

FIJI: DROUGHT

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The Disaster

The total population affected by the drought in Fiji is estimated at 270,000 individuals. Many of these people are dependent on the sugar cane crop of which up to 50% cannot be harvested this year due to the drought.

Serious drought conditions have been reported in one half of the geographical area of the main islands in the Fiji group. One half of the country has had no significant rainfall for more than 7 months. The worst affected areas include the western Viti Levu, western Vanua Levu, and the Yasawa Island group.

The Fiji Government is in severe financial difficulties. It has been distributing supplementary relief rations to people in the worst affected areas, however a proposal currently before Cabinet to release further funds for a second round of rations, is still awaiting approval. Government assessments, and independent assessments carried out by the Fiji Red Cross, indicate some 100,000 people in the Western Division of Viti Levu require additional food supplies.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The Japanese Government has provided aid for the affected areas through the Fiji Red Cross. The Society has agreed to purchase bulk quantities of rice, flour, dhal (split peas), milk, soy bean oil, and fresh vegetables for distribution in the affected areas. These will be purchased locally and transported to two key locations, Lautoka and Tavua, where they will be stored prior to distribution.

The U.S. Government has also shipped 200,000 Humanitarian Daily Ration Packs to Fiji for distribution by the National Society.

Fiji Red Cross will implement an initial short-term relief operation to distribute these food supplies to the most vulnerable members of the affected population. The operation is expected to last for six to seven weeks and will be facilitated by two staff members to be based in the Western Division of Viti Levu. They will co-ordinate the operation, make on-going assessments and distribute the supplies, employing the labour of locally based Red Cross volunteers.

Target beneficiaries include:

- ◆ 100,000 people in communities of western Viti Levu who have been identified as the worst affected. They will receive supplementary food supplies.

- ◆ 10,000 school pupils who will be provided with school lunches.

Due to its excellent reputation with donors, the Fiji Red Cross Society has been offered direct support from the Japanese and U.S. Embassies. Unfortunately however, this assistance does not include support to meet the Society's own costs in carrying out the operation.

To address this shortfall, the Fiji Red Cross Society has been granted CHF 6,014 from the International Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF). This amount, though not large, is essential to enable this small National Society to effectively carry out these much needed food distributions made possible by the generous contributions from independent donors.

Although additional funding is not required at this stage, support from donors to replenish the DREF would be welcomed.

Needs

The people who have been most affected by this disaster have been those families which rely almost entirely on the sugar cane industry for their income. They are mostly cane cutters, labourers and small scale farmers whose standard is barely above the poverty line even under the best of circumstances. The failure of this year's sugar cane harvest has resulted in dramatically reduced incomes, leaving many families unable to support themselves. Many children have been unable to take lunches to school, obviously affecting nutrition.

Although the Government food distributions have benefited some 105,000 beneficiaries so far, it is questionable whether this level of support can continue.

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