

INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES

MONGOLIAN RED CROSS SOCIETY

RAPID ASSESSMENT OF DZUD SITUATION IN MONGOLIA

(JANUARY 18 – JANUARY 26, 2010)

SUMMARY REPORT



Herder in dzud-affected Kuvsgul aimag, Davaa is moving long distances with his one year old daughter and wife in hope to find better pastures. Already 30 of his livestock died of cold and starvation/IFRC

SUMMARY REPORT

This report is a shortened version of the rapid assessment report which was conducted jointly by the Mongolian Red Cross Society (MRCS) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (Federation) from 18 to 26 January, 2010, in response to the evolving disaster situation in Mongolia termed dzud. Dzud is a type of disaster unique to Mongolia which is characterized by heavy snowfall and extreme cold temperatures (in minus 40-50) that result in massive deaths of livestock which is the cornerstone of existence for one third of country's population who are entirely dependent on pastureland livestock and lead nomadic lives.

Dzud happens on a periodic basis and it is the result of a complex combination of unfavorable weather (trigger), terrain, as well as human and social factors. In the current dzud situation, there is a big regional diversity in underlying reasons why the large number of animals is dying at this high speed, how the dzud is impacting the livelihood of people and the level of dzud response. Some aimags have been affected aimag-wide, whereas in some aimags only few soums have been affected, but very heavily. The rapid assessment team's main findings are generalized for all 12 heavily affected aimags, but the responses should factor in those regional and intra-aimag differences.

The general background information on this disaster and the response of the Mongolian Red Cross Society and international Red Cross/Red Crescent assistance can be found in regular operations update on this disaster on the Federation website: <http://www.ifrc.org/where/country/cn6.asp?countryid=194>. For the purpose of this assessment, the assessment team also conducted a quick mapping of dzud responses by other international organizations, a copy of which can be found in the DREF update at the above mentioned link.

ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

The assessment's overall objective was to identify the immediate and medium-term (early recovery) needs of the affected populations and potential response activities by the Mongolian Red Cross Society. The assessment findings and recommendations will serve as the basis for developing a plan of action under the framework of international Red Cross assistance to the MRCS through the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) and other international assistance channels and guide the overall MRCS' national response.

The assessment team was composed of disaster and health staff members of the Federation and MRCS and included Elzat Mamutalieva (Federation's Asia Pacific Zone in Kuala Lumpur), Amgaa Oyungerel (Federation's East Asia Regional Office in Beijing), E. Bold-Erdene (MRCS), A. Zoljargal (MRCS), E. Altantulga (MRCS), D. Enkhtsetseg (MRCS) and Kh. Solongo (Federation in Mongolia). The assessment team looked across six different thematic areas: health and psychological support, food and nutrition, shelter and non-food items, livelihood, logistics and water, sanitation and hygiene promotion.

To accommodate the requirement to deliver the initial assessment findings by 26 January and significant logistical challenges in reaching the most affected and snowbound communities, the primary data collection periods were relatively short and conducted in two out of 12 most affected aimags: 3 days in Khuvsgul aimag (from 21 to 23 January) and 3 days in Arkhangai aimag, including the travel time (from 22 to 24 January). The team conducted household interviews, key informant interviews with local authorities and visits to health centers during these field visits. However, this limitation was balanced with extensive follow-up communications with the respective Red Cross branches and government officials and relevant international and national organizations in Mongolia. This included face-to-face and over-the-phone interviews with all most affected 12 aimags following a set of guiding questions developed by the assessment team. Also, each of the Red Cross branches in 12 most affected aimags conducted 10 household interviews with the herders, following a set of 15 key questions and guidelines provided from the assessment group (semi-structured interviews).

KEY FINDINGS:

Health and Psychosocial Support:

- (a) Limited access to health care services, especially for emergency medical services in most affected soums;
- (b) Increased burden on health care services, increase in ARI cases among the affected population;
- (c) Reported increased level of stress and anxiety among the affected population, feeling of loss;
- (d) Low level of knowledge among the herders on first aid, for example what to do when they have frostbites which is now common occurrence during the dzud;
- (e) Increased risk of communicable diseases from animal dead carcasses if not buried before the weather gets warmer, water scarcity, and poor sanitation and hygiene practices.

Food and nutrition: the food security of the most affected herder families is seriously threatened.

- a) Availability of food in local markets (in some remote, difficult to reach aimags such as Gobi Altai)
- b) Reduced physical access for the remote, snowbound communities and families in *otor*¹ to local markets;
- c) Financial constraints (influenced by increased prices for basic food commodities, sudden drop in household income due to lower prices for meat and animal products for barter and abolition of government subsidies for families with children starting from January 2010). Not necessarily of these factors are related with dzud situation, but they exacerbate the existing situation.
- d) Proper food utilization: poor dietary diversity and reduced household food consumption, posing a risk of increased chronic malnutrition levels among children. The most critical period for food assistance will be the coming March, April and May months.

Livelihood: The livelihood of a large segment of the country's herders' population is threatened.

- (a) It is too early to predict the full impact of this dzud and the second assessment is required to assess the medium and short term impact of the dzud on the livelihood of the affected herders. Learning from the past dzud disasters, the potential impact include: increased poverty for the large number of herders who lost their livestock; other socio-economic consequences such as migration to cities in masses, joblessness, destitution, psychological stress and school drop-out. It is estimated that 60-70% of all herders own less than 200 livestock, which is considered that it is not economically viable and is sufficient for households' mere subsistence only. Obviously, this group will be the most heavily affected by the dzud.
- (b) Early household coping strategies to slaughter animals in the anticipation of the dzud have turned out to be very unsuccessful on individual levels (no opportunity to sell or barter). On a collective basis, these strategies have been detrimental to the small local economies in rural areas, leading to reduced prices for animal products.
- (c) The herders are using a variety of coping strategies to reduce their animal losses (providing hay and fodder, preparing special nutritional mixtures for weak animals, keeping the animals inside of gers and in warm shelters). However, those strategies are not sustainable in the long run and can lead to large debts, sales of household assets and exhaustion of people.

¹ *Otor* – a Mongolian term which means movement of nomadic herders in search of better pastures.

Shelter and non-food items:

- (a) No major needs expressed in terms of sheltering, but there are widespread constraints with heating materials (lack of access to wood and animal dung - main heating materials of herder families), especially those living in Gobi areas, isolated communities and also those who are left behind at winter places when families move in *otor*.
- (b) Affected households lack extra warm clothes (both for adults and children) and boots to enable them to stay warm while herding or in their houses.

Logistics:

- (a) The assessment team made a quick analysis of the logistical capacity (warehousing, transportation, suppliers, relief distribution, and procurement) of the MRCS, Federation and available options for outsourcing for immediate relief distribution. There is no warehousing capacity at the MRCS to store food items.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Overall recommendations:

1. Second joint Federation/MRCS assessment to be conducted in early March 2010. The assessment will identify the additional needs for the immediate and medium-term assistance as the situation evolves in the coming months, which are most critical months in dzud situation. Upon this assessment further international assistance options will be considered. This assessment should also include the review of existing and past livelihood projects implemented by the MRCS and analysis of the MRCS capacity and mandate to conduct livelihood interventions vs. the other organizations. Based on the results, we recommend deciding whether it is worth for the MRCS to be involved further in longer-term livelihood assistance projects.
2. Update an overall response plan for the MRCS and include the mapping of pledged and received funding for the disaster, including the Federation's assistance to make sure an accurate needs-based allocation of resources to the most affected aimags.
3. RC assistance should focus on the most vulnerable groups, which in the current dzud situation are: (a) those currently living in very remote, isolated areas due to blocked roads; (b) those who are in *otor*, especially if they have either pregnant women, elderly, small children or people with chronic conditions moving with them; (c) those who are left behind at winter places when families move in *otor* – they are most likely to be either elderly, disabled, small children or pregnant women, as all able bodied family members migrate with herds; (d) herder households that own less than 200 livestock, with the highest percentage of loss of livestock. There is some overlapping of these groups.

Sectoral recommendations:

1. Continuous monitoring of health situation, focusing on the most vulnerable such as the elderly, pregnant women, small children, the disabled and those with chronic conditions.
2. First aid basic education for common injuries like frostbites through distribution of brochures, radio messages, TV spots.
3. Health education, including hygiene promotion and FA training for households and distribution of first aid kits starting from April – May in dzud affected soums.
4. Psychosocial support to the affected herders by trained Red Cross volunteers.
5. Local mobilization of volunteers for clean-up and burial of dead animals for families which do not have able bodied members (elderly, female headed households, etc.)
6. MRC has an experience of conducting such activities in the previous dzud disasters.
7. Targeted food assistance for the most affected households minimum for the coming 3-4 months (February – April), proposed items for distribution: rice, flour, sugar, tea, vegetable oil, salt in selected five aimags.

8. Information dissemination to herder families on how to mitigate livestock loss – serve as information dissemination channels through mobilization of Red Cross volunteers.
9. Local (not regional/international) procurement of wheat flour: central procurement in Ulaanbaatar and/or local procurement in those aimags where there is grain milling and processing capacity.
10. Distribution of warm clothes and boots for adults and children.

Specific recommendations for the Federation’s immediate assistance to the MRCS:

1. Recommended aimags for targeting: Gobi Altai, Khuvsgul, Arkhangai, Zavkhan and Ovorkhangai. The selection of these aimags was based on the extensive analysis of all 12 affected aimags based on the information gathered from NEMA, MRCS and assessment team’s observations. The aimags were selected based on the following criteria: (a) NEMA classification of dzud situation in aimags; (b) aimag poverty index; (c) % of rural population in those aimags and (d) extent of the current and planned dzud response activities by other organizations and MRCS.
2. In those five aimags, select the soums that are considered the most affected and most remote. The selection should be done by aimag Red Cross branches in coordination with aimags’ Emergency Management Agencies, with the support from the MRCS national headquarters.
3. Proposed selection criteria for beneficiary herder households: (a) households not living in soum centers; (b) households which own less than 200 heads of livestock; (c) highest % loss of livestock and (d) if they have any family members from socially vulnerable groups (disabled, elderly, households with many children, female headed households).
4. In the selected five aimags, provide a “household package” of (a) non-food items (warm clothes/boots, 6 items) and (b) 3 month worth supply of basic food items (6 different items). The distribution of these items should be accompanied by “software” support (psychosocial support, basic first aid, health education for the affected herders), depending on the needs of individual households.
5. The remaining seven affected aimags, which are not targeted for the Federation-supported relief assistance plan, are being considered for assistance from the other funding sources (MRCS national appeal, bilateral Red Cross and external assistance, etc.). For those aimags, the Federation’s assistance plan should include “software” support (psychosocial support, basic first aid, health education for the affected herders).
6. The selection of soums for targeting and relief distribution and monitoring should be conducted through the existing network of MRCS’ Regional Disaster Preparedness (DP) Centres, in consultation with the aimags’ Red Cross branches. The five aimags selected for the International Federation’s assistance will be provided support through Khangai RC DP center (Arkhangai, Uvurkhangai, Khuvsgul aimags) and through Altai RC DP center (Gobi Altai and Zavkhan aimags).

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For more information on the assessment, please contact:

Mongolian Red Cross Society, Ulaanbaatar: Mr. Ravdan Samdandobji, Secretary General, email: redcross@magicnet.mn; phone: +976 11 312 578; fax: +976 11 320 934

International Federation country office in Mongolia: Mrs. Maija-Liisa Fors, (head of country office); email: majaliisa.fors@ifrc.org; phone: +976 11 312 720; fax: +976 11 321 684

International Federation regional office in Beijing: Amgaa Oyungerel (East Asia regional health delegate); email: Amgaa.Oyungerel@ifrc.org; phone: +86-135 1106 5152; fax: + 86-10-65327166