



SUCCESS STORY

Coupons Get Relief to Disaster Victims Fast

USAID Supports Innovative Approach to Aid Populations Affected by Flooding in Benin



A Red Cross volunteer helps a beneficiary use his coupons to buy manioc at the humanitarian market.

Photo by Sarah Binder for CRS.

CRS expanded upon a well known method of distribution to incorporate water sanitation and hygiene demonstrations and distributions.

Odile Koukin has lived in Lokpo, a small village in the county of So-Ava in southern Benin, for her entire life. So-Ava is situated on a lagoon where the Ouémé River meets the ocean. An unusually long and heavy rainy season flooded her house completely, destroying all of her family's belongings and taking the lives of their goats and chickens. All of the main water sources in Lokpo were flooded, forcing Odile and her family of ten to drink water straight from the lake. Other victims left the village to stay with family and friends in neighboring communities. Odile had no choice but to stay on the lake, struggling with her husband to care for her family.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 679,578 people in Benin have been affected. In the commune of So-Ava, one of the hardest hit areas, the Ministry of Interior reported that 51,269 people were without shelter, 48,181 livestock perished, and 1,997 hectares of cropland were destroyed.

In response to this natural disaster, Catholic Relief Services partnered with Caritas, Population Services International (PSI), and the Red Cross. With support from USAID, they organized a series of humanitarian fairs between October 23 and 27, 2010. The fairs served the most seriously affected residents of So-Ava and comprised three components.

First, beneficiaries received a demonstration on how to properly treat and store their water, and when and how to wash their hands properly.

Then, each beneficiary received the supplies necessary to treat and store water for three months. "Now that I know how to treat my water, my kids won't have to drink dirty water and can avoid getting sick," Odile said about the water and hygiene demonstration and distribution.

Telling Our Story

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Lastly, beneficiaries used vouchers worth approximately \$20 to purchase essential food and nonfood items of their choice at a mock market run by thirteen local vendors. Items included corn, manioc, rice, beans, oil, and soap. “I have never seen a strategy of aid like this one, where I can choose to buy what I know my family likes and needs,” said beneficiary Ibrahim Hounkpe from Dekammey.

At the end of each day, local vendors redeemed their vouchers for cash. When the fairs ended, 21,115,900 FCFA, approximately \$46,924 was injected into the local economy and 35.6 tons of grains were distributed to flood victims.

Over the course of four days, the fairs served 2,110 households, approximately 10,550 people. “I will never forget what [CRS] has done for me and my family,” Ahlonso Agbete from Ganvie, said.■

Submitted by Carla Brown-Ndiaye/CRS Benin