

SRI LANKA: FLOODS

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The Disaster

Late monsoon rains over the past 10 days are causing serious flooding in at least three provinces in Sri Lanka. As of 6 January, approximately 15,000 families were displaced but, as far as can be determined at this stage, many appear to have been provided shelter by the local population and authorities. The meteorological service expects the heavy rain to continue for several more days.

Most of the inundated land is used for crop cultivation. While it is still too early to evaluate the full impact of the flooding on the crops, farmers are expecting major losses. Damage in the paddy fields is thought to be significant, and in some areas the crops are considered as lost. Large numbers of livestock have drowned. Of serious concern is the traditional irrigation system of tanks and reservoirs (approximately 20,000 throughout the island). Some of the tanks in the affected districts have been damaged: many are overflowing, and eroding as the water eats away at the retaining walls. Without adequate water sources, future crop production will suffer and a longer term impact should be anticipated.

In Batticaloa District the floods are affecting people living in Manmunai South, Koralepattu, Vellavali, Manmunai West, and Erarvur Pattu. Low-lying areas of Trincomalee and Vavuniya Districts are flooded but details are not yet available. Flooding is also occurring in Ampara and Polonnaruwa but is reportedly less than in the other three districts.

District	Paddy acreage affected	Families/people displaced	Tanks overflowing
Batticaloa	8000	4500/16,000	8
Trincomalee	6000	6000/21,300	1
Vavuniya	4500	4500/16,000	4
TOTAL	18,500 acres	53,300 people	13 tanks

Sri Lanka Red Cross Action

The Sri Lanka Red Cross Society (SLRCS) has asked the Secretariat to inform the Federation about this growing disaster. It will continue to provide information to the Federation as it becomes available from local branches whose staff are currently undertaking assessments. SLRCS paid staff and volunteers are working in the affected areas to help ensure assistance to flood victims. Medical

treatment, transportation to safe areas, and emergency supplies are being provided, depending on resources available. At the Society's headquarters in Colombo, officials are meeting with relevant government ministries to co-ordinate the relief response. Similar meetings are taking place at the local level. During this crisis the SLRCS, the Federation, and ICRC have stepped up their routine contacts in order to increase information-sharing.

Needs

Assessments are underway, but in the meantime the provinces have depleted their stocks and are requesting clothing, soap, mats, cadjans, plastic sheeting and food. The Federation has a relief delegate on stand-by should the SLRCS request further assistance. The Secretariat has sent a DREF allocation of CHF 25,000 to the Society to support its disaster response.

ICRC has made stocks such as plastic sheeting available but local procurement by the SLRCS will be necessary to supplement SLRCS resources.

A number of the SLRCS staff responding to the flooding have attended disaster preparedness workshops facilitated by the Federation. This type of disaster highlights the need to continue supporting SLRCS efforts to increase the skills of its staff in disaster preparedness. The International Federation's Emergency Appeal has more information on this initiative in 1999 (see South Asia Regional Programmes).

Further information will be issued as it becomes available or by contacting the Desk Officer, Kris Hurlburt at 41.22.730.42.69 or hurlburt@ifrc.org

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