

Highlights and Recent Developments

UN appeals for funds to alleviate food insecurity in Tajikistan

On 25 September 2008, the United Nations in consultation with the Government of Tajikistan and other humanitarian partners launched a Humanitarian Food Security Appeal to rapidly mobilise funds and help address immediate needs of an estimated 800,000 of the most vulnerable people in society. Amounting to almost \$35,000,000, the appeal covers the 15 months between October 2008 and December 2009 to address needs in the areas of food, agriculture, nutrition and coordination.

The appeal launched on 25 September follows an earlier appeal for humanitarian assistance to support some 2 million people affected by the extremely harsh winter of 2007-2008. This appeal ran from February till August 2008 (6 month period). By August 2008, a total of \$15 million was mobilised in response to the appeal out of the USD 25 million requested (57%). A further 21 million was raised outside the framework of the appeal. The resources that were mobilised through the Flash Appeal allowed organisations to assist in the food needs of over 515,000 people; to provide essential medicines, generators and heating supplies for hospitals that provided essential health services for 120,000 people in the most affected regions; to assist 150,000 people directly and over 500,000 indirectly with clean water and sanitation; to provide assistance to 386 schools in the five most severely affected districts; and to support over 100,000 people with blankets, clothing and other shelter and non-food items. These combined interventions helped alleviate suffering, sustain minimum essential services, mitigate further disease outbreaks and avoid further deterioration in nutritional status.

Tajikistan has been experiencing multiple shocks this year, compounded by the global food crisis. The extremely harsh winter, drought and locust infestation, in addition to rapid rise in food and fuel prices have exacerbated the difficulties faced by the poor. Assessments indicate that in addition to the



800,000 severely food insecure currently supported through the appeal, some 1.3 million people may need to be supported additionally if conditions do not improve.

Thirteen relief organisations that are active in the food security sector are participating, with a total of 21 project proposals. Projects first and foremost aim to provide food and cash support to the 800,000 severely food insecure as well as food and nutritional support to 200,000 infants and small children, 50,000 pregnant women and lactating mothers. To avoid a prolonged relief situation, additional projects have been included that are designed to improve agricultural production, for example the provision of agricultural inputs to 373,000 severely food insecure people in rural areas, a locust prevention, or eradication campaign and expansion of areas under fodder crops.

While the food security situation is the most immediate concern and the focus of the present appeal, additional funding may later be required to fill gaps in the Government's plan of action for the winter. Another area of concern that the humanitarian community is closely monitoring is the continuing drought condition in the country. The current food security appeal may therefore, at a later stage, need to be revised if conditions on the ground so determine.

Kyrgyzstan: preparedness for winter

The Government of Kyrgyzstan, international organisations and donors are jointly developing a winter preparedness plan to address the potential humanitarian consequences of energy deficits and continuing price increases of basic commodities during the winter period.

Last winter, Kyrgyzstan like the rest of Central Asia experienced extremely cold temperatures for a prolonged period, making it the worst winter in 44 years. While the same situation in Tajikistan resulted in the need for urgent humanitarian intervention, Kyrgyzstan was able to ensure essential energy and food support to its population during the winter 2007/08, averting extreme hardship. This, however, was achieved through the severe depletion of state grain and energy-generating water reserves.

The remainder of 2008 saw a sequence of locust infestation, hail storms, lack of precipitation and spring frosts, inflicting serious damage on the agricultural sector estimated at 2.3 billion som (\$65 million). In addition, the global increases in the prices of key food and energy commodities are fuelling inflation and causing significant shortages in family income.

In 2008, the Toktogul dam received less water than anticipated, but more significantly, the cold snap at the beginning of the year saw far greater demand for electricity than is usual in the winter. This was coupled by a reduction in gas imports from Uzbekistan. As a result, the water level of the Toktogul reservoir fell to 6.5 billion cubic metres (bcm), just 20% more than the critical point (5.4 bcm) at which turbines would stop working entirely.

Since May 2008, the Government of Kyrgyzstan, supported by its partners, has been implementing plans to avoid a breakdown in energy supplies over the winter period. Government's comprehensive energy saving and thermo-production plans will likely ensure that sufficient electricity and heating will be available during the critical winter period. Nevertheless, a preparedness plan is being developed to ensure additional support for the most vulnerable in society. The draft of the plan is expected to be ready by 9 October.



Reducing vulnerability of school children to earthquakes

The Central Asian regional workshop on “Reducing vulnerability of school children to earthquakes” was held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan on September 17-18, 2008.

The workshop was organised by the United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD), the Uzbek State Committee on Architecture and Construction and the Uzbek Scientific Research Institute of Typical and Experimental Design of Residential and Public Construction.

Experts and authorities related to school infrastructure construction and maintenance, non-governmental organisations on disaster safety, environment and education and representatives from international communities including UN, Red Cross, NGOs and donor agencies participated at the workshop.

Recent earthquakes demonstrated that school buildings tend to be disproportionately vulnerable to earthquakes, resulting in relatively high numbers of deaths among school-going children in such disasters. Safety of school buildings as well as disaster education for school going children have proven their importance as tools to minimise the risk of disasters to school children and through them to entire communities.



The recent advances in technologies to combat the force of earthquakes and prevalence of some tested good practices of making communities able to adopt to a culture of safety through education and other capacity building processes show the potentials for community based earthquake safety programming. Dissemination of knowledge and skills is the key for the success.

The workshop aimed to make a contribution towards reducing the vulnerability of school children to earthquakes in the Central Asian region. The workshop provided a platform for regional experts and government representatives to discuss on strategy for national and local governments in Central Asian countries for formulation of necessary policy and programs on school safety.



Upcoming Events 2008

- **The Third Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction** will take place from **2-4 December 2008** in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The conference is being organised by the UN's International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR). OCHA, with support from ISDR and the Asian Disaster Reduction Centre (ADRC) is planning to host a side-event on **regional cooperation on Disaster Management in Central Asia**. The side event is planned for **1 December 2008**.
- From **9 to 11 November**, the annual **Asia-Pacific International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG)** meeting will take place in New Zealand. The meeting is organised by OCHA Geneva.
- In the week of **10 November**, the UN Country Team in Uzbekistan is planning to test its **contingency plan** in a full-day simulation exercise. The exercise is being led by UNICEF with support from OCHA Almaty.

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October 2008 Special Observances and Events

- ✓ International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction (**8 October**)
- ✓ World Food Day (**16 October**)
- ✓ International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (**17 October**)
- ✓ United Nations Day (**24 October**)

Interesting web-sites

<http://caresd.net/>

A Digital Network on Environmental and Sustainable Development Practice and Policy in Central Asia and the Neighboring Regions of Russia.

<http://www.cagateway.org/>

The Central Asian Gateway project aims at facilitating development and integration in the countries of Central Asia through promoting networking among socio-economic research institutions and other development stakeholders, knowledge sharing and experience exchange focusing on the issues of good governance, regional integration and private sector development.