-operative agricultural projects for which tools are sought.

#### **Niger w**

With a balance of funding from the 1998 floods operation, the Red Cross Society of Niger purchased 9 mt of millet for distribution and, from its stock, provided a total of 55 tents to those without shelter in Tahoua and Diffa regions. The government arranged for temporary shelter in school buildings and distributed 300 mt of cereals. However, with the resumption of classes, the homeless were obliged to move out. Those affected by the floods are still unable to reconstruct their damaged houses and many families are therefore living in the shells of buildings left after the waters receded. The most urgent need is currently for 3,000 blankets as the cold season will bring more suffering to the flood victims.

#### **Senegal w**

The Spanish and Senegalese Red Cross, with funding provided by ECHO, assisted 5,000 people in the Department of Podor along the River Senegal. A second evaluation revealed the need to assist a further 25,000 people in Podor who had completely or partially lost their homes. The most vulnerable include children under fifteen, pregnant and lactating women, physically and mentally handicapped, the elderly and heads of families, and these are the intended beneficiaries. The following assistance has been provided: 14,000 people received food supplies of rice, oil and beans for one month; 10,000 people received blankets, mats, bleach and soap; seeds were supplied to 2,000 families and 100 family tents were distributed in Tarédji where the inhabitants of Donaye village had settled following the total destruction of their village. 180 latrines are planned for construction at the site and essential medicines for malaria and diarrhoea will be made available. A further evaluation is currently being conducted in the Departments of Dagana, Matam and St. Louis where the consequences of flooding are also extremely serious.

## ***Outstanding needs***

To date and despite the needs, the Appeal has received a coverage of only 19.19%. Nevertheless, the flood victims have benefited from considerable bilateral support from the Spanish, German, and Swiss Red Cross, together with assistance from the UN, ECHO and other agencies. As a result, funds generated by this Appeal have been allocated as a priority to Benin, Burkina-Faso, Mali and Niger which have been granted little assistance from other organisations.

Many of the flood-affected have now managed to re-build their homes. However, many people do not have the resources to reconstruct their mud dwellings and have been obliged to subsist in what remains of their houses.

The importance of the Regional Disaster Preparedness Programme has again been highlighted, together with the need to take early preventive measures as a result of the collation of relevant information from the early warning systems networks. There is a need to ensure disaster preparedness training for relief staff, to reinforce preparedness at community level and to improve coping mechanisms.

The Gambian Red Cross Society requires 150 bales of second-hand clothing in view of the current cold weather.

## ***External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media***

Specialised UN bodies and aid agencies have been active in providing rapid assistance to the flood-affected areas. The National Societies maintain links with UN representatives and humanitarian agencies on the ground and are recognised as valuable partners to ensure that aid indeed reaches the intended beneficiaries. The decision taken in line with strategies to improve food security in the region and the designation of the WFP as the focal point on food requirements has proved efficient and has avoided duplication of efforts.

The interest of the international and national media has decreased since the occurrence of the torrential rains between June and September.

## ***Contributions***

See Annex 1 for details.

*Many contributions mentioned in this report have not been recorded in the list of contributions. To ensure correct financial reporting donors and the regional delegation are requested to complete Pledge Management Notes (PMNs) to correctly record these important contributions.*

## ***Conclusion***

The donor response to the Floods Appeal has been disappointing, and as a result the Federation response and assistance has been delayed. Nevertheless, the contributions received will complement the actions taken by both bilateral and external partners and prove valuable in providing additional support for the many thousands of flood victims. Solidarity in the communities which were worst-hit by the flooding has enabled a large number of the vulnerable to cope. The precarious nature of the living conditions of those affected coupled with the loss of all possessions will, however, continue to impact on the livelihoods of these populations for many months to come.

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