



Guyana Red Cross

# Guyana Community Disaster Response Team (CDRT) Response: Region 9 Lethem-St. Ignatius and environs

**May 2011.** Heavy rains in Brasil and Guyana resulted in flooding in southern Guyana, Region 9. Waters continued to rise rapidly, reaching alarming levels during 3-5 June. Many Amerindian communities were cut off from each other, as roads were compromised. Within Lethem, the central community in the Region, water levels rose to levels where access roads were under 8ft of water, and the airstrip was threatened.

Guyana Red Cross NITs residing in Lethem quickly started to respond, one of the first actions was to call up the CDRTs. The CDRTs were previously trained under the OFDA funded *Readiness to Respond* project<sup>1</sup> April 17-18 2009. The CDRTs quickly started to work with the Disaster Committee that became operational, and were able to provide assistance in many areas. Six CDRTs were active at this time. CDRTs provided assistance in conducting needs assessment, evacuating affected residents, shelter coordination, relief distributions and tracing displaced persons/families. Communication took place largely by mouth and daily meetings and debriefings.

When the water levels rose and covered the main bridges between St. Ignatius and Lethem and Lethem and Tabachinga, CDRTs came forward and volunteered their life-jackets to be used on the boats that were ferrying community members across. CDRTs, Red Cross volunteers and community members joined together to sandbag and bail water out of GTT, to preserve the community telecommunications equipment.

Other CDRT equipment that was invaluable to the response was the loudhailer, which was used to assist in family evacuations, disseminating information regarding shelter locations, health messages and water distribution schedules.

The CDRT team managed their response to the situation well. Some of the team members were themselves adversely affected by the flooding, but through their collective action, they managed the needs of the community – alerting neighbours and community members to the danger, assisting in evacuating them to safety, undertaking initial needs assessments, providing reassurance where needed and supporting the Guyana Red Cross with the relief distribution activities.

The experience has indicated that there needs to be continuous support to these teams (whether via the government or Red Cross in the form of regular meetings, etc) and additional guidance on roles in response.



Figure 1 Lethem community members interview neighbour in Tabachinga back in 2009 during VCA training

 International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies



<sup>1</sup> *“Readiness to Respond: Increased Disaster Preparedness through Enhanced Coordination and Community Awareness.” Guyana Red Cross – American Red Cross/USAID –OFDA Project 2008-09.*