

INFORMATION BULLETIN



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

SOUTHERN AFRICA REGION: FOOD SECURITY SITUATION

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This Bulletin is intended for information only. The Federation is not seeking any funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time.

The Situation

Following two years of consecutive floods in the region, southern Africa is now facing a dry spell and the global meteorological forecast predicts an el-nino induced drought situation for the years 2002-2003. The season's very limited rainfall has resulted in a poor harvest and diminished output in all countries in the region, except for South Africa which is the only country that has recorded a small surplus. Shortage of maize meal means that people in the region have to do without their staple food and substitutes such as rice are too expensive for most people to buy. Food availability at household level is becoming a serious problem and increased malnutrition adds to the vulnerability of the already vulnerable people in the region already living below the poverty line. It also adds to the vulnerability of the high number of people in the region living with HIV/AIDS. The maize meal available is frequently being sold at double the normal price, making it unaffordable to many people. The most acute food situations are in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe, with Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland facing regular food deficits. The situation in Zimbabwe has called for special attention as the economy faces serious crisis and impacts severely on the population and the region at large. Food shortages and the lack of foreign currency to import goods point to an impending disaster. The possibility of population movements from Zimbabwe into adjacent countries is already a reality and a concern for the neighbours.

Red Cross and Red Crescent Action

Malawi

In Malawi, the government has declared a state of emergency due to the food shortages the country is experiencing. The country is in a deepening economic crisis as the country also faces an acute hard currency shortage to import food and there is not enough food in the strategic grain reserve to be released to meet needs until the next harvest. According to the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), the national maize import requirement has been estimated at 200,000 tonnes, after the maize harvest output declined by one-third from the normal level. The World Food Programme (WFP) issued an appeal and some food distribution is already ongoing. The International Federation has sent an assessment mission to Malawi in the first week of March to monitor the situation on the ground and to discuss and establish a potential Malawi Red Cross involvement in food distribution. So far, the Malawi Red Cross has opted to stay out of the WFP led distributions due to limitations in capacity and a total commitment to the HIV/AIDS programme.

Zambia

After launching its appeal at the end of year 2001, WFP is funding the entire food distribution programme in Zambia and is distributing the food through local NGOs. The Zambia Red Cross Society is involved in the distribution and is in charge of distributing food in ten districts. According to FAO, the maize import requirement estimate is 400,000 tonnes, following a decrease in agricultural output of 24%. Some 1.3 million people need urgent assistance, according to WFP. The government, through WFP, has the situation under control and no emergency situation is expected for the time being.

Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, the government's land resettlement programme continues to cause unrest and has drastically diminished agricultural output. The break down of law and order in the run up to the presidential election in 9-10 March 2002 and the withdrawal of significant international donor support to the country threatens the collapse of the economy. According to FAO, maize harvest output has declined from 28% due to a 54% reduction in the area planted on the large-scale commercial farms. Half a million people face "severe hunger" according to WFP. WFP is distributing food in some provinces through a government controlled distribution scheme. The Zimbabwe Red Cross Society opted to stay out of the general food distribution due to the political volatile situation and the fear of not being able to carry out its work according to the Red Cross principles. The society is instead concentrating on its HIV/AIDS home based care programme which currently has 15,000 clients. These people are very vulnerable to the food situation in the country and receive food inputs as part of their nutritional status support.

Food Security Pilot Programme

In Swaziland a food security pilot programme is about to be initiated that benefits 455 households (5 persons per household) for a four year period. The country is in a regular food deficit situation due to the geography. The programme components planned include an increase in agricultural output through water harvesting, training, use of fertilisers and the production of cash crops to ensure income enhancement at household level. The programme also ensures food security for people living with HIV/AIDS. Lessons learned from the Swaziland pilot programme will be applied to other countries in the region.

International Federation's Regional Office, Harare

The International Federation in Harare continues to monitor the situation in the region and necessary steps will be taken depending on the further development of the situation. Regional disaster response teams have been trained and are on stand-by in all countries to carry out assessment missions.

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All International Federation Operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

For support to or for further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal.

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