

# 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

## INDIA: DROUGHT

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*This Bulletin is being issued based on the needs described below reflecting the information available at this time. Based on further updates and details from assessment reports, or should the situation deteriorate, the Federation will consider international support through an Appeal.*

### The Situation

Monsoon rains, regarded as India's economic lifeline - over 70 per cent of the country's one billion population depends on agriculture for a living - normally hits most of the country by the first week of July. But this year the monsoon rains in the country have not been timely and evenly distributed. While flash floods triggered by monsoon rains since July in northeastern and western India (India Floods operations update) killed hundreds of people and affected 20 million, central and northern India have been short of rain. The Government of India (GOI) taking into account the current situation and Indian Meteorological Department's (IMD) predictions of impending rain in the north and north west, has declared that the country is facing the most widespread drought for 15 years. Levels in the most important 70 reservoirs are less than half of last year. Of India's 593 districts, at least 321 in 12 states have had little or no rainfall during this monsoon season. The last July recorded the least rainfall since 1918. The states that have officially been declared drought-affected include Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Orissa, Gujarat, Haryana, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh and parts of Tamil Nadu. An estimated 300 million people have been affected by the dry spell. Substantial damage has been inflicted on maize, pulse, oilseeds, and paddy crops. The loss in the kharif (summer harvest) crop production is estimated at 10 million tonnes. Many agricultural labourers have been rendered jobless and prices of vegetables have also risen.



India's western state of Rajasthan is the worst affected and is suffering from one of its worst droughts this year. As much as 75 per cent of the crops have been lost as compared to 48 per cent crop loss in Haryana, 39 per cent in Orissa and 33 per cent in Uttar Pradesh. The state government has declared all 41,000 villages across the 32 districts as drought-stricken. Eighty per cent of the population in Rajasthan depend on agriculture and animal husbandry for

*The worst drought stricken state of Rajasthan is facing acute deficiency of drinking water, food and fodder.*

their livelihood and over two million families are below poverty line (1998 survey). Below poverty line (BPL) is a definition that Indian government uses on families earning 296 rupees (CHF 10.57) per month in urban areas and 276 rupees (CHF 9.86) per month in rural areas. The drought has destroyed 4.8 million hectares of Kharif crop (crops of monsoon season) of estimated value of 44 billion rupees (approximately 910 million dollars) and shrunk groundwater levels by up to 32 metres affecting more than 43 million population and 54 million cattle.

There is acute deficiency of drinking water, food and fodder. Many families have not been taking green vegetables for more than a month and are taking two meals instead of three a day. There are media reports indicating that some villages are surviving on samas (a kind of wild grass yields). The crisis has deteriorated income opportunities, increased food and fodder price and the distress of selling and abandoning of cattle. Migration has also started in many areas. The health needs, despite reported cases of malnutrition, malaria and diarrhoea in some villages, are yet to be explored further. Five most affected districts are Pali, Nagaur, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur and Barmer.

The GOI on 16 November offered 20 billion rupees (417 million dollars) in emergency aid to drought-stricken states till the end of January. The sum is in addition to the 250 million dollars already set aside. The government has also pledged half-a-million tonnes of food grain and 120 million rupees to Rajasthan. A 100 billion rupee (two billion dollar) food for work programme is also being implemented in affected areas. A plan to link rivers in different states to combat drought was also announced earlier.

In Rajasthan, the state government has implemented relief measures, including drinking water supply, assistance to destitute and infirm persons, food for work programmes, nutrition and health programmes, social security schemes and cattle conservation. 2,609 fodder depots have been sanctioned in 12 districts. According to the Rajasthan state government, at least 800,000 people have been employed at state-provided relief projects that began in mid-August. 3187 people have benefited through relief distribution of 1,446 quintals of wheat. Water is being transported to 1,030 villages through 1,423 tankers benefiting almost 700,000 people. Some drought relief work this year aims to deepen ponds and wells and to build check-dams. Special attention is also being given to poor people, pregnant mothers and children through the integrated child development scheme (ICDS), mid-day meal programme, national old age pension scheme, the poorest of the poor scheme (372,000 families identified) and medicare cards issued for all 230,000 BPL families. Regular check-ups are also arranged for labourers engaged on relief works through mobile medical team. A revolving fund for contingency supply of medicines has also be allocated.

A number of government departments, UN agencies, academic and research institutions, NGOs and INGOs, including CARE, Save the Children, Oxfam, ACT International and MSF, are planning their response. Few have conducted community level assessments. Planned interventions include food for work, water and sanitation, health and hygiene, water harvesting and irrigation, and agricultural inputs such as animal fodder. A number of organisations, including the Red Cross, are supporting government efforts in supplying water in 63 villages through 43 tankers and running 12 fodder depots.

It is estimated that India's winter food grains output in 2002 is likely to fall by 18 percent from the previous year to 91 million tonnes, while oilseed production will drop 11.3 per cent to 11.7 million tonnes. The prospects of Rabi crop is also bleak. This will continue to affect the availability of food grain, fodder and income opportunities in the agriculture sector until the next monsoon in June. Extensive interventions at least up to May 2003 are therefore required to support people's livelihood subsistence particularly in increasing community based water storage and harvesting capacity.

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

The India Red Cross Society (IRCS) National Headquarters has been receiving assessments from its state branches and the Control Room of the Ministry of Agriculture. The task force consisting disaster management personnel from the IRCS and the Federation's India Operations Centre (IOC), created to monitor the flood situation in the country, has held several meetings since July to discuss the evolving drought and possible intervention. Respective branches have also submitted preliminary assessment reports to the NHQ. The society

has undertaken constant monitoring, in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture, the Federation, American Red Cross and Spanish Red Cross and other organisations.

In 2000, the Society successfully implemented a drought relief operation in Gujarat, Rajasthan, which was later extended to Orissa for 20,000 families of which 10,000 families from Jodhpur, Barmer and Jaisalmer in Rajasthan received food rations, seeds and fodder distribution. Lessons learnt from the previous drought operations and the ongoing India floods 2002 relief operation have been reviewed for better preparedness and implementation.

The IRCS branch in Pali district, one of the worst affected in Rajasthan, has been providing 10 to 15 tankers of drinking water a day to BPL families in the villages for the past few months. The medicine bank of the branch has also been supplying free medicines to BPL families treated by the primary health care centres. In response to the request from IRCS Rajasthan state branch for assistance, a joint IRCS/Federation assessment team comprising a disaster preparedness coordinator from IRCS NHQ, the Federation's South Asia Regional Delegation (SARD) disaster response delegate, IOC information and reporting delegate, and logistics officer were dispatched for a rapid assessment together with the state branch officials during 26 to 29 November. The assessment was also joined by the Sri Lanka Red Cross information officer who is currently staff on loan to the SARD.

During the assessment, the team held discussions with the government and Red Cross officials and conducted surveys in the villages. The team, on return to Delhi on 29 November, convened a meeting with the IRCS and Federation senior officials and presented their findings. Recommendations were made to seek international support in the form of food rations to supplement the government's relief efforts, particularly intended for the critical period after January and before the onset of next monsoon. An appeal document with intended operation and budget in response to the findings of the assessment team is being drafted for IRCS' further consideration.

### ***Coordination***

Since the drought emerged in July, IRCS in collaboration with the Federation IOC has been actively involved in establishing close linkages with the key NGOs for knowledge sharing and disaster management coordination. With the IRCS Disaster Management Centre at NHQ gradually in place, IRCS has used the facility to take the lead in coordinating pre-disaster planning and relief efforts among key aid agencies. Several inter-agency meetings and consultations have been organized on strategic issues of disaster management in India. In the following days in order to advocate for more effective coordination and information sharing, IRCS is planning to call for an inter-agency meeting on the drought situations and present the intended humanitarian intervention of the Society.

***For a full description of the National Society profile, see [www.ifrc.org](http://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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