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Information bulletin Vietnam: Drought

 International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Date of issue: 24 March 2016	GLIDE n° DR-2015-000180-VNM
Date of disaster: Starting October 2015	Population affected: 409,917 households
Host National Society: Viet Nam Red Cross Society	

This bulletin is being issued for information only and reflects the current situation and details available at this time. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this stage. The Viet Nam Red Cross Society (VNRC) is currently maximizing their existing resources. However the IFRC and VNRC are conducting an assessment, where a scaled-up response requiring IFRC support is envisioned.

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Summary

Since the end of 2015, unusually dry conditions and a shortage of rainfall - attributed to El Niño - have seriously affected Viet Nam, leading to a severe drought which is compounded by saltwater intrusion. The current conditions have resulted in significant damage to crop, and threaten national agricultural production, livelihoods, and access to water by local populations. The most affected regions are in the southern central and central highlands, as well as the Mekong Delta.

The VNRC has launched a joint campaign with the National Committee for Natural Disaster Prevention and Control (NCNDPC) titled, "Together for the communities affected by drought and saltwater intrusion in the Central - Highlands and the Mekong Delta." The VNRC has also released VND 4.2 billion (USD 188,000) from its emergency fund for the initial response to support 11,000 households with bottled water, water storage containers and water purification tablets.



Rice fields have been either abandoned or reduced in productivity. In a normal harvest, this farmer in Ben Tre province obtains 800 kg per 2,000 m². Due to shortage of water caused by salinity, he estimates that he will harvest only 40 kg. **Photo: VNRC (March 2016)**

The situation

El Niño has been affecting parts of Southeast Asia countries since the last quarter of 2015, with conditions expected to improve in the second quarter of 2016. Viet Nam is one of the countries which is severely affected, mostly by higher temperatures and below-average precipitation during the rainy season. This combination of events has led to drought in the southern central, the central highlands, and the Mekong Delta of Viet Nam. The situation has been worsened by saltwater intrusion in the southern central and Mekong Delta regions. 39 out of 63 provinces of Viet Nam have been reportedly affected by drought and saltwater intrusion, in which 12 provinces¹ have declared drought and saltwater intrusion emergencies at different levels².

¹ Southern Central (*Binh Thuan and Ninh Thuan*); Central Highlands (*Gia Lai and Kon Tum*); and Mekong Delta (*Ben Tre, Vinh Long, Soc Trang, Ca Mau, Kien Giang, Tra Vinh, Tien Giang and Long An*).

² In according with the Government regulation, in Decision No. 44/2014/QĐ-TTg of the Prime Minister, dated 15 August 2014, on detailed regulations on natural disaster risk levels.

The above conditions have led to a reduction in storage capacity of irrigation reservoirs, which are currently between 60 to 80 per cent of design capacity from Da Nang to Phu Yen; only 30 to 50 per cent of design capacity in Khanh Hoa, Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan and 60 to 80 per cent of design capacity in the Central Highlands. The water levels of Mekong River and other main rivers in Mekong Delta are at the lowest recorded in 90 years. The lack of water has consequently caused saltwater intrusion, which begun two months earlier than in previous years. Saltwater has intruded around 70 to 90 kilometres into the mainland, which is 20 to 25 kilometres further inland in comparison with the seasonal averages. 10 of 13 provinces in Mekong Delta – half of Mekong Delta areas – have been seriously impacted by saltwater intrusion.



Vast fields of winter and spring crop have been abandoned in Quoi Dien commune, Thanh Phu district, Ben Tre province.

Photo: VNRC (March 2016)

As of March 2016, the impact of the conditions on the livelihoods and wellbeing of local populations has been reported³ as follows:

Number of affected households	409,917 households
Lost/damaged paddy rice	168,501 hectares
Lost/damaged cash crop	32,960 hectares
Lost/damaged aquaculture	3,454 hectares
Lack of water for daily consumption	195,217 households (estimated total of 976,000 people)

As the drought is expected to continue until middle of 2016, provinces in the Mekong Delta will likely experience a hard and late summer-autumn crop, which could affect the cultivation of 500,000 hectares of paddy rice, accounting to 30 per cent of total farming areas of the region.

Actions taken by Government and other agencies

The Government of Viet Nam has been closely monitoring the drought since October 2015. A number of instructions has been issued to the affected provinces, including on the rescheduling of winter-spring crop, integrated reservoir and irrigation management for agriculture production, dissemination and promotion of water saving irrigation and farming techniques, temporary dams, pumps and drainage to increase water storage.

The 35 affected provinces have requested primary financial support of VND 624 billion (USD 28 million) from the Central Government to respond to the drought and saltwater intrusion, out of which a financial package of VND 523.7 billion (USD 23 million) was approved by the Central Government for relief in 34 provinces. Immediate needs are identified as: seedling and crop recovery, water storage and water supplies, including salinity water filter and treatment. In addition, urgent investment in water resources and salinity management including embankment, pumping and drainage stations, upgrade of sluice gate system are proposed in order to address the drought and saltwater intrusion in medium and long term.

In the wake of this severe situation, on 22 March 2016, the People's Aid Coordinating Committee (PACCOM) officially requested development partners to provide emergency assistance to the affected communities. The request has highlighted food security (in the short-term), water, hygiene and sanitation (WASH) and livelihood improvements as some of the needed areas.

The Disaster Management Working Group, consisting of representatives from the Government, UN agencies and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), has mapped out the working areas of all agencies in the affected provinces in order to utilize resources effectively. A joint assessment team consisting of experts in WASH, nutrition, gender, disaster risk reduction (DRR), agricultural economics, communication, humanitarian relief and food security from UN agencies, INGOs, Vietnam Women Union and Public Health Centre is conducting a three-day rapid need assessment in five selected provinces (Ben Tre, Binh Thuan, Ninh Thuan, Kien Giang and Kon Tum) from 22 to 24 March 2016. The assessment team will have a debriefing meeting with Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and donor organizations on 29/30 March 2016. Further actions will be taken based on the results of the assessment.

³ Updates from NCNDPC as of 18 March 2016

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The VNRC has been active in monitoring the drought and saltwater intrusion, involving in discussions relating to response to the situation. The VNRC and the NCNDPC have jointly started a campaign, “Together for the communities affected by drought and saltwater intrusion in the Central - Highlands and the Mekong Delta”. The campaign will assist the affected populations through the mobilization of resources, conducting needs assessments, providing relief items, etc.

Following the kick-off of the campaign, on 18 March 2016, the VNRC launched a national appeal seeking funds to support the affected population and is working on the establishment of an SMS system for fundraising. The VNRC has initially released VND 4.2 billion (USD 188,000) from its emergency fund to support the affected people in 11 provinces (Ben Tre, Vinh Long, Soc Trang, Ca Mau, Kien Giang, Tra Vinh, Tien Giang, Long An, Gia Lai, Binh Thuan and Ninh Thuan). Each affected household will receive two 20-litre bottles of water, two 20-litre water containers, and one box of water purification tablets.



“I have never experienced such a drought and salinity in my life. Salinity occurred last October and escalated in January 2016. Normally, soft drinking water remains available and could be stored in January. I have never bought water before and so far I have bought three times”, said Mrs. Vo Thi Hoa, 65 years old who is living with her husband and 2 nephews. **Photo: VNRC (March 2016)**

In parallel, the VNRC has deployed its disaster response teams to conduct rapid assessments in four provinces – Ninh Thuan, Ca Mau, Ben Tre and Long An. Among these provinces, Ben Tre and Long An are project sites of the project, “Building Community Resilience for Climate Change and Disaster Risk in Viet Nam,” with the support of the Korea International Cooperation Agency through IFRC, while Ca Mau is implementing a DRR initiative supported by the Swiss Red Cross. Initial findings from the assessment undertaken by VNRC and IFRC team in Ben Tre and Long An provinces from 18 to 20 March 2016 show that safe water and food are immediate needs for the upcoming months, since local people has to buy water for drinking, and domestic and food stock could not be replenished in time due to the current situation.

The IFRC Country Cluster Support Team (CCST) in Bangkok and the IFRC Asia Pacific Regional Office are coordinating with the IFRC team Viet Nam team to provide technical support to the VNRC, conduct an initial assessment, and further develop a response plan. A scaled-up response is envisioned.

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The IFRC's work is guided by Strategy 2020 which puts forward three strategic aims:



Save lives,
protect livelihoods,
and strengthen recovery
from disaster and crises.



Enable **healthy**
and **safe** living.



Promote **social inclusion**
and a culture of
non-violence and **peace**.