

OPERATIONS UPDATE



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

ZAMBIA: DROUGHT

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The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 181 countries.

In Brief

Operations Update no. 1; Period covered: 18 March to 18 August 2005.

This Minor Emergency Update no. 1 is being issued based on the situation described below reflecting the information available at this time. CHF 50,000 was allocated from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) to respond to the needs in this operation or to replenish disaster preparedness stocks distributed to the affected population. This operation was completed at the end of August, and a Final Report will be made available by 19 November 2005. Replenishment of DREF by unearmarked contributions is welcome and needed.

All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the Code of Conduct and is committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable. For support to or for further information concerning Federation programmes or operations in this or other countries, or for a full description of the national society profile, please access the Federation's website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

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Background

Zambia's Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives had, in March 2005, issued a drought alert following erratic rainfall in many parts of the country. The erratic weather patterns had hampered good crop development in the 2004/05 agricultural season, especially in the Southern, Western and North-western provinces of Zambia. As a result, food insecurity exacerbated among most households. According to the government's food reserve agency (FRA), there was only 120,000 metric tonnes of maize in the state shells countrywide, way too short of the country's total requirement- 600,000 metric tonnes. With devastating crop failure (80% to 100%), many households started employing coping mechanisms such as gathering of wild fruits, sale of livestock, charcoal burning, skipping of meals and sale of household assets in exchange for food.

The government quickly reacted to the drought situation by mobilizing multi-sectoral assessment teams, under the coordination of the disaster mitigation and management unit (DMMU). After participating in the assessment, the Zambia Red Cross Society- with the Federation's support- conducted further assessments to determine actual needs and priorities of the communities affected so as to supplement the government's efforts in alleviating the suffering caused by the drought situation. A regional disaster and response team was mobilized and put on standby for field deployment while 65 volunteers, in each province affected by drought, were mobilized to work closely with the local authorities in data collection, through the HIV/AIDS home-based care programme.

The situation

The food security crisis in Zambia is attributed to a sharp reduction in crop yields following a series of dry spells and erratic rains, mostly in the Southern and Western provinces, during the 2004/05 season. The performance of staple crops was also adversely affected by a lack of fertilizer/manure, the reduced availability and late delivery of seeds, and a shortage of labour caused by households having to spend time caring for the sick. More than 80% of Zambia's population live below the poverty line. The Zambia Red Cross Society¹ identifies an emerging trend in the increase of the number of households struggling to make ends meet. The emerging trend is a clear indication of the degradation of livelihoods security over time, culminating in what may be termed 'chronic household livelihood insecurity'.

While there is no doubt about the high number of food-insecure households in Zambia, the exact figure is difficult to estimate as reports given by several actors do not agree. While the government reported that there is sufficient food in the country, including cassava, the Zambia vulnerability assessment committee (VAC) reports that 1.2 million people will require food. The non-governmental organization (NGO) community on the other hand places the figure at 2.13 million people (translating to 124,000 metric tonnes of food in the best case scenario and 175,000 metric tonnes in the worst). The World Food Programme (WFP) reported that its food stocks were reduced to the minimum by the end of August 2005 and according to the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the country reserves are only sufficient to cover a two-month period.

The Zambia Red Cross Society, with support from the Federation country delegation, participated in the assessment mission conducted by Zambia VAC in rural areas, mainly in the southern part of the country. The assessment sought to determine the impact of failed harvest on household livelihoods and food security. According to the VAC, 1.2 million people in the assessed areas are vulnerable to food insecurity because over 50 % of the populations living in these areas are very poor and rely on subsistence farming. The assessment also looked at the impact of the food insecurity on health, nutrition, education, water supply and sanitation. It was found that the proportion of children with common illnesses was high in areas where malnutrition was rampant. It was found that a fifth of the adult population in the affected areas had been chronically ill for the past twelve months while the school dropout percentage was higher for girls due to early marriages, lack of resources for education, and the general negative attitude of the girl child towards education. The assessment found that though the distance to water sources was generally less than a kilometre, two thirds of households have no access to safe water. The water situation is critical, especially in the Southern Province, and the government is yet to take an official position on the situation.

The VAC recommended that food security interventions be implemented in the affected districts as from July 2005 to February 2006. Food relief interventions may include free food distribution, food-for-work or cash transfer alternatives. Agricultural activities would focus on the promotion of drought tolerant crops, crop diversification and livestock disease reduction programmes. In areas prone to recurrent floods and droughts, permanent solutions need to be sought through integrated water management schemes- such as simple irrigation techniques for agriculture and small dams for livestock. It was also recommended that supplementary and therapeutic feeding programmes are established and strengthened in selected areas. Other suggestions were the promotion of safe water consumption and access to education for girls.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action - objectives, progress and impact

With the CHF 50,000 DREF allocation, the Zambia Red Cross Society has implemented several activities, including:

- Conducting crop and needs assessments in the affected areas, in collaboration with the DMMU.
- Deploying disaster response teams to assist in beneficiary identification.
- Conducting early warning and monitoring activities in risk-prone areas.
- Providing food to highly vulnerable groups- persons living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) within the home-based care (HBC) programme. High energy protein food was procured and distributed to 500 families, majority of them beneficiaries of the HBC programme.
- Meeting the expenses of its staff involved in the VAC assessment missions.

¹ Zambia Red Cross Society- <http://www.ifrc.org/where/country/check.asp?countryid=12>

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It is anticipated that future intervention will target carefully-identified vulnerable cases that will be provided with assistance according to established needs. Based on the lessons learnt from the VAC assessment and recommendations of the assessment team, the Zambia Red Cross Society is considering launching an Emergency Appeal, with the Federation's support, to assist 60,000 beneficiaries in the Southern and Western provinces of the country. The objective of the Appeal will be twofold:

- To provide food aid to highly vulnerable groups, particularly those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.
- To improve livelihoods by promoting long-term support that will build local capacity and enhance community resilience.

With support from the Federation, the Zambia Red Cross Society is also negotiating a partnership with WFP for a two-pronged approach to drought relief and development assistance. The partnership will employ the use of nutritional support to highly vulnerable groups (PLWHA) and the food-for-work programme in the affected areas.

Whereas it is too early to for the impact to be determined, initial steps taken to ascertain the extent of crop failure and damage in the affected areas, the beneficiary identification and the distribution of food to highly vulnerable groups is an indication of the timeliness of the Red Cross's intervention.

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