



Viet Nam: Drought and Saltwater Intrusion

Office of the Resident Coordinator Flash Update No. 1

As of 23 January 2020

This update is issued on behalf of the UN Resident Coordinator in Viet Nam in collaboration with humanitarian partners. It covers the period from December 2019 to 23 January 2020. The next update will be issued once new information becomes available.

Highlights

- Since December 2019, severe drought and saltwater intrusion conditions have been detected and have begun to significantly affect the livelihood, food security and water supply of 685,558 people across all provinces in the Mekong Delta region (source: CCNDPC).
- Preliminary satellite observations indicate that the level of severity will continue to increase.
- On 10 December 2019, in Can Tho, VDMA, UNESCAP, ASEAN Secretariat and UN called for early actions in the National Multi-Stakeholder policy dialogue – early actions to mitigate drought and saline intrusion in Southern Viet Nam.
- On 3 January, in Ben Tre, Deputy Prime Minister Trinh Dinh Dung chaired a conference on prevention and response to drought and saltwater intrusion where the situations from thirteen affected provinces were discussed.
- On 9 January, the Government requested participation from UN, Red Cross and NGOs partners to carry out a multi-cluster rapid assessment to better understand the immediate needs of the affected provinces.
- Central Committee for Natural Disaster Prevention and Control, INGOs, Viet Nam Red Cross partners and United Nations, conducted a joint multi-cluster rapid assessment 15-17 January to inform response planning. Findings are expected to become available 5 February.



Figure 1: MARD Forecasting 4g/l Boundary in 2020

685,558

People affected by the drought and saltwater intrusion

13

Number of provinces affected

1

Province in state of emergency

Source: Central Steering Committee of Natural Disaster Prevention and Control

Situation Overview

The 2019 rainy season in the Mekong basin appeared much later, resulting in drought conditions and historic low levels of flow, with saline intrusion appearing 10-20 days earlier than the historic 2015–2016 lows, and 2.5–3.5 months earlier than the annual average. Salinity is expected to enter 55-110km inland, about 20-40km deeper

than average and will surpass the highest levels reported in 2015-2016 in the next few days (source: VDMA, UNOSAT).

Preliminary satellite observations from October 2019 to January 2020 indicate poor vegetation health, prolonged dry spells and soil moisture deficits, indicating drought like conditions. The drought is attributed to saltwater intrusion in the Mekong Delta affecting aquifers (underground water sources) which usually supports the domestic water demand.

For the past month, the ongoing drought, water shortage and saltwater intrusion has posed a significant risk to 685,558 people in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam. A total of 13 out of the 63 provinces (20 per cent) of Viet Nam have been affected and 1 province, Ben Tre has declared a State of Emergency.

According to the Viet Nam Disaster Management Authority, the Mekong Delta and Central Highlands regions have been facing abnormal weather that could be attributed to climate change. Retention of water by dams in upstream areas is also seen as contributing to record-low water levels. As of 20 January, the upstream water level of the Mekong River is reported below average (water level observed in Tan Chau station was 0.69 metre; water level observed in Chau Doc water station was 0.78 metre) (source: MRC). It is expected that the water flow in rivers in the Central Region will continue to decrease until the end of June.

Gaps have been reported in basic understanding of drought and saltwater intrusion and, especially, in sanitation practices and knowledge about hypertension and its consequences, especially in pregnant women. Considering the seasonal forecast, it becomes important developing clear and engaging messaging focused on social and behaviour awareness of mitigation actions in key areas such as health, WASH, education, agriculture, food security and disaster risk reduction for the general public in the affected provinces.

Overview of Early Impacts and Early Actions

Early Impacts

- **Water:** 76,659 households are suffering from clean water scarcity (source: MARD) and are increasingly purchasing fresh water; in selected locations water price is increasing. In marginalized communities along Mekong Delta coastline, particularly communities living further away from water pipe systems, access to safe water is limited or at a higher than usual cost. Intensification of drought and saltwater intrusion will further expose these communities.
- **Sanitation and Hygiene:** Basic hygiene and sanitation practices tend to be ignored for lack of available water and appropriate facilities; Communities are furthermore exposed due to bad waste management practices and unaware of dangerous health risks. Risks of disease outbreaks will highly increase in the coming two months.
- **Agriculture, Food Security and Livelihoods:** significant agriculture land could be damaged when the drought and saltwater intrusion intensifies in the coming two months; Cattle and agriculture land face water shortages; Rice paddies, vegetable cultivations and cash crops are the more severely affected; Household income dropped; Drying-out canals are causing erosion and damaging to houses and road.
- **Health:** poor personal and community hygiene practices and inadequate knowledge on risks of saltwater intrusion and water shortages coupled with favorable conditions for mosquito breeding, will increase people's vulnerability to water born and skin diseases.
- **Nutrition:** there is no evidence on increased cases of moderate or severe acute malnutrition. However, experience from 2015-2016 drought and saltwater intrusion indicates that, later in the dry season, MAM and SAM may increase significantly especially in vulnerable communities.
- **Education:** School attendance has slightly reduced over the last 3 months. School age boys and girls in the affected areas also clearly stated having difficulties to concentrate which is affecting their learning abilities. Some schools are lacking drinking water and have extreme dirty or non-functional latrines.
- **Gender and Protection:** Women and girls, being the primary care givers and responsible for household care, are disproportionately affected by water shortages and salinity intrusions. Basic household activities require more time to be completed, affecting childcare, income from little trade and increasing their vulnerability. It has been observed an increase in parents migrating to bigger cities in search of work, leaving behind families and children.
- Early impacts are increasingly felt by vulnerable people (women and girls, children, poor and near to poor) and fear of a worsening situation in the coming weeks and months is growing.

Early Actions

- The Government and local authorities are closely monitoring the evolving situation. Awareness has been raised as early as September 2019 triggering mitigation and preventative actions (source: media articles). The Government and local authorities, drawing from the experience in 2015-2016, are taking early actions to

support affected provinces, districts and communes with early forecast and warnings, efficient water use plans, infrastructures (sluice systems), crop/harvesting calendar and key activities involving communities.

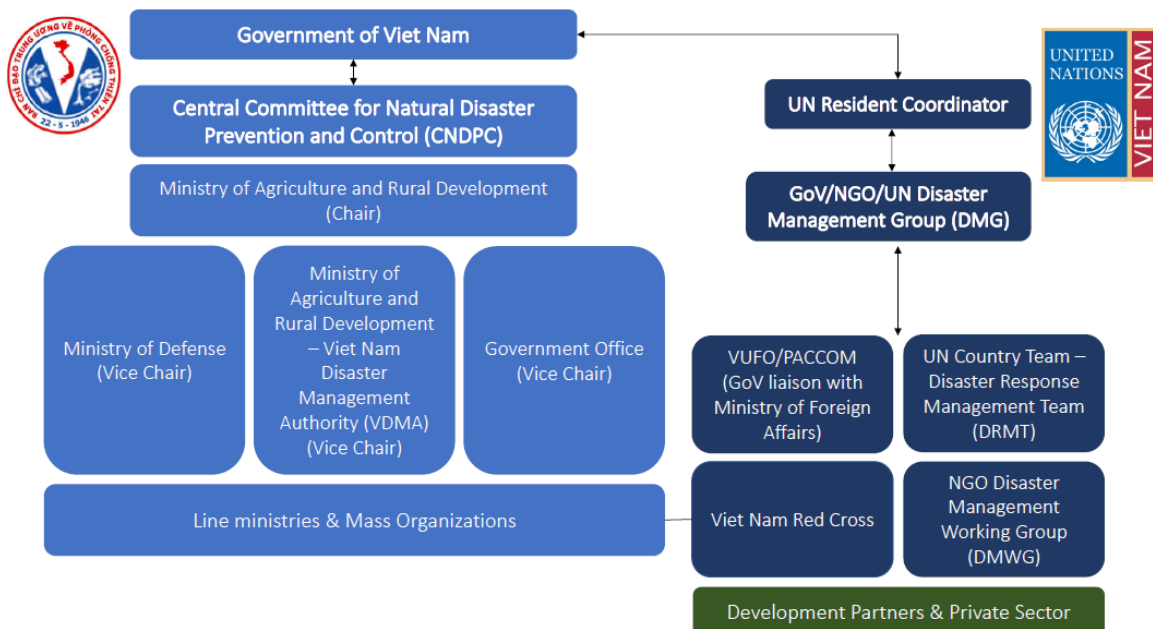
- UN agencies are coordinating with the Government, VNDMA, national partners and international NGOs to monitor the impacts of the drought and saline intrusion situation including the following activities: drought mapping and risk assessment was conducted by UNITAR-UNOSAT; development of drought index and assistance with impacts to the agricultural sector and salinity intrusion by FAO; water, sanitation and health and nutrition status by UNICEF; and health by WHO-Ministry of Health, data collection/monitoring of the impact of the drought and salt water intrusion on education and learning led by MOET/DOETs with support from the cluster-co leads Save the Children and UNICEF; UNDP has made funds available from its emergency resources to support government with field assessments and recovery planning and has also elaborated monitoring indicators in Ca Mau and Ben Tre provinces.
- Between January 14 and 17, two Joint Assessment Teams, including partners from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, United Nations, NGOs and Viet Nam Red Cross conducted a joint multi-cluster rapid assessment to inform response planning. Preliminary results were presented at a meeting on January 21st called by the CCNDP Vice-Chairman and are reflected in this report. Complete findings are expected to become available the week of February 5th.
- Sector leads are closely monitoring impacts in each of the affected areas.

General Coordination

The Government through the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, UN agencies the Vietnam Red Cross Society and NGOs/INGOs jointly completed a multi-cluster rapid assessment in the Mekong Delta region, with field teams completing data collection on 17 January. Preliminary results were presented at a meeting on January 21st called by the CCNDP Vice-Chairman and are reflected in this report. According to the joint Government/NGO/UN Contingency Plan developed in 2018, National authorities, the UN and partners are working in close coordination monitor the evolving situation in provinces affected by drought and saltwater intrusion.

Viet Nam: Joint Gov/NGO/UN Contingency Plan 2018

COORDINATION STRUCTURE AND GENERAL COORDINATION ARRANGEMENTS



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