

AID TO VULNERABLE POPULATION IN THE PUNO REGION



A female peasant from the District of Coasa, Province of Carabaya, grazes her livestock between the mountains.

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 **Cruz Roja Peruana**

Supporting



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Mobile clinics for those affected by the low temperatures and snowfall in Puno

At ground level you can see feet moving to the rhythm of music. They seem as if they have been molded from clay, withered just like stones exposed to the sun, aridness, wind and intense cold nights. Grandparents dance. Today, Sunday, 15 September, at the health clinic in their community, under Llallahua, they dance and rest. For several months now, they have endured a winter that seems as if it will go on forever, a winter that made them sick, that killed their cattle, the few animals that allow them to survive. The tremendous frosts sickened guaguas (babies) with pneumonia and the flu. The winter in the department of Puno generally extends from May to September, but the strong cold calms in late July; then everything improves. This was not the case this year. August surprised everyone, there were frosts, snow and rain showers; the temperature dropped to 25 degrees below zero, and the provinces of Lampa, El Collao, San Román, Azángaro, Carabaya, Chucuito and Melgar were the most affected.

Linuaria is 60 years old. Pascual, her husband, is just two years older. They have always lived in Llallahua, where they raise alpacas and llamas, the animals capable of withstanding an altitude of more than 4 thousand meters above sea level. Pascual is sure that: all illnesses suffered in his community, especially by grandparents, are due to the cold weather. Linuaria is grateful for today's opportunity: "We suffer from stomach complications, we are treated by doctors but there is no one available to conduct the ultrasound. Luckily, today we will be able to get the ultrasound." The Peruvian Red Cross (PRC), in coordination with the Regional Directorate of Health (DIRESA, acronym in Spanish) from the department of Puno, launched mobile clinics that reach the most affected areas and which today reached Bajo Llallahua. The elderly are given assistance in the areas of general medicine, dentistry, psychology, diagnostic support (laboratory) and ultrasound.

The PRC is not alone. To implement the medical brigades, distribute hygiene kits and blankets, and implement assistance to livestock producers that witnessed the death of their alpacas, the organization received help from the German Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department of the European Commission (ECHO). The Spanish Red Cross also monitored the area to assess ways to provide support.

"Snowfall like the one witnessed recently had not occurred in ten years. It is true that there are frosts in the region every winter, but snow is different, it destroys roads and houses. Snow destroys infrastructure," explains Esteban Fernández, Health Coordinator for the Peruvian Red Cross, who was in charge of operations to distribute supplies. Dr. Sonia Paredes, Head of International Cooperation at DIRESA Puno, described the support provided by the Red Cross as a "blessing."

Medical brigades organized by Peruvian Red Cross provide assistance to vulnerable populations affected by the low temperatures in the Puno Region.



Hygiene kits and blankets

During the first twenty days of September, the most affected areas of the department of Puno were visited by the Red Cross, which distributed one hygiene kit and two blankets to each family of the 1,500 affected families identified during the assessment phase. The operation, with regard to the medical brigades, focused on the vulnerable population: children less than five years of age, pregnant women and adults over 65 years of age. Hours of traveling to the communities to distribute aid was only made possible via the essential participation of volunteers in Puno, who were responsible for identifying beneficiaries and ensuring that each person received the aid being delivered.

On Friday the 13th, the Red Cross team arrives at the health clinic in Ampatiri. The 155 beneficiaries come from the communities of Batalla, Villa Santiago, Ticaraya and Ampatiri. A group of women sits in a circle, eats puffed corn and talks while waiting to be called. Olga, Marta, Dolores, María, Herminia and Julia joke in their Aymara language and laugh because I do not understand them. They are happy. They say that, during this very cold winter, they had few blankets and that they kept warm with their aguayos (multicolored woolen clothes). “Thanks for remembering us,” exclaims Marta.

On Monday the 16th, it is the communities of Acllamayo, San Bartolomé, Antaymarca, Apaycachi and Ichucahua, in the province of Melgar turn, who convene in the health clinic in Acllamayo. There, among all those people who await the distribution of aid, is Rocío Paredes Mamani. She laughs timidly and, when I look at her, she hides her face among her neighbors. Rocío is 14 years old and pregnant. When I ask her how many months pregnant she is, she hesitates; it seems as if she does not know. In the end, in a low and shy tone, she tells me she is eight months pregnant. When the time comes to pose for the photo, she is scared, her body shrinks, she gets serious and looks away.

The harsh weather in this area is confirmed by Dr. Eliana Pari, responsible for the health clinic in Acllamayo. “In previous years, consultations for respiratory diseases: flu, pneumonia, bronchitis, in August and September were between 80 and 100 per month. In the fifteen days that have gone by this September we have had over 120 consultations.” While the Doctor speaks, local children play, run to the sun which, benevolently, increases the temperature during the day, inviting you to wear a sweater. Most of them have hurt cheeks, lacerated by the cold wind of winter.



The Peruvian Red Cross distributes hygiene kits and blankets to the families who were affected by the low temperatures in the Puno Region.



A female inhabitant of the town of Acllamayo receives her hygiene kit and two blankets that were distributed by the Peruvian Red Cross after the intense frosts.

Support to livestock producers

Just as the welcome sign announces upon arrival to the district Macusani, in the province of Carabaya, is the alpaca capital of Peru and the world.. In and around this city and in the nearby communities of Ituata, Ayapata, Ollachea and Coasa, among others, an estimated 250,000 alpacas are raised, of which 16,800 died after the frosts and snowfalls of recent weeks. In addition, many farmers warn of diseases in alpacas and the spontaneous abortions they suffer because they are poorly fed. What happened was that the snow covered the ground with layers of up to 80 inches and there was no pasture left for the animals. In many cases, livestock breeding is the only livelihood that people of the region have.

Lucía Gutiérrez is over 60 years of age and, in addition to having some sheep and a few alpacas of her own, she grazes cattle for other farmers. Her age and parsimonious way of walking do not prevent her from traversing long miles through the mountain leading the animals. At home, which is in between the mountains, away from population centres, Lucía does not have any utility services. At night, she only uses candles, to provide lighting. “We make a fire with wood; that is how we prepare food. Sometimes firewood is wet, we cannot light a fire and we cannot cook. In the country, we suffer; in the city, the population has light and television,” she states, adding that radio is all they listen to.

“First we work on identifying those persons who have been most affected to assess the type of aid they need and how it will be provided in the region to alleviate the situation of loss suffered by producers,” explains Jaime Huerta, Disaster Response Coordinator at the Peruvian Red Cross, responsible for the operation at Macusani. In principle, the support for a thousand farmers would consist of a veterinarian kits for 100 alpacas and five bales of oat per producer.

Given the emergency situation, representatives from the UN, World Food Programme and the National Roundtable on Poverty also traveled to Macusani. “We did not come together but we coincided here in order to assess and monitor the situation after the bad weather suffered by the inhabitants of this region,” stated Ana María Rebaza, Head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Both during the identification of beneficiaries and the distribution of aid, local volunteers participate in the tasks that need to be carried out. Roger Came is 34 years old; he is from San Antonio de Putina. He joined the Red Cross four months ago. Excited, he travelled to Macusani to participate in the assessment of those affected the in nearby communities. His parents live in a rural area and also raise cattle. This is why Roger says he “knows that reality”. “Since I am an electrician working at a mine, I can take days off from work, and come here to help,” he adds.

Alpacas and llamas in the Puno Region were the animals most affected by the intense frosts.



New technologies

The impact of the actions carried out in the area of Macusani were increased via the implementation of a system that allowed volunteers to use something other than paper and pencil to help the affected farmers. Through its social responsibility programme, LG electronics, donated 15 next-generation mobile phones to the Peruvian Red Cross. The ODK (Open Data Kit) system was installed on these devices for data collection. This facilitated the uploading of information from each farmer affected by the frosts in a shorter period of time; for example, the number of alpacas owned by the producer and how many died after the snowfalls.

“The time spent in assessing each community is now reduced thanks to this system which, in addition, is more convenient since you only need to carry a mobile phone,” states Huerta. Furthermore, once the virtual forms are ready, the ODK system allows them to be sent directly through the Internet.

A member of the Peruvian Red Cross identifies and uploads information of a person affected by the low temperatures in Puno through the new ODK (Open Data Kit) system.



Training (Capacity Building)

Another important initiative in this operation is the training that will be provided to community-based health workers in October. In each of the eleven health networks in the Puno region, a total of 330 people will be trained. “They will be the leaders in the promotion of health in their community,” stated Dr. Paredes.

Community workers will be trained in first aid, referral, transfer, monitoring and immediate information; i.e., so that they are able to refer people to the health clinic if they witness a serious case.

Dr. Paredes highlighted that it had been a long time since these very important trainings had taken place within the community, as there is annual or semi-annual rotation of medical staff in each health clinic, it is very common for local people to feel distrust and avoid receiving medical care. Dr. Paredes added that “It is important to know the traditions and customs of each place.”

The training will take place in each of the eleven execution units in the region; they will last three days, plus one day of practice and a small evaluation. The Red Cross will provide each health worker with a backpack with reference material and information necessary to perform their practical work.



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