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# Information bulletin

## DPR Korea: Drought and Food Insecurity

 International Federation  
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

<b>Glide n°</b>	<b>Date of issue:</b> 30 April 2019
<b>Date of disaster:</b> Slow onset	<b>Point of contact (name and title):</b> Mr. Kim Chol, Disaster Management Director
<b>Host National Society:</b> Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) Red Cross Society	

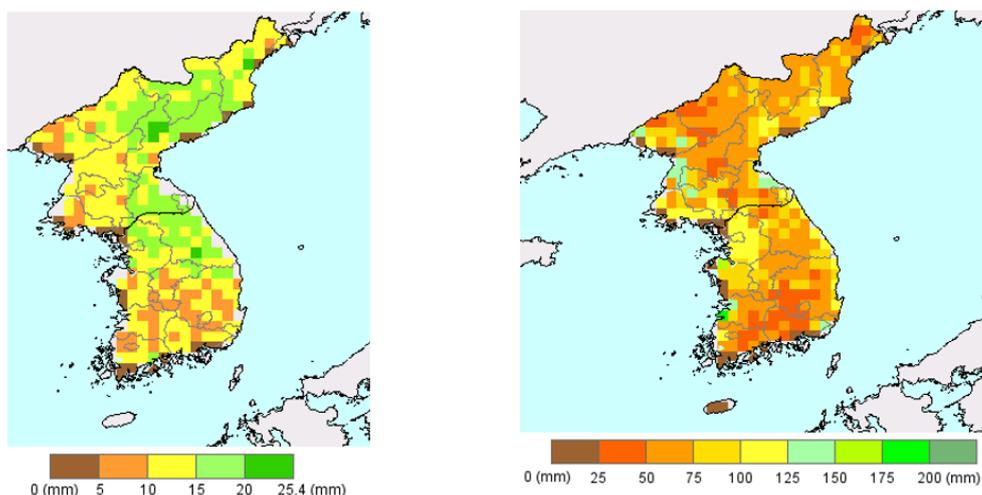
***This bulletin is being issued for information only and reflects the current situation and details available at this time. The DPRK Red Cross Society, with the support of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), is considering a Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) request.***

## The situation

DPRK is suffering from droughts that have occurred consecutively in recent years. In 2014, a dry spell that persisted for over 18 months caused drought, affecting agricultural production and access to water, and left 18 million public distribution system (PDS) dependents at risk of food insecurity, malnutrition and illness. In June 2017, the Government declared a national emergency following a dry spell that affected key food producing provinces in the southwest of the country. The 2017 dry spell stressed the early season crops and constrained planting and early growth of main season crops. The Government mobilized communities and resources to provide irrigation, to reduce impact from the dry spell. In 2018, an emergency was declared due to unusually high temperatures and drought. The response of the Government and Red Cross Society of DPRK was focused on preserving crops from the heatwave and drought-like weather conditions.

Entering 2019, DPRK has experienced unusually erratic weather conditions with little precipitation, limiting available soil moisture for growth of winter crops and planting of spring crops, as well as replenishment of irrigation water reservoirs. The temperatures over the last couple of months have also been higher than normal. Early spring precipitation has so far not been enough to redress the imbalance, and only very good late spring/early summer rains will do so. The conditions for soil moisture and irrigation are at an alarming level. The current lack of precipitation and soil moisture will not only affect winter and spring-planted crops, but also the planting of the main crop to be harvested in September.

**Figure 1. Surface (l) & Subsurface (r) Soil Moisture**



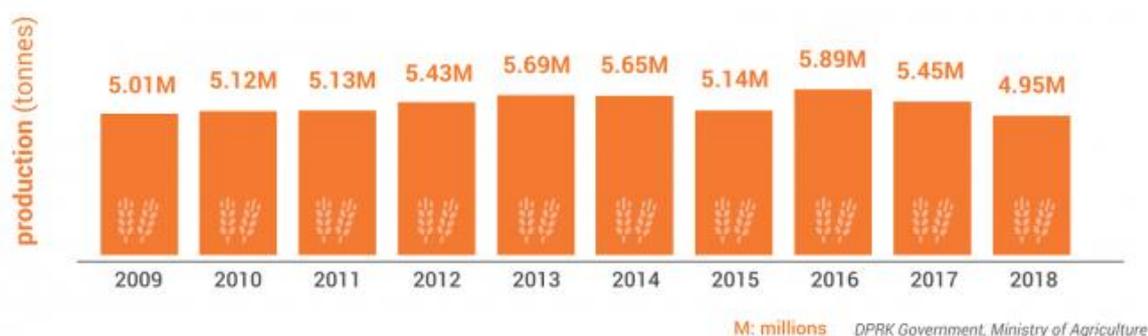
This lack of precipitation will affect the planting of the main crop, since inadequate soil moisture conditions exist across much of the country (optimum: 20 mm). Subsurface soil moisture conditions are also suboptimal and will not support the full development of wheat and barley winter crops (Deutsche Welthungerhilfe).

According to FAO, winter and spring-planted crops are important for food security in DPRK, although they account for only 8 percent of the total annual cereal production in DPRK. The winter and spring-planted crops backup the food supplies until September, when the main season harvesting begins. Thus, the winter and spring harvests are crucial in the lean season (summer months). If the early season crop production suffers, the food insecurity situation in DPRK will be further aggravated.

Any threat to food security will have a serious effect on an already stressed population in terms of food availability and the risk of increased malnutrition, which will affect the most vulnerable sectors of the affected population: children, pregnant and lactating women, the elderly, and those with underlying illnesses.

DPRK is already suffering from a protracted food crisis, making the population vulnerable to any further losses of harvest or food. Food production in 2018 in DPRK was 4,951,025 tonnes, which was the lowest over the past decade. It was 9.22 percent less than in 2017 and 10.66 percent less than the previous six-year average (2012-2017). According to FAO, the sharp decline of production was due to a decrease in total cropped area, as well as yields. The yields suffered badly during the disasters that took place in DPRK in 2018: heatwave, floods and landslides. To deal with the food deficit, the Government of DPRK has requested support from the international organizations present in DPRK.

**Figure 2: DPR Korea Crop Production (2009-2018)**



FAO and WFP have carried out an assessment on the food deficit in DPRK and results from the assessment are expected to be released in early May.

Chronic food insecurity, early childhood malnutrition, and nutrition insecurity are widespread in DPRK. According to the 2017 Global Hunger Index (GHI), which measures and tracks hunger worldwide, DPRK has a score of 28.2, which is classified as 'serious'. Around 10.3 million people, or 41 per cent of the total population, are undernourished. There are many complex, intertwined reasons for the high rates of undernutrition in DPRK. This includes mountainous terrain, with only 17 per cent of land good for cultivation. Farming is largely reliant on traditional methods, and there is a lack of agricultural inputs, such as quality seeds, proper fertilizer and equipment. In addition, changing weather patterns have left DPRK vulnerable to droughts and floods, which often result in reductions in agricultural production.

The IASC Index for Risk Management (INFORM) ranks DPRK 41 out of 191 countries in terms of disaster risk. Floods and drought, sometimes both in the same year, regularly strike the country. An estimated 6.2 million people have been affected by natural disasters between 2004 and 2016.

Dietary quality for many people in DPRK is poor, with limited consumption of food that is rich in protein, fat and micronutrients. This results in problems related to undernourishment, including physical and cognitive development concerns. The immediate causes of undernutrition (both stunting and wasting) among under-five children are directly linked to food insecurity, sub-optimum feeding practices, and lack of quality health services. Chronic food insecurity, as well as poor water and sanitation, are the main contributors to chronic undernutrition in the country.

According to the DPRK 2017 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) results, 20% of children under the age of 5 in the DPRK are stunted and face impaired physical and cognitive growth, whilst 3% of children under the age

of 5 are affected by wasting and face an increased risk of death. Marked disparities exist between rural and urban areas, wealth groups, and provinces both in stunting and wasting prevalence. In the MICS, the distribution of stunting by age of children is noteworthy. Evidence shows that in the DPRK, the percentage of stunted children increases with age after one year and is highest in the age group 48-59 months at 26 per cent.

## Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The current priorities of the National Society are centered around, at first, conducting an assessment to verify the effects of the low levels of soil moisture, determine the needs, and recommend further actions. The assessment is planned to be conducted from 6 to 9 May 2019.

Based on available information, it is clear that the need for irrigation support is urgent. The National Society is therefore considering enabling pumps in the most affected communities, to pump water to lands most affected, by providing the community with fuel to activate their existing pumps. In addition, the DPRK RCS will likely mobilize their own mobile water pumps, bringing them to work in the affected areas, and providing much needed water from dams and channels to the fields where it is most required. This was successfully done for the first time during the heatwave in 2018.

IFRC and DPRK RCS are planning to seek additional support for these activities shortly.

The DPRK RCS is meeting with government agencies, such as the State Committee for Disaster and Emergency Management (SCDEM), to coordinate activities and better understand the needs and gaps. The IFRC country office in Pyongyang is in communication with the other organizations in the field of food security and agriculture to better understand their planned operations considering the developing situation.

The DPRK RCS has ongoing integrated programmes in health, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), disaster management (DM) / disaster risk reduction (DRR), and livelihoods focusing on food security in the affected communities, so it is very well positioned to quickly react with trained staff and volunteers, including community volunteers, in the affected target communities. The DPRK RCS will discuss the priority geographical locations with the government authorities, understanding that the food insecurity situation is nationwide. The assessment to be conducted by DPRK RCS will also consider health and WASH needs.

The IFRC DPRK country office is supporting the DPRK RCS in obtaining updates from the UN and other partners and is coordinating with the relevant working groups (health, WASH, and nutrition). The IFRC continues to closely coordinate with the DPRK RCS to determine the appropriate response and process a possible request for support through the DREF.



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1. Click [here](#) to see the map (no map provided)
2. Click [here](#) to return to the title page

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## How we work

All IFRC assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct](#) for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief and the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable. The IFRC's vision is to inspire, **encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities** by National Societies, with a view to **preventing and alleviating human suffering**, and thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world.

The IFRC's work is guided by Strategy 2020 which puts forward three strategic aims:



**Save lives,**  
protect livelihoods,  
and strengthen recovery  
from disaster and crises.



Enable **healthy**  
and **safe** living.



Promote social inclusion  
and a culture of  
**non-violence** and **peace**.