



PANAMA: FLOODS

**Final Report for
DREF Bulletin
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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 Final Report: 27 November, 2006 to 27 January 2007.

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

- CHF 69,509 (USD 55,607 or EUR 43,716) allocated from the Federations DREF on 27 November 2006 to respond to the needs of this operation.
- This operation was expected to be implemented in 2 months, and completed by 27 January 2007. In line with Federation reporting standards, the DREF Bulletin Final Report (narrative and financial) is due 90 days after the end of the operation (by 27 April 2007).

Financial Report will be attached shortly

The International Federation undertakes activities that 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.

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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.

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 Summary

Unexpected severe and long-lasting rains were reported since 11 November in the eastern part of the province of Panama (Panama East) causing significant flooding in the districts of Pacora and Chepo. The heavy rains further affected some areas that were still recovering from bad weather and subsequent damages at the end of October 2006.

The unstable conditions continued and on 19 November – worsened by a cold front – brought heavier rains to regions that were already saturated with water, causing even more flooding. On 23 November, a National State of Emergency was declared due to floods in the province of Colón (Costa Abajo and Costa Arriba), the Kuna Yala indigenous region, the north of the province of Coclé and the north, west and east areas of the province of Panama. It is estimated that 12 people died and more than 4,800 families (24,000 people) were directly affected by these floods. More than 799 homes were damaged – of which more than 247 were completely destroyed. At least 1,253 people were evacuated to temporary shelters.

The Red Cross Society of Panama has been involved in this emergency in the provinces of Colón, Coclé and Panama.

In the province of Colón, floods were reported in several communities of Costa Arriba and Costa Abajo causing severe damage to houses, schools, health centres, and infrastructure (inaccessible roads and destroyed bridges). The capital of the province underwent similar floods and strong winds, although not on the same scale as in the areas mentioned above. More than 2,900 families were affected in this province and part of the population had to be evacuated to temporary shelters.

In the province of Coclé, the severe rains mainly affected the Atlantic coast, as well as the Coclé Norte and Coclesito areas. The overflowing rivers, along with landslides and destruction of the basic infrastructure (destroyed bridges and highways), caused difficulties in accessing the area around the mountains. In this province it was estimated that more than 1,160 families were affected.

In the province of Panama, the heavy rains severely affected the western part of the province. Landslides as a result of the flooding caused natural dikes, which worsened the problems with the increased water levels. In this province, more than 740 families were affected by the floods and landslides. The flooding caused severe damages to houses, schools and infrastructure, as well as to the water supply system of the districts of Arraiján, Chorrera and Capira. Due to the strong winds the Red Cross volunteers experienced some difficulties with search and rescue (SAR) and evacuation activities. Significant flooding in the eastern part of the province of Panama in the districts of Pacora and Chepo has affected over 50 families.

The dry season has set in and water levels have considerably receded, which has allowed villagers to gradually return to their normal lives and seasonal activities. An inter-institutional commission was formed by the Ministry of Housing (Ministerio de Vivienda-MIVI), the Ministry of Education (Ministerio de Educación – MEF) and the Ministry of Public Works (Ministerio de Obras Públicas- MOP) in order to accelerate the rehabilitation phase in terms of repairing schools, houses, public infrastructure, etc.



IFRC personnel carrying out field assessment in Río Indio. Source: International Federation

Coordination

All the activities carried out by the Red Cross Society of Panama (RCSP) during the operation were coordinated with all governmental and non governmental institutions present in the affected areas, such as National System of Civil Protection (Sistema Nacional de Protección Civil - SINAPROC), the Panama Fire Brigade, the Ministries of Housing, Social Development, Health, Public Works and Education, the National Maritime Service, the National Aerial Service, the Office of the First Lady, the Governmental Water Agency (Instituto de Acueductos y Alcantarillados - IDAAN), the United Nations Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Analysis of the operation – achievements and impact

The Red Cross Society of Panama mobilized more than 300 members from nine local branches and the National Society headquarters, ensuring a direct response to the emergency situation by supporting activities such as search and rescue and evacuation, first aid, establishment of temporary shelters, needs assessments and the provision of immediate relief items in the form of clothing, non-perishable goods, food and hygiene kits.

From the onset of the disaster the National Society has been in close contact and coordination with the Federation's Pan American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU). A Regional Intervention Team (RIT) member specialized in Water and Sanitation as well as the IT and Telecommunications expert from PADRU were deployed to the field to support the emergency operation.

The need for IT and Telecommunications support was assessed in several remote areas of the province of Colón. In order to provide the areas with communication resources as quickly as possible the Red Cross Society of Panama and PADRU established an operational telecommunications centre in the Río Indio community in Colón. With the installation of this centre, communication was restored between the provinces of Colón and northern Coclé, and isolated communities have been reached. A telecommunications kit including a VHF system and repeaters, an HF system, generators, a laptop, a GPS and satellite phones was sent to the field for this purpose.

The Red Cross Society of Panama, with the support of Federation, has achieved the following objective:

Objective 1: 550 of the most affected families (approximately 2,750 persons) benefit from the distribution of food and non food items to assist them to recover from the effects of the floods.

Achievements

The following table shows how the food and non-food items were distributed to the 550 targeted families according to the plan of action supported by DREF funding:

Affected provinces	Affected districts	Beneficiary families	Relief items distributed
Panama East	Pacora/ Chepo	50	Hygiene kits, kitchen sets, blankets
Colón	Donoso/ Chagres	200	Hygiene kits, food parcels, water tanks, blankets
Coclé	Coclé del Norte	150	
Panama West	Capira	150	

In addition to the DREF funding, other private food and non-food items contributions allowed the Red Cross Society of Panama to distribute a total of:

- 550 hygiene kits,
- 50 kitchen kits,
- 3,000 blankets,
- 1,350 food parcels and
- Approximately 2,500 gallons of drinking water.

Impact

The most immediate impact of the operation is that 550 of the most affected families saw their basic needs met through the timely distribution of relief items. Although there were some difficulties in accessing the areas, the timing of the distributions was coordinated in order to ensure that goods were provided when people needed them the most. In the case of some isolated communities, assessment and evaluation activities were complemented with the direct distribution of water, food and non-food items in order to provide them with immediate assistance and help the affected families through the first days.

The activities within the Plan of Action of the Red Cross Society of Panama had a significantly wider reach thanks to private food and non-food items donations.

Constraints

The main constraint during the operation was the difficulty to access some of the affected areas during the first days of the emergency. Inaccessible roads, collapsed bridges, and generalized bad weather conditions made it difficult to reach communities, in spite of the support provided to SINAPROC by the National Air Service (three helicopters) and the National Naval Service (two vessels).

In addition to the difficult access, telecommunications coverage was also limited - which hampered a timely and accurate damage and needs assessment. Through the operational telecommunications centre established by the RCSP with the support of PADRU, communication was restored between the provinces of Colón and northern Coclé, and isolated communities were reached. The IT and Telecommunication support was therefore essential in restoring and maintaining good information and assessment recourses.

The lack of logistic resources at the RCSP (boats, vehicles, helicopters) made it difficult to optimize the number of available human resources and reach the affected areas.

Even though coordination took place between all the parties involved in the emergency operation and duplication or overlapping of relief efforts did not occur, inter-agency coordination could have been better during the first phase of the operation. This would have resulted in a more efficient utilization of logistic, material and human resources. Logistics resources – in particular - could have been optimized and utilized by other organizations that in turn had sufficient available human resources and humanitarian supplies.

Lessons learned:

On 2 February 2007 the operational evaluation organized by the RCSP took place with the support of the Federation and the participation of the National Police, OCHA, The Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), SINAPROC, MIVI and others. The implementation of such evaluation is in line with the Federation's aim to provide humanitarian relief according to SPHERE standards and Federation policies.

Lessons drawn from this operation include:

- The preliminary visits to the communities and selection of suitable distribution points increased the effectiveness of distributions, as well as the safety and comfort of personnel, and facilitated the gathering of data for reporting.
- According to the outcome of the evaluation, adjustments are now being made on operational procedures, deployment mechanisms and packaging of some relief items that were getting damaged before they reached the beneficiaries.
- The evaluation underlined the importance of effective coordination amongst all actors in terms of information sharing, logistic and human resources optimization, in order to ensure more effective and rapid response in future emergencies. As a result of the evaluation, it was decided among all involved institutions, that improvement of the coordination especially in the first phase would provide a more effective utilization of available resources.

- The evaluation emphasised the importance of the commitment and motivation of RCSP volunteers for the successful completion of the emergency operation.
- The evaluation also revealed the need to strengthen the capacity of National Societies by providing these volunteers with better equipment in order to better prepare them for future actions.
- Overall, the evaluation was appreciated by all participants and considered to be very useful for future operations. It allowed for the sharing of experiences and acknowledgement of strengths and weaknesses, as well as opportunities and hazards. Valuable lessons learned during the operation were formulated and exchanged, leading to a greater appreciation and understanding of each others' ways of responding in times of disaster.

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