



## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS PAKISTAN FLOODS

10 August, 2010

### FAO on the Importance of Agriculture in the Pakistan Flood Response Plan

#### **Why is agriculture so important to the Pakistan response plan following the recent floods?**

The majority of the affected areas are home to small-holder subsistence farmers who are dependent on crop farming and livestock rearing for their livelihoods. Approximately 75% of farm households are involved in sheep, goat and cattle rearing. Women are traditionally responsible for the care of livestock.

Floodwaters have contaminated water sources and irrigation systems and ruined crops. In some areas 100% loss of crops has been estimated. Over half a million hectares of crops is estimated to have been destroyed in KPK and Punjab alone.

Stored grains and stocks of planting seeds and straw have been washed away. Maize, sorghum, millet crops grown for fodder has also been washed away or destroyed.

Tens of thousands of animals have perished and surviving livestock face acute feed shortages. More animals may die if immediate feed and veterinary support is not provided.

#### **What information is available on crop damage and losses?**

The Government of Pakistan estimates however that 7 000 sq km of crops have been washed away in Punjab and KPK alone (the over half million hectares referred to in the Pakistan Initial Field Response Plan). An estimated 80% of crop losses can be predicted in some of the most affected areas, especially where planted with cotton, rice, vegetables, sugar cane, tobacco and maize. This has an enormous impact on livelihoods.

The next planting season (Rabi) starting in mid September is when the major staple food crop wheat is grown. If the season is missed, the threat to food security increases dramatically, as planting cannot take place again until March-April. The September planting season therefore is not only critical for livelihoods of the affected families, but also for the food security of the region. The necessity of the timeliness of providing agricultural inputs therefore cannot be underestimated.

An Agriculture Cluster and FAO led needs assessment is ongoing in 5 flood affected districts in KPK and detailed information will be available by 13-14 August. Good estimates will also be available for Punjab and Sindh by then.

#### **What information is available on livestock damage and losses?**

Tens of thousands of livestock animals have also died and for the surviving animal, feed is not available. Animal fodder, mainly wheat straw, was already harvested before the floods and stored. The maize stover, used a dried winter fodder, was also lost. The loss of fodder due to the floods is therefore close to 100%. Remaining animals will die in the coming days if vaccinations and feed are not made available, further undermining the livelihoods of families.

Livestock's importance in the local economy is considerable not only because of their role as a source of food, their use for plowing fields, but also because they often represent a family's entire savings.

**What evidence is there that the fields that were/are flooded will be dry enough for planting in a few weeks?**

Plantation of most crops is usually possible within the first days from the recession of water. Water recession is quite a quick process once the rains fall below the levels that usually trigger floods.

If the earth does become completely saturated, in lower lands the water might stand for longer. This will not be the case however in the northern hilly parts of KPK (Swat, Dir, Shangla, Kohistan) where the damage is mainly along the perennial or seasonal streams and rivers.

Agriculture cluster teams led by FAO and deployed in KPK are reporting that waters here are quickly receding even from lower areas. In the hilly areas of KPK, the damages to crops were mostly along the perennial or seasonal streams and rivers and flood waters here have already disappeared.

**What is at stake for the agriculture sector in Pakistan?**

Nearly 700 thousand hectares of standing crops are under water or destroyed. This means the majority of the upcoming harvest has already been lost. This includes sugar cane, cotton and rice and vegetables. There has also been significant damage to orchards.

Green and dry fodder, already harvested has been lost due to the fact that the fodder was washed away whilst drying in the fields or in storage. Fodder in storage that was not washed away is damaged due to dirt and silt deposits and therefore no longer suitable for animal consumption.

Reserves of wheat grain from the historically high 2009 and 2010 wheat crop have also been significantly impacted. Although no detailed figures are available yet, it is anticipated that many of the food stocks in the region have been damaged or lost. The upcoming fall season's wheat crop is now at risk in a region that is the bread basket of the country. If the appropriate seeds are not made to farmers by September- October 2010, the Winter or Rabi season will be missed; this, in an area that traditionally exports wheat and other produce to the rest of Pakistan and abroad. When put in the context of the current high wheat prices, the impact on livelihoods will be significant.

Infrastructure damage such as the loss or damage to irrigation networks and animal shelter will also slow down the time needed for farming communities to return to farming activities. The loss of close to 300 000 homes will also make it difficult for families to return to their land and to normal activities.

The loss of livestock not only represents a loss of income for families, but also family savings and investment over many years. Livestock represents a safety net for many families and the loss of such productive assets will impact significantly on lives and livelihoods.