

# ***CENTRAL ASIA: DROUGHT***

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### ***The Disaster***

The third consecutive year of extremely low rainfall and reduced snowfall has resulted in severe drought in the Central and South Asia region. Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are considered to be among the worst affected countries in the region.

#### **Tajikistan**

This year's drought, the worst in 74 years, only added to the existing poor economic situation of the country, already coping with deteriorated irrigation systems and agricultural machinery as well as with the unavailability of high-quality seeds. Tajikistan has been continuously struggling with the low-quality of locally-produced seeds which have had a seriously impact on agricultural output. The most affected drought areas are the Khatlon Oblast, in the south-west of the country, with 840,000 people in critical need of food assistance and the Leninabad Oblast in the north, with 600,000 worst affected.

Upon the request of the Government of Tajikistan, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) carried out a Crop and Food Supply Assessment from 3 to 26 July, 2000. According to this assessment, compared to 1999 production the total cereal output this year will be reduced by 47%, compared to 1999. Consequently, the total additional food needs for the year 2000-2001 are estimated at 787,000 tonnes, with an uncovered amount of 313,000 tonnes. By autumn this year, around 3 million people are expected to be directly affected by drought, with 2 million possibly facing a critical food shortage. The need for assistance in seeds (60,000 tonnes) surpass the efforts made by a number of non-governmental organisations having seed-assistance programmes in the country.

#### **Uzbekistan**

In Uzbekistan, the drought wave has mostly affected the Aral Sea basin, already crippled by the ongoing ecological crisis and poverty, the region where around 15 million people depend solely on agricultural production. Earlier this month, the Government of Uzbekistan approached the United Nations with a request for urgent assistance in water and sanitation material, medicines and vehicles for the transport of drinking water. The UNICEF Office in Uzbekistan carried out a rapid assessment in the affected area of Karakalpakstan Oblast from 24 to 25 July, 2000. An estimated 500,000 persons are potentially considered to be critically affected, needing approximately 50,000 MT of food. There is an extreme shortage of water, not only for agriculture, but also for domestic use in some areas, increasing concern about a possible rise in the occurrence of diarrhoeal diseases and cholera.

### ***Red Cross/Red Crescent Action***

The International Federation is planning a comprehensive Field Assessment and Co-ordination Team (FACT) mission in both countries from 27 August to 17 September 2000 in order to determine the scope and modalities of a Red Cross and Red Crescent intervention. Two options are under consideration: an individual emergency appeal, and a possible partnership with WFP in the distribution of aid. The mission will be composed of the team leader from the Federation Secretariat, two representatives of the Norwegian and German Red Cross Societies respectively, a regional health co-ordinator and regional information officer from the Federation's Central Asia Regional Delegation, and a water/sanitation delegate and logistics co-ordinator from the Federation's delegation in Tajikistan.

### **Tajikistan**

The Red Crescent Society of Tajikistan (RCST), with support from the Federation's delegation in Tajikistan, are closely liaising with WFP and other humanitarian organisations in this early planning phase of the operation. At this stage, the agencies are preparing for an overall co-ordination of activities and programmes in order to fully meet the immense needs of the population and to contain the threatening effects of the drought.

A joint RCST and Federation team has completed a preliminary assessment mission in the Kurgan-Tube Region, Khatlon Oblast, identifying the areas for possible intervention, based on the needs, as well as on the National Society implementation capacities. Preliminary findings show that the most affected areas are Kabodiyon, Shartuz, Jilikul, Gozimalik, Kumsangir and Pyanj, with the total of 30,000 hectares of agricultural plots and 100,000 people affected. It is estimated that the National Society will be able to carry out the distribution of the aid, with support from the International Federation in logistics and training of staff and volunteers. Local authorities, as well as Red Cross branches, expressed a strong interest in food-for-work programmes, including the river-bank reinforcement activities, canal cleaning, repair of water-pumps, and other activities. These have given a rehabilitation component to the planned food-relief operation. The preliminary findings will serve as a basis for the development of the RCST assistance strategy, together with the recommendations of the upcoming Federation FACT assessment mission.

In the meantime, the RCST and the Federation are continuing with the ECHO-funded food assistance programme, providing supplementary feeding and food-security support to 37,000 beneficiaries.

### **Uzbekistan**

As the Government of Uzbekistan launched its request for international assistance only on 9 August, the Red Crescent Society of Uzbekistan (RCSU) has not yet completed its internal assessment of the affected area and envisaged level of assistance. The RCSU central office has asked all Oblast Committees in the country to liaise with local authorities and locally-based NGOs and mobilise the Rayon level committees to obtain more information about the possible effects of the situation, and to receive more specific information on the possible future needs. Two Oblast committees in Karakalpakstan and Khoreijm (both in the Aral Sea area) have responded, indicating that there is a visible impact of the drought and that they have started the assessment process in their Oblasts.

## ***Needs***

The decision on the exact number of people to be assisted, as well as the type of support to be provided, will be communicated once the FACT team completes its assessment of the affected areas. Modalities of co-operation with WFP and other agencies will be decided upon as soon a co-ordinated inter-agency response is articulated in the coming month.

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