



World Health Organization

Floods in western Africa: health relief arrives

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Floods across western Africa in September were the worst for several decades. Hundreds of thousands of people were at least temporarily displaced, health risks from water-borne bacteria and viruses surged, and already over-burdened health systems were disrupted or destroyed.

As countries in the western African flood plain continue to recover, WHO and partners recently responded with distributions of badly needed medical equipment, drugs and supplies to help get health services back to normal.

"To think that several months down the line we are still receiving support really touches our hearts," says Mustapha Ali Idris, a government minister in northern Ghana. This photo essay shows some of the flood's effects in Ghana and Togo, and health service recovery operations coordinated by WHO and the WHO Regional Office for Africa, and supported by Norway.

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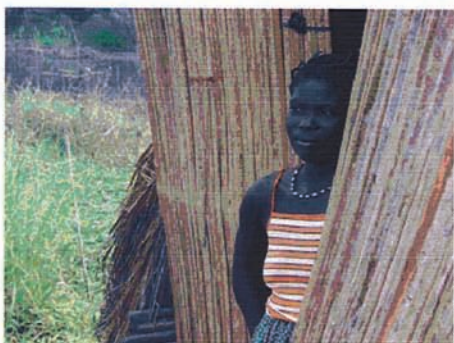
Flood damage across western Africa

In August and September 2007, floods swept across Africa, killing more than 400 people and affecting hundreds of thousands of families. The unprecedented floods hit vulnerable communities hard. "You have to remember," says Dr Kadri Tankari, WHO Representative to Togo

Togo: people displaced

Some areas in the extreme southeast of Togo were completely cut off for more than a month when the river Mono broke its banks.

A young mother, displaced by the floods, took refuge on an embanked road. Three months later she is still sheltering there.



Togo: homes lost, property damaged

In Adamé itself, 80-year-old Douvo Nouviwo did what many people decide to do after their houses are severely damaged in disasters: he stayed put to safeguard what remained of his property, some pots and pans, a few clothes and a chicken coop. His cassava and maize crops were destroyed. "Even though four of my five children live in the village with my 15 grandchildren, I didn't want to leave," says Nouviwo. "For two months I slept in the chicken coop and ate only vegetables."

Togo: health services destroyed

Both the structure and the equipment of the health clinic in Adamé, Togo, were badly damaged during the floods.



WHO/Alex Wynter

Ghana: health risks

"Some communities were deprived of health services for about two and a half months," says Dr Kyei Faried, acting regional director of health services for the region. "The last completely cut-off riverside village was reached only in mid-November."

Two potential health risks that have been aggravated by the floods are malnutrition from possible food shortages to come, and the guinea-worm disease, which has been drastically reduced in Ghana over the past two decades but breeds in standing water, he said.

Ghana: threat of a food shortage

In northern Ghana, Dr Joaquim Saweka (left), the WHO country representative, discusses the flood's effects with the district chief executive Wahab Suhuyini. Many subsistence farmers lost most of their crops. Vast areas of farmland were flooded as planting was under way, and there could be serious food shortages around March of 2008, according to the country's director of health services for the region, Dr Faried.



WHO/Alex Wynter



Medical supplies arrive

Emergency, cholera and medical kits for health relief arrived at the United Nations Response Depot in Ghana in December. The supplies - donated by Norway - will be distributed to Togo, Burkina Faso and in Ghana by WHO.

Relief distribution for the flood zone

The supplies are an integral part of a broader WHO operation to distribute medical aid throughout the western African flood zone, which will include health assistance to Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Sierra Leone.



Ghana: kits for primary care unloaded

In Dalun, Ghana, WHO delivers a "basic unit" to community health nurse Evelyn Mori and a colleague. The unit consists of essential drugs and supplies for a primary health care clinic.



Togo: medical supplies for basic care

Meanwhile in Adamé, Togo, WHO logistics officer Jose Rovira and a WHO Togo water and sanitation engineer distribute medical supplies to health workers at a local clinic. The damaged clinic, re-supplied, can once again provide basic care.

No flood-related cholera outbreak has been detected in Togo, though a risk remains until water supplies are fully back to normal.