



Background

The Syrian Arab Republic is facing its third consecutive year of severe drought. In the northeast and the Badia region, the failed rains of this year have compounded devastating losses from 2007/08 – during the country's worst drought spell in over four decades. The crisis has negatively impacted the food security of 1.3 million people, of which over 800 000 are severely affected.

The drought has caused acute water and food shortages and an extreme deterioration in health and nutritional status. Most farmers who depend on rainfed production have suffered complete, or near-total, loss of crops, while only few small-scale herders have retained 3-10 percent of their animals. Since 2006, the income of severely affected groups has plummeted by 90 percent.

Soaring food and input costs have made the most basic necessities inaccessible to households most in need. Harmful coping strategies, such as reduced food intake, the sale of livelihood assets, withdrawal of children from school and large-scale migration to urban areas, are rendering affected populations more vulnerable and farther from recovery.

The Syria Drought Response Plan 2009 was launched on 11 August in close collaboration with the Government to address emergency needs and to prevent further impact on the 300 000 people most affected by protracted drought. The Response Plan is complementary to the extensive efforts of the Government. Strategic priorities include rapid provision of humanitarian assistance, strengthening resilience to future drought and climate change, assisting in the return process and ensuring socio-economic stability among the worst affected groups.

Challenges facing agriculture and livelihoods

The northeast and Badia region is inhabited by the Syrian Arab Republic's most vulnerable and agriculture-dependent families. Small-scale farmers and herders have been hardest hit by the drought and largely depend on livestock and crop production for their subsistence. Drought is among the country's most serious environmental problems. Three-quarters of cultivated land depends on rainfall, as do rangelands and the recharge of groundwater for irrigation.

Many farmers experienced continual total crop failure for two years. In May/June 2009, an interagency assessment estimated that 200 000 farming households have been affected, of which over 70 percent have attained minimal or no yields. This means that these families have lacked food for household consumption and sale for an extended period of time, leading to deteriorated health and increased food and livelihood insecurity.



The death and distress sale of livestock have left many herders with nothing to rely on for food and income

Barren grazing pastures and a 75 percent rise in animal feed costs have led to the loss of over 80 percent of animals belonging to small- and medium-scale herders. Animal mortality has risen by up to 30 percent, alongside a drop in fertility rates of 60 percent. Flocks are being further reduced as herders have increasingly sold surviving animals as meat, at a small fraction of their value.

Support is thus urgently needed to protect and diversify the livelihoods of vulnerable communities affected by the current drought, and to increase resilience to climate-related shocks, as pressure

on arable land, water and income is likely to rise in the future.



FAO's response

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is appealing for **USD 13.3 million** under the Syria Drought Response Plan 2009 to support ongoing efforts of the Government in addressing the most urgent needs and increasing the resilience of drought-affected communities.

FAO's proposed response to time-critical requirements:

- **ensuring access to seed by the most drought-affected farmers** through distribution of wheat, barley and legume seeds in time for the planting season (October); and
- **safeguarding the remaining asset base of small-scale herders** through the rapid provision of animal feed and sheep restocking.

FAO's proposed response to promote stabilization and resilience:

- **development of a National Early Warning System** for drought with emphasis on rangeland and marginal areas; and
- **building national capacity to implement the National Drought Strategy** and resources for improved drought adaptation/preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery.





FAO's COMPONENT OF THE SYRIA DROUGHT RESPONSE PLAN 2009

Funding requirements: USD 13 284 583

Time-critical requirements

Project Title: Emergency Response to Support Livelihoods and Food Security of the Destitute Farmers in the Northeastern Governorates in Syria (SYR-09/A/25688)

Objective: Ensure drought-affected destitute farmers' access to the minimum required wheat and barley seeds on time for the 2009/10 planting season.

Beneficiaries: 18 000 small-scale rainfed wheat and barley farmers (144 000 persons).

Partners: Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform (MAAR), local authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), targeted communities.

Project Duration: August 2009 – August 2010

Current Funds Requested: USD 4 989 050

This project seeks to rapidly distribute 9 000 tonnes of wheat, barley and legume seeds to 18 000 households that rely solely on crop production for their livelihood and suffered total crop losses in 2008/09. Provision of these drought-tolerant seeds will maximize yields even if limited rainfall persists during 2009/10. Farmers would also receive training in improved soil and water management techniques to enable the more effective use of limited rainfall. With donor funding, these efforts are expected to cover household consumption needs of wheat and barley for one year and enable farmers to generate a supplementary income of at least USD 230.

Stabilization and resilience

Project Title: Capacity Building for Implementation of the National Drought Strategy (SYR-09/A/25691)

Objective: Building national capability to implement the National Drought Strategy and putting appropriate plans, measures, staff and resources in place for drought adaptation (preparedness) and drought mitigation, response and recovery.

Beneficiaries: Herders, rainfed farmers, Badia women and Government staff to benefit from training.

Partners: MAAR, local authorities, NGOs.

Project Duration: August 2009 – July 2011

Current Funds Requested: USD 462 200 (to cover the costs of the first year of implementation)

This two-year project seeks to assist the Government in operationalizing the National Drought Strategy, ratified in 2006, with the overall goal of reducing vulnerability to drought. The project aims to develop institutional capacity and procedures to respond to early warning of drought in a timely and effective manner. Capacity building will be a key component of the project, with strong emphasis on training staff at district, provincial and national levels, as well as on community participation in decision making. Training in alternative income generating activities will benefit women's groups, thus reducing dependence on livestock.

Time-critical requirements

Project Title: Emergency Response to Support Food Security and Life Sustaining of the Destitute Small Herders in the Northeastern Governorates and the Badia (SYR-09/A/25689)

Objective: Sustaining the remaining asset base of vulnerable small-scale herders through the provision of animal feed and limited sheep restocking.

Beneficiaries: 20 000 destitute small-scale herders (166 000 persons).

Partners: MAAR, local authorities, NGOs, targeted communities.

Project Duration: August 2009 – June 2010

Current Funds Requested: USD 7 400 000

Herders risk the total depletion of their flocks owing to the lack of viable grazing pastures, crop residues and animal feed. Without rapid support, many will be left without any means to secure food or income. FAO thus seeks to provide 20 000 vulnerable, small-scale herders with sufficient feed to cover the daily requirements of up to ten sheep for three months. Further, 1 000 herders who have lost their entire flock to the drought will receive five pregnant sheep, a six-month supply of feed and animal health services. This critical assistance will reach herders during the most critical phase of the feeding calendar until the onset of the rainy season.

Stabilization and resilience

Project Title: Development of a Drought Early Warning System (SYR-09/A/25692)

Objective: To develop a national Early Warning System for drought with emphasis on the rangelands and marginal areas.

Beneficiaries: Rainfed farmers, herders and Government staff to be trained.

Partners: MAAR.

Project Duration: August 2009 – July 2012

Current Funds Requested: USD 433 333

The development of a drought Early Warning System (EWS) would enable the Government to take early actions at the onset of drought conditions before serious losses are caused. The proposed project seeks to realize a fully operational EWS within the country, with the necessary infrastructure and national capacity to render it effective and sustainable. Activities include improving and implementing procedures for data collection, processing, analysis and dissemination, training at institutional and community levels, and establishing procedures, manuals and networks of dedicated government officers and community representatives.

For more information please contact:

Mr Abdulla T. Bin Yehia
FAO Representative for Syria
PO Box 10709
Damascus, Syria
Tel. +963 (0)11 6121142
Email: FAO-SYR@fao.org

Mr Rodrigue Vinet
Senior Project Coordinator
Special Emergency Programmes Service
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, Rome 00153, Italy
Tel.: +39 06 570 53659
Email: rodrigue.vinet@fao.org
Website: www.fao.org/emergencies

