

RIASCO

Regional Inter-Agency Standing Committee
Southern Africa

HUMANITARIAN NEEDS CONTINUE TO SPIRAL IN SOUTHERN AFRICA AS PEAK OF LEAN SEASON LOOMS

Johannesburg, 6 December 2016: Southern Africa is now entering the peak of the lean season following the worst El Niño-induced drought in decades. With food stocks largely depleted due to poor or failed harvests across the region, estimates of people in need of humanitarian assistance have increased by more than one million to 13.8 million, mainly due to rising needs in Madagascar, Malawi, and Zimbabwe.

“Humanitarian assistance is being scaled up throughout the region,” said Timo Pakkala, El Niño Coordinator for the Southern Africa Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). “However as we enter the critical period of the crisis during the lean season, many countries are struggling to stretch funds to cover the growing needs. It is essential that humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable people is sustained through this period, and for farmers to be supported so they can resume agricultural production.”

Today, humanitarian agencies of the Regional Inter-Agency Standing Committee (RIASCO) launched a revised Action Plan, outlining the deteriorating humanitarian conditions as well as response in the region.*

Food shortages across the region are now severe, and are being exacerbated by a multitude of existing and increasing vulnerabilities, including weak commodity prices, unfavourable exchange rates and slow economic growth. Moreover, the region accounts for a third of all people living with HIV worldwide. The crisis is also disproportionately affecting women and children, with an increasing number of children dropping out of school due to lack of water and food, and entering child labour or early marriage. For example, in Malawi, more than 137,000 children are being forced out of school by the crisis.

Southern Madagascar is of particular concern where an estimated 845,000 people are currently in the emergency or crisis category of food security. Maize, cassava and rice production has decreased there by as much as 95% compared with 2015. The Madagascar humanitarian response plan is only 29% funded.

As of early December 2016, some \$757 million has been raised for the humanitarian programmes of RIASCO partners in the region, which has helped save lives, protect livelihoods and reduce human suffering. This funding has allowed for a broad range of humanitarian assistance from partners. WFP’s combined operations, including food and cash assistance, reached 6.6 million people in October. WFP is now scaling up to reach 13 million people in January through a combination of relief, development, resilience and recovery operations. From now until April 2017, WFP is supporting governments in treating and preventing moderate malnutrition among more than 700,000 young children, pregnant and nursing women, and people living with HIV across the region.

UNICEF and partners have treated more than 82,000 children for severe acute malnutrition and reached more than 600,000 people with clean water. In the coming months, UNICEF will work with partners to mobilise resources to provide life-saving treatment to 580,000 severely malnourished children; water, sanitation, and hygiene to more than 4.6 million children and their families; education to 1.9 million affected children; and protection and care for 5 million children.

FAO is supporting the provision of agricultural inputs for 800,000 farmers. National social protection programmes have been strengthened and cash transfer programmes expanded to stimulate local markets. National and international non-governmental organizations have played an indispensable role in the response.

Despite efforts, critical remaining funding gaps amounting to \$550 million need to be met, without which, millions of the most vulnerable people will not receive full rations, and hundreds of thousands of children will remain at risk of irreparable damage from undernutrition and from dropping out of school. Health centres will not be able to provide the most essential services, and farmers will be unable to resume full agricultural production.

Alongside humanitarian assistance, the RIASCO action plan revision advocates stepping up efforts to end the cycle of drought-induced crises in southern Africa. Development partners say focus should be on the development of sound national policies and strategies, expanding coverage and strengthening social safety nets, promoting climate-smart agriculture, reinforcing early warning systems, and improving management of water and other natural resources.

Further investments in these areas, combined with solid fiscal and other risk management instruments at national and regional level, are required to build resilience and achieve the goal of breaking the cycle of recurrent drought emergencies.

** An initial RIASCO Action Plan for Southern Africa, released in July 2016, outlined urgently-required, life-saving humanitarian actions plus various options to address chronic issues and build longer-term resilience.*

The revised RIASCO Action Plan will be available here shortly:

<https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/southern-eastern-africa>

Content for the media:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B3Y0KQMSH4DDZGpZN1E3aEVydnM?usp=sharing>

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/lloa6ugklvspfo0/AADjCkH1N4S16nggmeWzKtx1a?dl=0>

Latest information about agency response to the crisis:

<https://www.wfp.org/emergencies/southernafrica>

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