



Communications for life

**June 28<sup>th</sup> to July 4<sup>th</sup>:**

**Télécoms Sans Frontières' Intervention  
In Cerro Musun  
Nicaragua**

## ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION:

INETER had been warning for some time that the hurricane and storm season would reach Nicaragua, in order that all the systems for disaster relief in Nicaragua - SINAPRED - could be on alert. Télécoms Sans Frontières signed an agreement valid for two years with the Nicaraguan organisation, offering their services in the event of a disaster occurring.

On Saturday June 25<sup>th</sup>, mudslides and general flooding was reported in Cerro Musun, in the borough of Rio Blanco, as well as in the area of Prinzipolca within the RAAN (the North Atlantic Autonomous Region), as a result of the arrival of tropical storms nos. 13 & 14.

TSF immediately contacted the Emergency Operational Centre of SINAPRED, itself in contact with the emergency committee of the affected borough: the communities affected as well as the borough of Rio Blanco had been out of contact since the torrential rains which fell on the night of June 25<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup>. The telephone system had been damaged by the rain: the borough of Rio Blanco could receive calls but not make any, which made the organisation of humanitarian aid very difficult.

SINAPRED called TSF : on Monday June 28<sup>th</sup> a team of technicians from TSF arrived in Rio Blanco in response to the catastrophe, bringing telecommunications equipment including satellite telephones, high-frequency transmitters and computers with Internet access. It was one of the first humanitarian organisation on site.

### The problem was analysed thus :

1. The heavy rains had saturated the soil: the mud slides at Cerro Musun were flowing into ten local communities, notably in a zone of biological interest where the majority of the population lived. The causes of the slide were the heavy demands made by the local people on existing natural resources: over-exploitation of the land's resources plus the water reserves explained the scale of the disaster.
2. 10 areas and 20 communities were most affected: 72 kilometres of road destroyed, the destruction of 15 sewers, one bridge, 11 houses totally destroyed, 11 partly destroyed, 61 on land which was at risk and those remaining in grave danger. Cf. table attached.

Table showing the % of people and families affected by communities according to SINAPRED - Rio Blanco

Area	Population		<i>Populations affectées</i>		
	inhabitants	Nbre. Families	Inhabitants	No. Families	%
Palancito	1534	250	202	<b>33</b>	<b>13.0</b>
Palan Grande	680	111	500	<b>86</b>	<b>77.5</b>
Mancera	601	98	383	<b>70</b>	<b>71.5</b>
Wanawas	1644	269	385	<b>50</b>	<b>18.6</b>
Cano negro	560	92	276	<b>46</b>	<b>50.0</b>
Las Penitas	826	135	54	<b>13</b>	<b>9.62</b>
Wanawana	1016	166	24	<b>4</b>	<b>2.4</b>
San Adres de Boboque	893	146	20	<b>3</b>	<b>2.0</b>
Cabecera de paiwas	1066	174			
Centre ville	Affected population from Cano Negro, El martillo y Cabecera de Paiwas		70	<b>12</b>	<b>¿?</b>
Total	8820	1441	1914	<b>317</b>	<b>22</b>

1. There are 15 centres, 6 of which hold 75% of the affected population. These found themselves crammed into the centres or private houses, exposed to the effects of cold with little food and drinkable water, leading to cases of depression for the most vulnerable. TSF recognised the need for significant psychological support.
2. Roads to reach the most serious devastation were in a bad state, limiting access to the disaster area. Only one community was accessible by a 4 x 4 vehicle, the others needing at least a 3-hour walk over very dangerous ground. A mass evacuation as well as the search for survivors and bodies, moving in humanitarian aid, the rapid evaluation of the exact amount of damage to human resources and the environment in general was impossible. There was an urgent need for adequate telecommunications to co-ordinate any rescue attempts.
3. Despite the will to support affected communities, the organisational limitations and meagre technical resources of the emergency committee were enormous. The process of direct support for the population was slowed down again and again.

## **RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION**

### **BRIEF DETAILS OF THE BOROUGH**

Rio Blanco belonged to the borough of Matagalpa, surface area of 700 km<sup>2</sup>, 46 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>, with a total population of 32,241 inhabitants. 48% of the population is rural (15430 people) against 52% (16811 people) who are urban. Rio Blanco has 4915 households where the social security support is negligible. The borough has 8 districts and 14 boundaries with other areas.

The economy is predominantly agricultural, generating 42.2% of the total employment available: the second biggest source of employment (dairy industry -cheese making) totals 10.1%: the remaining percentage of work comes from service industries and commerce.

Data supplied by the borough numbers 350 families in the protected zone, 45% of the total population. More than 30% of the inhabitants of Cerro Musun have lived there for more than 12 years, the majority being demobbed soldiers from the resistance movement and the Nicaraguan army : some who produce basics grains such as coffee, cocoa and citrus fruits own their property legally.

The following evaluation corresponds to: An analysis zone by zone of the deterioration of daily living conditions and safe delivery of food for victims, the Deterioration of access roads and a Diagnosis of the level of vulnerability.

This evaluation is in progress and is processed with the cooperation of the Production Committee of the borough. July 2<sup>nd</sup> is the proposed date of the initial results.

**Today, five weeks after the start of the first rains, the situation has worsened. Heavy rains continue, the communities remain threatened, to which access is still impossible.**

## TABLEAU D'EVALUATION DES BESOINS

Date: 29/06/04

Heure: 6pm

No	Comunities	Population						Name of shelter	Deaths	Missing
		Affected		Sinistrés		Shelters				
		N/F	N/P	N/F	N/P	N/F	N/P			
I.	<b>Palán</b>									
01.	Palán – Bilampí (antes Palancito)	33	202	33	202	33	202	Escuela Amor Divino	8	2
02.	Palán Grande	47	301	47	301	47	301	Escuela Monte Cristo		
03.	Palán Central	20	125	20	125	20	125	Escuela Monte Cristo		
04.	Palán Jicote	19	74	19	74	19	74	Maisons familles, amis		
II.	<b>Wanawás</b>									
01.	Caserío Wanawás	10	63	10	63	10	63	Escuela Cristóbal Colón		
02.	San Luis	5	32	5	32	5	32	Escuela Sacuanjoche		
03.	La Isla	35	290	35	290	35	290	Escuela Amor Divino		
III.	<b>Caño Negro</b>									
01.	Población dispersa	46	276			28	176	Family houses, friends Iglesia católica Jacinto Sevilla		1 family
IV.	<b>Mancera</b>									
01.	Mancera arriba	8	41	8	41	8	41	Casa Andrés Guzmán	5	6
02.	Mancera abajo	12	81	12	81	12	81	Escuela		
03.	Colina de Mancera	50	261	25	150	25	150	Casa Prof. Freddy Oporta		
V.	<b>Las Peñitas</b>									
01.	Peñitas arriba	11	45	1	8	1	8	Escuela Santo Eduviges	1	5
02.	Peñitas central	2	9	2	9	2	9	Sin confirmar		
VI.	<b>Wanawana</b>									
01.	Santo Tomás	4	24	4	24	4	24	Maisons familles, amis		
02.	San Pedro									
VII.	<b>El Martillo</b>									
01.	Población dispersa									
VIII.	<b>San Andrés de Boboque</b>									
01.	Cacerío disperso	3	20	3	20	3	20	Maisons familles		
IX.	Río Blanco, Casco Urbano			12	70	12	70	INASOL, are families from Caño Negro		
X.	<b>Cabecera de Paiwas</b>									
01.									1	
XI.	<b>Municipio de Matiguás</b>									
01.									1	
<b>08</b>	<b>TOTAUX</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>1852</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>1,767</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>1,767</b>	<b>7 Shelters- others are back up shelters</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>9 missing + 2 entire families, n° of people unknown</b>

The last report from the disaster area on July 6<sup>th</sup> states that:

Affected: 398 families, 2583 people

Stricken: 359 families, 2280 people

Refugee centres: 359 families, 2280 people

23 dead (11 in the Palan area, 8 in the Manceras area), 5 injured, 14 refugee centres established.

Problems in refugee centres :

The authorities operating in Rio Blanco decided to move certain refugee centres, judged to be too exposed, to safer ground. This can be explained by the fact that:

- most refugee centres were in schools which were not suitable as centres. Many were affected by the mud and dust-borne diseases leading to fears of epidemics.
- other refugee centres were built on unstable ground and in areas at risk from water spouts, also new mud slides which would be catastrophic if they hit the rescue centres.
- the emotional impact of the disaster on the population was heightened and everyone agreed that it was important to build links with other groups and reconstruct a communal life

There are 353 families and 2146 people who are going to be re-housed.

## **TSF'S POSITION**

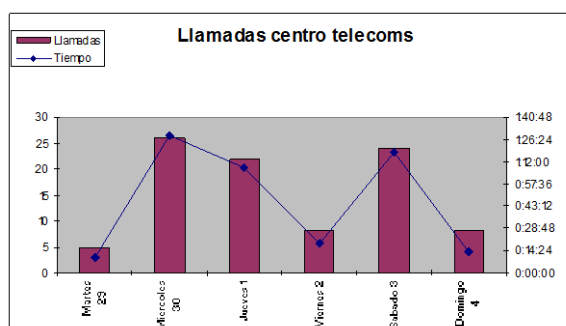
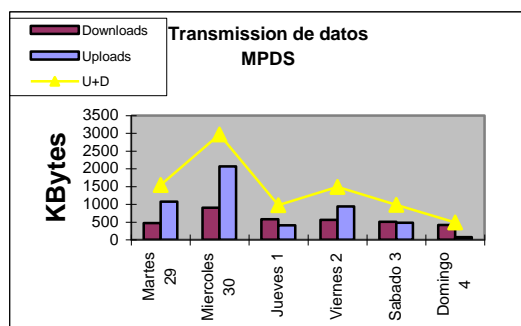
1. TSF's team established a telecommunications centre in the office of the Mayor of Rio Blanco to replace the network damaged by the rains. The Emergency Operations Centre could not communicate with the capital Managua: the telecommunications system had been affected by the torrential rains and the line could only receive calls, not send them.

The satellite system made available facilitated the coordination of the emergency relief operation and the support provided from the capital city and other areas: rescue teams, representatives of governments departments and of SINAPRED - Minsa, Inta, Mi Familia, MTI, Ejercito Nacional, Nicaraguan Civil Security and the police - could transmit their immediate needs on site as well as co-ordinate the arrival of humanitarian aid.



a. MiniM sender and receiver, the high-frequency transmitter and one computer in the Mayor's office (photo on the left) for sending reports, and photographs to show the current situation, send out calls for international assistance etc.

**A total of 93 calls, a total of 4h 38 mins. An average of 3 minutes per call.**



2. A mobile team of TSF technicians worked directly with the population most affected by the disaster and in the refugee camps, where some people had walked for several hours in the hope of telephoning their families in other parts of the country. This satellite telephone network allowed victims to inform their families of the situation. To be able to say « I'm alive! » is very important psychologically; for people in isolation and feeling forgotten.

Mobile telephone centres were established for:

A. Intervention at the refugee centre in la Isla, the only centre still accessible after five weeks since the first rains. Two technicians were sent to the area where they set up a call centre for distressed families who had a great psychological need for support.

Happy to be able to share their experiences with their families, the distressed population were mostly from rural communities: the telephone was not a familiar means of communication in this isolated area. The majorities of these families have never had access to a telephone and have no numbers to call.

The radio is the most usual means of communication.

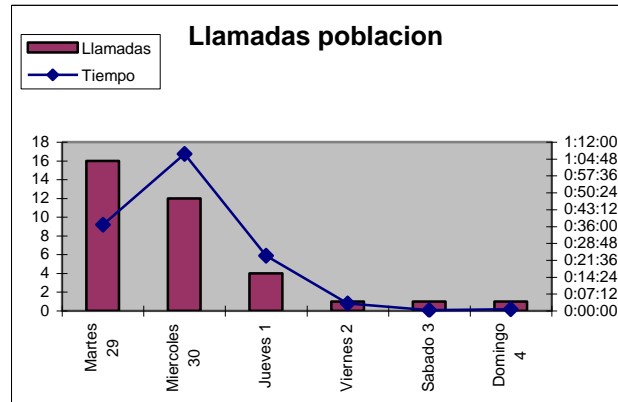
TSF technicians therefore had to find an alternative by taking messages on a piece of paper and sending them via the most popular radio frequencies; depending on the region of the call's destination.

B. Refugee centres in the middle of Rio Blanco where families from different communities were sheltering. They were willing to walk for almost a day and in dangerous conditions in order to avoid further mud slides.



*In this photo, Nubia, a TSF technician, passes radio messages which families in the la Isla centre have given her, written on damp pieces of paper*

**In total 34 radio calls over 2hrs 10 mins, an average of 3 min 50 secs per call.**



TSF's departure:

In co-ordination with the Mayor of Rio Blanco and the Emergency Operations Centre, composed of all the Nicaraguan government agencies, it was decided that Télécoms Sans Frontières could leave the area on July 4<sup>th</sup>, having provided aid for the initial emergency: communications between Rio Blanco and the capital had been re-established.

**CONCLUSION**

Five weeks after the initial rains of June 25<sup>th</sup> -26<sup>th</sup>, the situation of the stricken population of Cerro Musun remains critical.

Télécoms Sans Frontières are still supporting SINAPRED and making available the satellite telephones and their teams who operated in the area of Cerro Musun. The object of their participation is to identify safe areas for the permanent relocation of displaced families.

## COMMENTS OF NGO'S AND INSTITUTIONS

### **Organisation : ACTED - Francia, Henry Zambrana**

#### **Length of mission: 5 days**

- « excellent service »
- Objectives attained thanks to the services of TSF :
  - Sending information to the head office in Managua
  - The handling of finances for the project
  - A direct exchange of opinion with the institute in Managua for optimising the establishment of future projects

### **Institution : Nicaraguan Army, Lieutenant Oscar Antonio Mercado Valle**

#### **Length of mission :10 days**

- « very good service, especially during the time of greatest need, after the initial emergency »
- Objectives achieved thanks to TSF :
  - Transmission and evaluation of the degree of damage
  - Request for help from the capital city
  - Support for children and adolescents
  - Searches for survivors and bodies
  - Inter-institutional co-ordination