

UN agency steps in to help Pakistani farmers after floods destroyed seed stocks



Distributing seeds to vulnerable farming families hit by the floods in Pakistan

27 October 2010 – The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (**FAO**) is distributing wheat seeds that will benefit over half a million farming families, or nearly five million people, whose seed supplies were destroyed during the recent flood disaster.

The floods, which began in late July and inundated one fifth of the country, claimed more than 1,800 lives and have affected more than 20 million others.

Agriculture is the mainstay for over 80 per cent of the victims of the disaster, which damaged over 2.4 million hectares of cultivable land and washed away millions of homes and livelihoods.

FAO **noted** that providing seeds, as well as fertilizer, to vulnerable farming families for the current Rabi planting season that ends in December is crucial because an estimated 500,000 to 600,000 tonnes of wheat seeds were washed away or ruined by the floods.

“The food security of tens of millions of Pakistanis is at stake with the current planting season,” the Rome-based agency stated in a news release, adding that the next harvest for wheat will not be until spring 2011.

With the generous help of donors, FAO is able to provide agricultural inputs and other support to over half a million flood-affected households in the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Punjab, Balochistan and Sindh so that they are able to plant wheat during the 2010 Rabi season.

“Wheat is the main staple of the Pakistani diet so it is of vital importance that farmers receive seeds in time,” said Luigi Damiani, the senior FAO official leading the agency’s efforts in Pakistan. “I am happy to say that thanks to the generous and timely response of donors, we are in good shape to salvage the Rabi season for millions of people.”

Additional assistance is also being provided to help families save their livestock, and to assist in rehabilitating or repairing small-scale irrigation schemes.

Meanwhile, three top UN human rights bodies are urging Pakistani authorities and relief agencies not to leave behind the most vulnerable populations amid the flood response efforts.

“Members of minority communities, Afghan refugees, women, children and persons with disabilities, particularly those living in rural areas, were already among the most vulnerable in Pakistani society,” said the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The aftermath of the Pakistan floods “calls for special measures to prevent discrimination and protect the most vulnerable, active vigilance regarding human rights violations, and the establishment of channels of participation for all affected persons in the decisions now being taken towards long-term recovery,” they stated, while commending the authorities and relief agencies for their efforts.

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