

Ugandan early flood warning system triggers pre-disaster humanitarian action

November 19 2015



Heavy rains in Uganda's capital Kampala. Credit: Edgar R. Batte

To prevent waterborne diseases (e.g. dysentery) brought on by floods, the Red Cross last week distributed preparedness items to households in flood-prone villages 300 km north-east of Uganda's capital, Kampala. This is the first time in the history of the International Red Cross that pre-disaster humanitarian action was taken based on a scientific forecast of flood risk. The forecast, which was based on the JRC's Global Flood Awareness System (GloFAS), proved to be correct as the area was subsequently flooded following heavy rainfall.

The humanitarian action was based on a forecast of rising water levels in the Teso area - especially in Amemia parish - where almost 5 000 preparedness items were distributed. The non-food items were procured under 'forecast-based financing' with the support of the German government through the German Red Cross (GRC).

Forecast-based financing (FBF) is a new concept in humanitarian aid whereby humanitarian funding is released based on forecast information for planned activities which reduce risks, enhance preparedness and response, and make disaster risk management more effective overall.

The Uganda Red Cross (URC) Secretary General, Robert Kwesiga, said: "By using forecasts in this innovative project, we are now intervening even earlier, before receiving reports of disasters. With such a timely disbursement, we hope to avoid potential catastrophe before it even happens, supporting people to continue working and going to school."

The GloFAS [forecast](#) used in Uganda was verified by the Uganda National Meteorological Authority (UNMA) and the country's Hydrological Department. According to weather experts at the UNMA, Uganda has experienced the heaviest rainfall in 50 years since the beginning of November.

The Red Cross/Red Crescent Climate Centre's Senior Climate Specialist, Erin Coughlan, added that the evidence from Uganda will inform development of FBF pilot projects in 15 countries around the world that are coordinated by the GRC in cooperation with national societies and the UN World Food Programme and that aim to replicate the approach.

GloFAS is developed by the JRC in cooperation with the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF). It produces real-time flood forecasts for the entire globe, coupling state-of-the-art weather forecasts with a hydrological model. GloFAS already demonstrated its potential during the floods in Myanmar in September 2015, as well as those in Somalia and Iraq in October 2015, for which it provided early flood information to the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) of the European Commission. It is planned that GloFAS will become operational under the Copernicus Emergency Management Service by 2017.

More information: Global Flood Awareness System (GloFAS):
www.globalfloods.eu/

European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF):
www.ecmwf.int/

Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC):
[ec.europa.eu/echo/what/civil-p ... ation-centre-ercc_en](http://ec.europa.eu/echo/what/civil-protection-centre-ercc_en)

Provided by European Commission, Joint Research Centre (JRC)

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