

Hurricane Keith in Belize

Report from the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Cooperatives Hon. Daniel Silva, Minister

Hurricane Keith brought disaster and destruction to Belize. The excessive wind, torrential rains and resulting floods grievously affected the central and northern regions of Belize and about two thirds of the agricultural and fisheries sectors. The economic value of the loss or damage has been estimated at US\$105.8 million for agriculture and US\$ 6.0 for fisheries.

What is more devastating to our sectors is that the rising waters and flooding in the plains along the major rivers in the region (i.e. Sibun, Belize, Rio Hondo and New River) has caused the displacement of thousands of persons and the destruction of their agricultural systems and fields. It is already anticipated that many of these farmers who are dependent on subsistence and commercial farming, are facing two to four months of loss of food and/or income. In effect, the food and nutrition security of these farming families, as well as that of the whole country, is under threat. Clearly, the most affected are the small farmers. They are the main group to whom we wish to target our assistance.

Presently staff from the Ministry of Agriculture, in collaboration with the affected farmers and fishermen, sector leaders and partners in Belize, are drafting plans for a) emergency measures and b) rehabilitation and disaster mitigation plans in an effort to mobilize local, national and international resources to tackle urgent needs and priorities at hand.

The immediate, urgent needs for the agriculture and fisheries sectors are as follows:

1. Seeds, planting materials, fertilizers, inputs for basic food commodities such as rice, corn, beans, potato and vegetables
2. Small machinery and/or equipment for land preparation and tilling, irrigation, and well drilling
3. Small boats, machines and gears for artisanary fishing

Additional resources are also required to:

1. Support and promote farmer organization for enterprise rehabilitation and disaster mitigation
2. Finance and refinance crop, livestock and fisheries loans on concessionary terms
3. Support credit unions to reach out to the small and micro sectors, with credit, training and enterprise development
4. Mount a farmers' register to assess and monitor production, income and capacity during the recovery period

Complementary assistance urgently needed in the rural sector is also a priority, such as:

1. Food relief for flooded and/or isolated communities
2. Repair or reconstruction of work sheds, storage facilities
3. Repair to access and feeder roads to agricultural fields
4. Repair and improvement of potable water systems for rural villages
5. Repair to rural residential dwellings and schools.

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