

PHILIPPINES: DROUGHT

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The Disaster

The El Nino phenomenon has brought drought to the island of Mindanao in the southern Philippines and severely reduced rainfall in many other parts of the country. Seasonal rainfall figures from October 1997 to March this year show that 90% of the country received 50% less rainfall than average. This hot and dry period is expected to continue until at least June when rains are expected. The normally dry month of April will be exacerbated by El Nino conditions, and above normal temperatures in most parts of the country will further deplete available water reserves.

According to the Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC), as many as 2.6 million people are affected by the drought in eight provinces of Mindanao (700 barangays (villages)). An area of 200,000 hectares, which would normally yield crops of corn and rice, is expected to experience losses in excess of 1.2 billion pesos (USD 340,000). The PNRC has recorded eight deaths, six of which are a result of eating ill-prepared wild yam.

Government Action

The PNRC is the lead agency within a task force made up of government agencies. These include the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), the National Food Authority (NFA), the Presidential Action Centre (PAC) and the local government.

The government, which is currently providing relief food to Mindanao, expects to have adequate food supplies for the month of April. After that, it will increasingly call on organisations such as the PNRC to help meet the food deficit.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

As the lead agency, the PNRC is currently distributing supplies released by the government. Twenty five Red Cross staff and 49 volunteers have been deployed to assist in the various Mindanao chapters. To date the PNRC has targeted approximately 211,000 families (an estimated one million beneficiaries) out of 328,938 vulnerable families in the eight provinces. However, as more provinces report on the effects of the drought, these figures keep rising.

The medium term plan is for the PNRC to assist 100,000 families (particularly focusing on pregnant women and lactating mothers, and children from 0-6 years of age) with food relief (rice, canned goods & noodles) for the months of May and June. Following this there will be an evaluation, including a nutritional survey, which will determine longer term needs and plans.

The Manager of the PNRC Disaster Management Services is presently in the Southern Philippines conducting an assessment with the representatives of the Presidential Action Centre and the Department of Social Welfare.

The Federation Regional Delegation in Kuala Lumpur is liaising with PNRC; both its information delegate and disaster preparedness delegates are in regular contact with the National Society.

Needs

Although needs have not yet been clearly defined, it is likely that the PNRC will request international support for the relief operation as it continues into May and June. Meetings are currently taking place both in Manila and in the region to determine a strategy for the operation. As the situation develops, further information will be provided to National Societies.

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