

LAO PDR: MEKONG RIVER FLOODING

6 October 2000

appeal no. 27/2000

situation report no. 1

period covered: 22 September - 5 October 2000

Lao Red Cross, supported by the Federation, is currently carrying out beneficiary identification in the worst-affected provinces. The flood disaster has had a less visible impact than in neighbouring countries. However, there is a serious threat to food security as vast areas of planted paddy fields were damaged, and those farmers who have no possibility of irrigating crops will only be able to plant a new crop between June and July, with a harvest season of November 2001.

The context

In mid August, typhoon Keimi swept through southern Lao PDR causing flooding in three districts of Saravan province and in early September typhoon Wukong hit both Lao PDR and neighbouring countries. Torrential rainfall swelled the Mekong and its tributaries causing widespread flooding. Waters have now receded revealing the extent of the damage. The cost in human lives has fortunately been relatively low with 15 deaths reported. Damage to housing, loss of personal possessions and food stocks are minimal thanks the slow rise of water levels, allowing timely evacuation. However, serious damage has been caused to 62,743 ha of a total area of 79,345 ha of planted paddy fields. WFP states that land referred to as “damaged” will not be recoverable, creating serious food insecurity for those farmers who have no access to irrigation and who produce only one rice crop per year. Following a rapid assessment by the Federation, an appeal for CHF 871,317 to assist 42,000 beneficiaries for 5 months was launched on 21 September. Since the end of September, two Federation relief delegates have been deployed to assist the Lao Red Cross (LRC) and are currently assisting with the preparation of a distribution of 7,000 family kits comprising food and non food items.

Latest events

The table below illustrates the extent of damage to planted rice paddies in the 5 most affected provinces. In areas where the irrigation systems remain intact, the next crop can be planted now and harvested in three months' time. What remains to be identified are those areas where farmers have no access to irrigation during the dry months and will have to wait to plant in June/July and to harvest the following November. Irrigated fields account for approximately 25% of the total planted area. A joint WFP and National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) assessment team also identified damage to water gates, irrigation canals, electricity lines and dams in 31 irrigation schemes.

Province	No of districts	Planted areas flooded (ha)	Planted areas damaged (ha)	Families affected
Borikhamxy	4	3,708	2,864	3,236
Khammouane	9	23,657	22,027	29,389
Savannakhet	15	24,903	18,457	15,599
Saravanne	4	4,347	2,125	2,383
Champasack	8	22,730	17,270	20,993

Source: Ministry of Agriculture.

In addition to the devastation to the rice paddies, the Ministry of Health has alerted the population to the threat of disease caused by mosquitoes breeding in the stagnant pools left by the receding flood waters. Although, at present, there are no signs of an increase in malaria or dengue fever, outbreaks are anticipated. As expected, the flood waters have contaminated wells and tests by the Ministry of Health revealed a high level of contamination from e coli and cholera bacteria.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

A relief delegate working with the Lao Red Cross and a logistics delegate from the region have carried out a rapid appraisal of available supplies in country and the transport and logistics capacities in the affected areas, as well as local LRC branch capacities. LRC has newly constructed warehouses in Thakhek in central Khammouan province and Pakse in the southern province of Champasack. These will be used to receive goods, package and forward them to beneficiary distribution points or secondary warehouses, where necessary. Quotations from suppliers in Thakhek and Pakse are presently being considered and the LRC is mobilising volunteers for all stages of the distribution operation. Family kits will be composed of 25 kg of rice, 18 packs of noodles, 18 tins of sardines, 2 mosquito nets, 2 blankets and 10 packets of oral rehydration salts (ORS).

Beneficiary selection will be according the following criteria:

- Families who have lost all possessions and food stocks.
- Families who have lost their crop and have no access to irrigation.
- Poorest families in the community.

The latest assessment team has ascertained that the economic circumstances of villagers is well known at district level. Branch volunteers will establish beneficiary lists with the Provincial and district authorities and then carry out spot checks in the villages to ensure accuracy. Volunteers will also receive training to disseminate health information at distribution points on the need to boil drinking

water, the use of ORS and mosquito nets. The two Federation delegates will be based in the field, one in Thakhek and the other in Pakse to cover the central and southern provinces respectively.

Outstanding needs

To date, the appeal has received 53% coverage and additional funding is required in order to assist the most vulnerable who will face severe food shortages in the coming months.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

At present, no NGOs have specific programmes to assist victims of this flood disaster. WFP is chairing the UN co-ordination meetings and has plans to assist Lao PDR with 600 tons of rice in the near future. WFP has expressed interest in working with the LRC. The NDMO, supported by CONCERN, is playing an active part in the management of the disaster and the LRC, which sits on the committee, is an important member. LRC is collaborating closely with the Ministry of Health to co-ordinate health strategies during the distributions. The Vientiane Times, an English language newspaper, carries frequent articles on the flood disaster and has reported on the LRC and Federation programme. However, there appears to be little international coverage of the disaster.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The scale of the disaster cannot be compared to that which has occurred in Cambodia and Vietnam, however, the full impact of the disaster on the victims is yet to be felt. Most farmers' food stocks will run out by mid November and there will be no hope of harvesting another rice crop until the following year. This will exacerbate the precarious situation of many thousands in this area who will have to resort to looking for work in Thailand or eking out an existence through fishing and planting vegetables.

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Laos - floods						ANNEX 1
APPEAL No. 27/2000		PLEDGES RECEIVED				10/06/00
DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE	COMMENT
CASH						
REQUESTED IN APPEAL CHF ----->				871,317		TOTAL COVERAGE 53.0%
AUSTRALIAN GOVT		30,000	AUD	29,952	16.09.00	FAMILY KITS AND TRANSPORT COSTS
AUSTRIAN - RC		25,000	EUR	38,933	20.09.00	
DANISH - GOVT		950,000	DKK	198,360	28.09.00	
ICELANDIC - RC		200,000	ISK	4,295	22.09.00	
JAPANESE - RC				44,000	25.09.00	
SWEDISH - RC		500,000	SEK	91,000	03.10.00	
SWISS - RC				55,500	27.09.00	FAMILY KITS
SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED IN CASH				462,040	CHF	53.0%
KIND AND SERVICES (INCLUDING PERSONNEL)						
DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE	COMMENT
SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED IN KIND/SERVICES				0	CHF	0.0%
ADDITIONAL TO APPEAL BUDGET						
DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE	COMMENT
SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED				0	CHF	