

INFORMATION BULLETIN



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

CAMBODIA: DROUGHT AND FLOODS 30 August 2002

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This Information Bulletin is for information only. The Federation is not seeking any funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time.

The Situation

Late rains have brought some relief to the eight drought stricken Cambodian provinces of Kampong Speu, Takeo, Kampot, Kandal, Kampong Cham, Svay rieng, Odor Meanchey, Pursat and Battambang; most of the 51 worst effected districts have now received rain. However, with a shortage of rice seedlings for planting, there are concerns about both the immediate economic impact as well as longer term food security. Meanwhile, extensive flooding - the worst hit province being Prey Veng - has affected more than 1.0 million people with as many as 16,341 families evacuated to 'safe areas' on higher ground. With an overall estimated 2.0m people (National Committee for Disaster Management) affected by the combination of disasters, on 23 August, the Royal Government of Cambodia issued a declaration on the disaster situation.

Water levels have started to recede in most provinces, however, it is expected that levels, which are currently higher than the 'alarm stages' (Mekong River Commission, 30 August 2002) in the lower lying provinces, Prey Veng, Kampong Cham and Kandal, will remain high for a further few weeks. Meanwhile, the 1,000 families that had been evacuated in the North-eastern province of Kratie have begun to return to their homes, and water levels in Stung Treng have dropped to below flooding level. Despite these positive developments in the Northeast of the country, reports indicate a further surge of water could, as was the case in 2000, be experienced in the Mekong in mid September. This would bring a second and more disastrous round of flooding.

With an estimated 16,341 families (as well as livestock) now living in safe areas (traditional places of refuge on higher ground such as pagodas, schools and roads) and whilst as many as 87 of these areas now have basic water and sanitation facilities established by the Cambodian Red Cross (CRC) and UNICEF in 2000 and 2001 (further safe areas have been developed by CARE), should people remain in these area for more than a few weeks, there remains a risk of not only an outbreak of disease, such as diarrhoea, but also a lack of food, as families exhaust there limited reserves. Early indications from the Provincial Committee for Disaster Management (PCDM), Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and the CRC, indicate that whilst displaced families will have the means to cope for one to two weeks, the cumulative effects of three years of consecutive floods and the recent drought which have once again destroyed or damaged inter alia, crops, productive land, roads and drainage systems, will have a disastrous impact on household economies and the food basket of Cambodia; already 30% of the population live below the basic needs poverty line (UNDP, 2002). There are already indications that in their effort to cope, people have gone increasingly into debt, are migrating to the major towns and that rice seed is being consumed as food. There are also anecdotal reports of individuals going hungry or migrating further into the forest in the search of food (increasing the risk of malaria). Given that only an estimated 50% of the total wet season rice crop has been planted (Ministry of Agriculture) and indications that some of this could be destroyed by the floods, there is real possibility of a serious food deficit in late 2002.

In order to accurately determine the food needs, it is, therefore, widely acknowledged that there is a need to carry out a countrywide crop production assessment. Given that this may not be possible in the coming weeks (until the full impact of the floods and drought can be seen), NCDM will work with the UN, Federation, CRC and NGOs in a co-ordinated rapid assessment of needs in both the drought and flood affected areas. Lessons will be drawn from a similar experience in 2002 and opportunities will be provided to develop the capacity of (Provincial Committee for Disaster Management) PCDM staff. Assuming the water levels continue to fall or to stabilise, this assessment, which will take place within the next 10 days, will form the basis of any further humanitarian or longer term assistance.

Meanwhile, the NCDM has continued to play a key role in co-ordinating the national level response to the disaster; in Kratie, for instance, where preparedness measures have made a noticeable difference, the PCDM, has not only been active in co-ordination, but by working with the DCDM as well as the CRC and NGOs, has assisted people to move to the safe areas. Additional co-ordination work by NCDM, has included information sharing as well as joint missions with the UNDMT and the Red Cross (including to the provinces of Stung Treng, Kratie and Prey Veng).

The government has been quick to respond with the distribution of food (as of 23 August 1,000mt of rice had been distributed to drought affected areas), the procurement of gasoline (for pumping and transportation) as well the provision of 60,000 sandbags. The Cambodian royal family has provided 400mt of rice. Significantly the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) have distributed 1,600mt of rice seed in 11 provinces (up to 19 August); a further 1,400mt will be distributed in the coming weeks. It is estimated, by MAFF, that a further 5,000mt of rice seed is required.

Whilst the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) is to procure a further 400mt of rice seed and the World Food Programme (WFP) has a significant amount of food available in-country, a number of NGOs, such as CONCERN and ZOA, CARE and World Vision, are, amongst other things, procuring rice seed, supporting home gardening or setting up credit schemes. Other organisations, such as Oxfam which welcomes a co-ordinated response, have placed resources, financial and human, on standby. In the flooded areas, organisations are providing support to safe areas and considering the provision of food and household items (mostly pending the result of the rapid assessment). The representative of the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) has also been active in both co-ordination as well as in visiting the affected areas.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The Cambodian Red Cross launched a national level Appeal on 24 August and has received 356 mt of rice (including 200mt from the Royal Family) and well as an estimated US\$ 44,000. The first distribution of humanitarian assistance (25kg rice, clothing, bed mats and a krama (traditional scarf)) to 2,563 families displaced in Kampong Cham province, took place on 24 August. This has been followed by a similar distribution to the drought affected population in Kampong Speu and will continue to an estimated total of 14,239 families in 30 districts in the provinces of Kampong Chhang, Kampong Cham, Kampot, Prey Veng, Kampong Speu, Banteay Meanchey, Takeo, Pursat, Svay Rieng, Phnom Penh and Kandal.

While CRC will, in its distributions to those people worst affected by flood and drought, continue to target the most vulnerable, such as the elderly, orphans, and single female headed households, it is continuing to work with the Federation delegation, NCDM, UN and NGOs to carry out the detailed needs assessment. Should the assessment determine the need for further assistance, it is likely that CRC will assist those people evacuated to safe areas (largely through health care, water, sanitation and food - working closely with WFP), as well as to develop micro-projects, such as irrigation and drainage repair, to both assist in the people's immediate recovery (through food for work) and to mitigate against the effects of further disaster. The success of the existing safe areas as well as the need to develop co-ordinated approaches to disaster assessment, could also form the basis for future disaster preparedness work.

The Federation delegation has continued to provide support to CRC and is working closely with NCDM and UNDMT. The delegation has joined survey missions to the provinces of Stung Treng, Kratie and Prey Veng, is continuing to provide considerable information to national and international media as well as co-ordinating with major donor partners. The Federation's regional Disaster Management Unit in Bangkok is providing technical

support and is, importantly, co-ordinating the disaster response in Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos. Timely information from, for instance, the Lao Red Cross and Federation office, has helped shape the CRC response. The delegation is also working to keep Cambodia based partner national societies informed.

While the Federation and CRC are fully supportive of, and will take a lead in, the co-ordinated rapid assessment in both the flood and drought affected areas, given an unpredicted worsening of the situation in the coming days, CRC and the Federation would be prepared to launch an international appeal to meet urgent humanitarian needs. However, given no deterioration in the situation, the Federation is not expected to launch an Appeal until the assessment is completed. The Federation does encourage partners to support CRC in its continued operation and to assist CRC in replenishing its stock; should further floods occur in mid September, pre-positioned food and relief items will be central to any humanitarian response.

For a full description of the National Society profile, see www.ifrc.org

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All International Federation Operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

For support to or for further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal.

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