

DREF operation update



International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Republic of Congo: Population Movement

DREF operation n° MDRCG005
Update n° 1
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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.

Period covered by this update: 23 November to 18 December, 2009.

Summary: CHF 247,375 (USD 244,200 or EUR 163,857) was allocated from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) on 23 November, 2009 to support the Congolese Red Cross (CRC) in delivering emergency relief assistance to some 10,000 beneficiaries, i.e. the most vulnerable among the over 24,000 initial refugee populations from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) following a conflict over a disputed fishing lake in the Province of Equateur in DRC. Since then, the refugees have reached the number of 84,000 people. They have been assisted by the Congolese authorities; the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR); the World Food Programme (WFP); the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement; Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF); Médecins d'Afrique (MDA) and the Agence pour l'Assistance des Réfugiés Congolais (AAREC). The assistance provided has not been sufficient to meet all the basic needs of the displaced population (protection, health and care, food and nutrition, shelter, restoring family links, education, etc.) However, with this DREF allocation, the Red Cross volunteers have been able to conduct sensitization campaigns in displaced and host communities on water, sanitation and hygiene and distribute water purifying tablets in coordination with AAREC to prevent the outbreak of waterborne diseases such as Cholera. They also started helping the most vulnerable among the refugee households with shelter and latrines construction materials and advice. Furthermore, the Red Cross volunteers are being trained for food and non food items distribution exercises together with WFP and UNHCR for shelter construction.

The response has been logistically complicated because the refugees "scattered along a 500 km stretch on the banks of the Ubangi river" (see UNHCR Briefing Note on Equateur: 15.12.09). An exhaustive refugees' registration is yet to be done by UNHCR. This is delayed partly on the Congolese Government pending status definition of the displaced persons.

The operation was initially planned to be implemented in three months, and completed by 20 February, 2010 but in line with the slow implementation rate (logistical obstacles) and increasing needs (increasing populations in needs) it is expected that the implementation period will be extended with the Federation most likely launching an emergency appeal to help meet the needs of more refugee households.

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 the beginning of this operation, the number of refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo has increased from about 24,000 to close to 84,000 with thousands of them crossing the Ubangi River every day into the Republic of Congo (RoC). These population movements have affected 5 districts of Likouala Region in the RoC with hosting more than about 60% of the refugees. Populations started crossing the river into the RoC when in October 2009, a dispute over a fishing lake between two communities turned into interethnic clashes in the areas of Dongou and Gemena in the Equateur province in DRC. The number of refugees started increasing drastically after the deployment by the DRC government of additional police forces to Dongou to pacify the region. Later on, the situation turned into a complex one as rumours started spreading about a possible rebellion in the Equateur Province. The table below shows the evolution of the number of refugees during the first fortnight of December.

Locality	Date					
	02 Dec.	04 Dec.	07 Dec.	09 Dec.	11 Dec.	14 Dec.
<i>Bétou</i>	37,114	47,447	49,946	50,669	51,129	54,259
<i>Dongou</i>	10,434	10,434	10,434	11,189	11,265	11,265
<i>Enyellé</i>	903	903	903	903	903	903
<i>Impfondo</i>	6,673	13,835	13,835	13,835	13,835	13,835
<i>Liranga</i>	1,563	1,563	2,370	2,370	3,321	3,650
Total	56,687	74,182	77,488	78,966	80,453	83,912

Table 1: RDC Refugees in Likouala Departement RoC (source UNHCR & the Congolese Home Office)

The districts where the refugees have settled are known to be the sites of refugees from DRC in the recent past. This could help timely in the reactivation of some mechanisms and “know how” in the refugee operation management regarding the beginning of this new influx of refugees. UNHCR, MSF, MDA and AAREC have established some response capacities in the area. Unfortunately the traditional epidemiological surveillance systems have been overwhelmed and serious gaps are being noticed in the identification and notification of cases. Due to the fact, also, that part of the refugees drink water mainly from the river, there is a likelihood of cholera outbreaks. Most of the refugees do not have either access to adequate shelter and warm cloths, Acute Respiratory Infections prevail among the displaced populations. During the coming days, it is likely that UNHCR and the Government of RoC will take a decision to set up camps and relocate the displaced populations. This will greatly facilitate the operation. The field assessments conducted by the Congolese Red Cross with support from the Federation representations in Yaoundé and Kinshasa, ICRC, and French Red Cross have revealed that there are new and/or unmet needs that are yet to be satisfied. This includes the need to increase Red Cross capacities in the area, especially in the affected localities such as the district of Betou where no Red Cross structure exists.

Coordination and partnerships

The Government of the Republic of Congo has set up a task force that supervises the entire operation. The Congolese Red Cross supported by the Federation Regional Disaster Response Team members from West and Central Africa is a member of the task force. Several humanitarian actors are also involved in the task force and coordinate their response adequately, sharing resources wherever necessary. While MSF and MDA are active in the health sector, UNICEF, AAREC and CRC are mainly focusing on water and sanitation, shelter and relief distribution. WFP and UNHCR provide foods and non food items respectively. The National Society and the Federation coordinate their actions with ICRC, and Participating National Societies (PNS) in both countries. Joint assessments and joint planning of Movement Response at both sides of the border evolve very well with ICRC taking the lead in DRC and the Federation in the Republic of Congo. The French Red Cross has made a pledge as support and will avail part of its regional stock in Bangui as well as technical resources if necessary. While it is expected that the Congolese Red Cross plays a greater role in shelter, water and sanitation and relief distribution it should be necessary to define its response strategy in DRC. In helping reduce the negative impact of logistical challenges, UNHCR, PAM and ECHO have enhanced their respective warehouse and air transportation facilities available in DRC in order to support the operation in the Roc. These facilities have also been extended to humanitarian organizations other than UN agencies.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

Progress towards objectives

Relief distributions (food and basic non-food items)

Objective: To improve the living conditions of 2,000 families of refugees identified as the most vulnerable in the Betou, Dongou and Impfondo localities through the distribution of non-food items.

Activities planned:

- Identifying the needs of the most vulnerable refugees ;
- Purchasing materials and transporting them to targeted localities;
- Training Red Cross volunteers on food distribution and other relief activities techniques;
- Distribution of food and non-food items to targeted beneficiaries;
- Production of distribution reports

Progress:

The identification of the most vulnerable people has started in most of the sites and is yet to be completed. This is being done by 60 newly recruited and trained Red Cross volunteers. Additional 30 volunteers are going to be trained in the coming months on relief distribution techniques. This will help to increase the Human Resource capacity of the existing 37 volunteers. In total the National Society has mobilized, trained and deployed 127 volunteers for the operation.

No distribution of non-food items (NFI) has taken place due to the ongoing assessment and identification of those that may be in a dire need for NFI. Nevertheless, 3,000 vulnerable people have already been identified. Some stocks are available with UNHCR and have been planned for distribution in the coming days. For the sake of the operation the Federation's representations in Kinshasa and Yaoundé as well as the Congolese Red Cross provided three vehicles. Some protective, sanitation tools and equipments also have been deployed. They are to be used by Red Cross volunteers. The capacity of the RoC national disaster response teams (NDRT) have been enhanced with the deployment of three RDRT members for one month.

Challenges:

A part from the fact that the Congolese Government is yet to decide upon the exact status of the displaced persons and subsequently offer lands for their relocation/grouping, most of the items that are needed for the operation are not available in the local market. They should be brought from Brazzaville (about 2,000 km away) or from the nearest big city in Bangui (250 km), if not from further places thus requiring enormous logistics support.

Emergency health

Objective: To improve the living conditions of 2,000 families of refugees identified as the most vulnerable in the Betou, Dongou and Impfondo localities through community-based health activities.

Activities planned:

- Sensitization to the dangers of malaria and HIV/AIDS;
- Administration of first aid assistance to injured persons;
- Treatment and support for old people.

Progress:

Red Cross volunteers have conducted sensitization campaigns on basic environmental sanitation and malaria control targeting households as well as public gatherings. They conducted as well cleaning campaigns in public places. Within the 3,000 vulnerable people identified by Red Cross volunteers there are more than 300 elderly and 150 chronically ill people whom the volunteers assist with drinking water and relief items collection, as well as transportation to health services for an adequate care. In the field of first aid very few of interventions have been done by Red Cross volunteers. This is mainly due to the fact that the overall health conditions of the refugees are satisfactory. Injured refugees are receiving treatment from MFS and MDA.

Challenges:

Recruiting and training adequate number of Red Cross and community volunteers to carry out awareness raising activities remain a challenge as few people within the host communities understand how the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement operates. Another challenge is the lack of adequate communication technology as internet facilities are almost nonexistent making it difficult to get real time feedback from the field.

Water, sanitation, and hygiene promotion

Objective: To reduce the risks of water borne diseases and improve the sanitation system for the displaced population for the next 3 months.

Activities planned:

- Training Red Cross volunteers on basic water and sanitation techniques;
- Sensitizing the refugees to hygiene rules and the dangers of not cleaning hands;
- Supporting the distribution of potable water;
- Sensitization of the refugees to the conservation and use of potable water;
- Supporting the treatment of targeted water points;
- Supporting the disinfection of existing latrines, and the creation of emergency latrines;
- Participating in environmental sanitation activities.

Progress:

Sixty volunteers have been trained on water and sanitation, on the basis of 20 in Betou, 35 in Impfondo, 20 in Dogou and 5 in Boyele. New training sessions are planned before 31 December, 2009. In Edoko and Lanka, the volunteers' training is scheduled by the end of the December. However, due to the difficult access of these sites, the trainers will benefit from a mission of MSF and MDA, which will visit these localities for the mobile clinic. To improve on meeting the minimum Sphere standards, the Red Cross volunteers have constructed two public VIP latrines in two sites in addition to those constructed by AAREC. The Red Cross volunteers have conducted as well a total of 42 sanitation and cleaned up campaigns in various sites (20 in Betou, 10 in Impfondo and 12 in Dongu) benefiting some 6,000 people.

Due to the fact that the Red Cross volunteers are newly recruited and trained and therefore lack IEC skills, sensitization activities in Betou especially are now focused on improving hygiene for individual, household, environment and sanitation. Information on HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases will be included into the IEC package at a later stage.

Working in close coordination with MDA, the Red Cross volunteers have distributed water purification tablets to households and disinfected water points in various areas. A complete report on this is yet to be compiled. The Red Cross volunteers are currently conducting a survey in the sites to know the exact type of latrines that will be built for the displaced persons.

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:

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