

# 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**

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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**

With flood levels fast receding (Mekong River Commission website, 30 October 2002) and people returning home from 'safe areas', concern is increasingly focused on the overall food security in the country. The impact of the drought combined with at least three consecutive years of unseasonal flood levels is likely to have a significant impact on overall crop production. The fact that as many as 30% of the Cambodian population live below the basic needs poverty line of half a US dollar a day (United Nations Development Programme, 2002), that nationally, '56% of children under five suffer from chronic malnutrition, which has stunted their growth; 13% suffer from acute malnutrition' (World Food Programme, 2002) and that 'poor water management exacerbates structural food insecurity' (World Disasters Report, 2001) makes the situation in Cambodia a highly complex one.

While the government of Cambodia, the United Nations Disaster Management Team (UNDMT), the Cambodian Red Cross (CRC) as well as national and international non governmental organisations (NGO) and key donors, have been quick to respond to some of the emergency needs of those people worst affected by the flooding and by the drought, there has been a growing realisation that, in order to avert a possible further disaster, that of widespread food shortage, further urgent action could well be required.

It is on this basis and in light of the lack of consistent information concerning the actual and forecasted impact of the combined disasters (there are several damage assessments but little assessment of humanitarian needs), that a joint needs assessment of those areas worst affected by the drought and flood was planned for September and October 2002. Although the National Committee for Disaster Management (NCDM) as well as key UN agencies, CRC, Oxfam, Action Against Hunger and CARE, embarked on this more detailed study, a lack of preparatory work and particularly a lack of sustained coordination, meant that the exercise was not uniformly carried out.

While the assessments carried out by the three NGOs will be completed in the coming weeks and CRC is currently finalising its findings, the World Food Programme (WFP) has completed its part of the assessment. Although initial findings of both CRC and WFP concur that an estimated 2.5 million people have been affected by the drought and floods, further work, where CRC and WFP will revisit the worst affected districts, will take place during the first two weeks of November, carried out, where possible, in coordination with Provincial Committees for Disaster Management (PCDM). In order to determine the scale of impact of this ongoing crisis, coordination of various assessments by a range of organisations and

government ministries is vital. The CRC-WFP-PCDM effort paves such way and will encourage joint needs assessment in future.

However, despite the difficulties in establishing an accurate overall picture, it is commonly agreed that a significant number of people will face food shortages in the coming months. Using four key criteria<sup>1</sup>, the WFP assessment (WFP, Results of WFP Needs Assessment, October 2002) which targeted ten provinces, has identified the need for 6,500 mt of food - likely to be reduced as information on the amount of food already distributed by the government and other bodies is obtained - to bridge the two month gap (each family will receive 25kg per month as a supplement to their own food) until the expected harvest in early 2003. This assessment of need, which is based both on the reduced area of land sown as well as on the projected losses due to low yields, only focuses on the worst hit districts. An overall figure for loss of production nationally in 2002 is an estimated 30% against 2001 yields (representing an overall reduction from 767,000 mt to 530,000 mt), and in the province of Kampong Speu, for example, PCDM reported that up to 40% of productive rice land has not been sown in 2002.

While WFP will appeal for funds to procure food, an initial amount of 591 mt will be made available through UNDMT using funds from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). This food will be distributed by CRC who themselves have already provided more than 690 mt of rice for those people worst affected by the drought and flood. In addition WFP will continue to provide food through a number of NGOs for food-for-work projects.

In the coming weeks, while efforts will continue to focus on finalising assessments, clarifying the needs, advocating for more effective coordination as well as distributing food, there remains a real concern that food insecurity could go from a chronic to an acute situation in 2003. This will not only affect household economies, where assets are sold, money borrowed or paid labour sought in the cities, but a significant increase in malnutrition could be experienced. Understanding the relationship between the poverty levels and the twin disasters of flooding and drought, will continue to be a challenge not only for the government but also for the humanitarian and development agencies working in the country: 'Cambodia's most pressing need is relief from pervasive poverty that is crippling the population' (Asian Development Bank, 2002).

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

Since launching a national level appeal on 24 August, CRC has distributed 690 mt of rice to an estimated 28,000 families (averaging 25 kg per family) affected by flood and drought. CRC has not distributed a full ration, but similar to WFP, considers the food quantity, which is a supplement to other household food sources, as an economic asset to help the most vulnerable people through to the next harvest. In addition to rice CRC has also distributed a range of relief items including varying quantities of tinned fish, sarongs and mosquito nets. By late October 2002, CRC has not only begun to exhaust its stocks but it has fully distributed in-kind donations received from a number of embassies, the Cambodian Royal Family as well as from the public. CRC will provide humanitarian assistance, whilst stocks last, for the foreseeable future.

With the support of the Federation delegation in Phnom Penh and regional office in Bangkok, CRC will work closely with WFP to both confirm the findings of their respective assessments (to the district level) and to identify the most vulnerable households at the commune level; CRC will then develop a plan to distribute the 591 mt of OCHA funded food. Additionally on the basis of projects implemented in 2002 - supported by ECHO and WFP - where food, through food-for-work, has been provided to support community based food insecurity mitigation projects, CRC will work with the worst hit communities as

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<sup>1</sup> i). Poverty rate greater than 40%.  
ii). Over 85% of households are rice farmers.  
iii). Rice production is less than demand for 2 months per capita  
iv). Other crop land is less than 10% of arable land.

well as with WFP and the donor partners, to identify further social development projects for implementation in late 2002 or early 2003.

The Federation has continued to support the work of CRC and has played an important role not only in advocacy through the media but also in negotiation with the government, UN, donors and NGOs. The Federation, specifically, has in order to better understand the food security situation, continued to encourage the government to call for a full WFP/FAO crop assessment. The Federation has also been active in coordinating with Red Cross/Red Crescent partner societies, and will continue to push for enhanced national level coordination, by working with NCDM and UNDMT.

Given the complexity of the situation and recognising that Cambodia has for many years been "subject to temporary, seasonal or chronic food shortages and nutritional deficiencies" (FAO) and yet respecting that people have a right to an adequate and secure supply of food, the Federation, while taking some immediate measures, will continue to seek greater clarity of the needs and, if deemed necessary, promote a coordinated response. The findings of the NGO assessments, further information from the government and from FAO, as well as the consolidation of the assessment data collected by WFP and CRC, are all important steps in determining the next steps in this complex situation.

The Federation will, therefore, support CRC in further distributions of food, provided largely by WFP, and will advise on the development of food-for-work mitigation projects to improve food security. However, given a significant increase in the scale of food insecurity or a clear consensus on worsening nutritional levels (moving increasingly from chronic to acute malnutrition), the Federation would be prepared to be part of a coherent humanitarian response.

In the meantime, the Federation will continue to support CRC and to work with its Red Cross partners such as the Danish, American, Swiss, French, Australian, British, Swedish and Finnish Red Cross societies, in implementing health and disaster preparedness programmes, that aim to reduce vulnerability (including looking at community-based flood and drought early-warning systems) and to alleviate the poverty that has plagued Cambodia for decades. The role of the Federation to advocate for effective poverty reduction strategies will not be overlooked..

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

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*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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