



DREF Operational Learning

Purpose:	Learning about main challenges from the Floods Operation
Operation	Tunisia – Floods
Participant(s):	Marco Vargas – DREF Team
Dates:	20-26 February 2019
Destination:	Tunis and Hammamet, Tunisia.

Outstanding findings

Despite the three months delay for the procurement of the NFIs for distribution under the DREF operation, the TRCS was able to distribute the items within the operations timeframe, and these were still relevant for the needs of the affected population.

During the operations timeframe and while waiting for the NFIs, the Branches involved in the operation continued to provide aid to the affected population through actions inside and outside of the scope of the operation

Background

Situation

On Saturday 22 September, torrential rain hit north-eastern Tunisia's Cap Bon Peninsula, causing water levels to rise 1.7 meters. The storm dumped approximately 200 millimetres (7.9 inches) of rain on Nabeul and up to 225 millimetres in the city of Beni Khaled, in the peninsula's centre, according to Tunisia's National Institute of Meteorology. This was the heaviest rainfall since the institute began keeping records in 1995. A warning on the storms was issued on September 21st.

More than 6,000 families have been affected by the floods. Some of them fled their homes seeking shelter in neighbouring high-ground houses and villages, while others chose to stay in their damaged houses moving to rooftops rather than risking crossing flooded areas to reach evacuation points. Water supply through pipelines is limited, and the water available in some areas is contaminated. Electricity has been cut off in certain districts to avoid risk to people and electrical damage.

A second flood has hit the country affecting the governorates of Tunis and part of Nabeul; causing damages to houses' and infrastructure.

Families whose homes were damaged partially or completely have lost most of their household items, including mattresses, blankets, clothes, food stocks, hygiene materials and school books. Considering the financial situation, targeted affected people can't afford to replace their lost belongings. All affected houses required clean-up and sanitation to be habitable again. Flooding water ruined food stocks that have been piled in preparedness for winter. Those affected people experienced food shortages due to the loss of livelihoods and purchasing power. Officials estimate that the flood ruined 200,000 poultry, 600 sheep, 15 cows, and 1,000 hectares of planted trees.

Operation

This DREF operation supported with CHF294,452 to the TRCS to respond to the September floods, with an initial operational timeframe of three months, extended by two additional months due to delays in the procurement of NFIs. The operation aimed to deliver emergency assistance and humanitarian relief to 2,000 flood-affected households in eleven providences with:



Emergency Shelter/ Non-food Items

- Distribution of NFIs ((6,000 mattresses and 6,000 blankets)
- Replenishment of NFIs distributed by the NS in the initial stages of the emergency



Food Security

- Distribution of food parcels for 1000 HHs (6 kg Spaghetti, 5 kg semolina, 4 kg tomato paste, 1 kg chilli paste, 2 kg rice, 5 kg couscous, 2 kg macaroni, 2 kg of sugar, 1 kg salt, 0.25 kg coffee, 0.25 kg tea, 3 liters oil, 0.5 kg jam)



Health and care

- Provision of Psychological First Aid (PFA) to the affected population



Water and sanitation

- Distribution of Hygiene kits for 2000 HHs
- Distribution of cleaning kits for 2000 HHs
- 30 volunteers trained in Vector Control



Protection, Gender and Inclusion

- Monitoring of PGI issues at the shelters with volunteers shifts 24 hours a day at the government's shelters.

Objectives of the review

- Identify the main challenges around the implementation of the DREF operation.
- Assess the level of impact of the actions covered by the DREF, including those delayed.

Methodology

The Review was conducted during the visit to the Tunisia Red Crescent Society to support the Lesson Learnt Workshop carried out as part of the floods DREF operation. Information gathering consisted of:

- Discussions with the head of the North Africa CCST
- Discussions with the MENA RO Project Manager
- Discussions with Head of District of the TRCS (main operational focal point)
- Lessons Learnt workshop

The LLW was conducted in Hammamet, the area affected by the floods, and consisted in a two days workshop, with the participation of volunteers from the ten branches involved in the operation and the head of the district.

Challenges

Main limitations in the information gathering for the review are:

- The TRCS president was not available to meet during the visit.

- Not possible to visit the affected area and interview beneficiaries due to a one day delay during the transit to Tunis.

Observations

Management, Coordination and Communication

Due to concerns regarding historical challenges regarding DREF operations in the MENA region, the Disaster and Crisis Unit decided to take on a new approach to the Tunisia Floods operation. To ensure proper implementation of the DREF operation, the MENA regional office appointed as Project Manager to Raja Assaf, Senior Response Officer. Raja's responsibilities included:

- Deployment to Tunisia and the affected areas to conduct Emergency Needs Assessment
- Develop EPoA and Budget for the DREF Request
- Responsibility for the follow up of the implementation of the response actions
- At the National Society level, the main management focal point was the president of the TRCS, with little involvement of the HQ members beside him. At the affected area, the main operational focal point was the District Director, responsible for coordinating the 11 branches engaged in the field and main counterpart for the MENA RO Project Manager.
- The National Society took two main decisions that shaped the course of action of the operation:
 - No funds were transferred to the National Society; the IFRC directly made all payments through the North Africa CCSS, based in Tunis.
 - Due to lack of agreements with the National Authorities for the importation of relief items and customs clearance, the NS decided to not go for international procurement of the NFIs, but instead get the items from local vendors.
- Monitoring was held mostly by the Head of District, through daily calls with the Branches responding to the emergency requesting updates of the situation, calls took place mostly since branches are not used to written reports/updates. Monitoring calls took place during the distribution of the NFIs (last month of operation).
- The TRCS faced issues related to communication, both external and with communities.
 - Senior Management went on TV telling them about donations that were promised, which raised expectations and issues at the branches as persons were going to get relief items that were not available.
 - Selection of beneficiaries was done based on the existing list at the branches from their social programmes, or provided by the local authorities and then checked by the NS
 - Some of the persons not selected as beneficiaries were aggressive

Main Challenges

- **Procurement and distribution of the NFIs**
 - Procurement of the NFIs was done completely local as decided by the TRCS. The coordination with the providers was done between the North Africa CCST and MENA RO Project Manager. The challenges with the procurement were mostly due to the difficulty from the vendors to comply with the IFRC procedures for procurement, this translated in much back and forward with them, extended times to ensure compliance and extra cost due to the "extra steps" required to comply with the procedures. Once the NFIs were procured, they were ship to the affected area by the providers.
 - Due to the delays, the distribution of items was done close to the end of the operational timeframe, which created pressure for the branches to distribute the items to the affected

persons. Despite the time constraints, the TRCS managed to distribute all NFIs within the timeframe.

- Branches carried out the distribution of NFIs at the same place where they were storage, which translated in issues related to crowd control and security.
- There were issues with the quality of the NFIs procured, especially with the items from the hygiene kits (e.g. soaps, female pads)
- During the lessons learned workshop, participants identified as main challenges issues around the volunteering structure, specifically related to:
 - Volunteers engaged in the operation did not have sufficient training in areas like relief distribution and vector control
 - Most of the volunteers were available only during weekends, which delayed some of the activities.
 - Volunteers were not briefed about their insurance coverage, with one case of a volunteer requiring medical attention and not using the insurance.

Beneficiary Satisfaction and impact

- The TRCS conducted satisfaction surveys post distribution of the NFIs; the MENA RO will share the results.
- In terms of the distribution of NFIs (blankets, mattresses, hygiene kits and cleaning kits) it has been identified, by the branches and head of the district, that despite the delayed with the procurement and distribution of the NFIs, these still had a positive impact in response to the needs of the affected population. It's noteworthy that although the actions were still relevant, this is because those affected by the disaster could not cover their needs through other means while waiting for the intervention of the TRCS.
- The TRCS branches carried out response activities additional of those supported by the DREF through the operation's timeframe. The activities varied between the branches, and included:
 - Collection and distribution of domestic donation of NFIs.
 - Support the cleaning and painting of affected houses.
 - Support the refurbishing of homes affected by the floods through the collection of in-kind and funds donations.

Recommendations

Based on the information gathered related to the main challenges for the implementation of this operation, as well as identified best practices, there are the main recommendations for the National Society:

- The National Society requires to enhance its readiness regarding procurement procedures; this could be:
 - Establishing agreements for the preapproval of providers, using the experience of this operations, the TRCS can reach out to the providers utilised during the floods operation, as they are now IFRC procedures. Nevertheless, there must be consideration about the challenges with the quality of some of the items provided by these providers
 - Deciding to utilise the IFRC international procurement, which although can have a delay (approx. 2 months) due to lack of agreement with the government for customs clearance, it can still be faster than local procurement (based on the three months delay for this operation.
 - Creating agreements to expedite customs of relief items from international procurement.

- Volunteers involved in the floods operations have gained experience in the management of a response operation and even trained through the DREF in Relief Distribution and Vector Control (at least 30 trained volunteers). Acknowledging that lack of training for volunteers was identified as part of the main challenges LLW, these volunteers should be considered by the HQ for deployment to support emergency operations in other areas of the country (e.g. the Head of District could be deployed as ops manager)
- The TRCS could use the findings from the LLW for the identification of institutional preparedness activities. The specific actions could include the development of response and contingency planning, identification of roles and responsibilities at the HQ, District and Branch levels, SOPs for emergencies, further training of emergency response teams (e.g. NDRT, LDRT) and others.
- Communication during emergency operations can be scientifically improved with the development of key messages about the NS operation. These messages can be used by Senior Management during interviews and to reach donors, and also by volunteers to communicate effectively with community members (e.g. to communicate the selection criteria for those supported through the operation)

Learning for the DREF Capacity Strengthening Initiative

- Lack of awareness of the DREF procedures continue to be a key factor for delays, not only at National Society Level but within IFRC structures as well.
- The review reinforced the need for a close link between the DREF capacity strengthening initiatives, and the preparedness of National Societies.
- DREF operations continue to provide the opportunity for National Societies to learn about their preparedness and response mechanism, LLW should promote the discussion not only about the specific DREF operation but also about the National Societies structure behind those operations.