

ZIMBABWE: DROUGHT RELIEF

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The Disaster

Southern Zimbabwe is seriously affected by drought. Since 1992 there has been a pattern of low rainfall for all but two seasons. The accumulation of the effects of low rainfall over several years has parched the fields resulting in a scanty harvest this year. The problems of the 1998 harvest were compounded by predictions concerning the El Niño phenomenon which proved to be misleading to farmers. Moreover, given the very dry conditions for the preparation of the land this year, the prospects for the harvest in May 1999 are bleak.

The worst affected areas are in Matabeleland South Province - Matobo South, Gwanda South and Beitbridge Districts - and in Masvingo Province - Chiredzi and Mwenezi Districts.

Information has been made available from various Government Departments; there has also been consultation with FEWS (Famine Early Warning System), the National Early Warning Unit, UNICEF and other organisations. The conclusion is that many wards in the two southern Provinces are "extremely food insecure" i.e. using the Maize Equivalent Income (MEI) formula (the monetary value of all production, income and transfers in communal areas converted into the amount of maize that could be purchased by exchange), the per capita level is below the 250 KGs considered as minimal.

The Government of Zimbabwe declared a state of disaster in the communal, resettlement and small-scale commercial farming areas of Matabeleland South Province with effect from 21st August 1998 and has appealed for urgent assistance, especially for food and water supplies for human and animal consumption, plus agricultural inputs for the new season.

Red Cross Action

In September last, a joint Zimbabwe Red Cross and International Federation assessment team made intensive visits to the field in the worst affected areas of Masvingo and Matabeleland South Province. The assessment clearly established the present acute food shortages and problems of reliable potable water and sanitation.

The team worked to identify, at the lowest possible administrative level, the needs of the most vulnerable in the communities. Analysing the information available, the assessment team estimates that the percentage of underweight under five in some areas is as high as 17%. The situation will deteriorate further unless there is prompt intervention.

Subject to final negotiation, the ZRCS intends to establish a wet feeding programme in approximately 25 Wards in Chiredzi and Mwenezi Districts in Masvingo Province and Beitbridge, Gwanda South and Matobo South Districts in Matabeleland South Province. Alternatively, provision of supplementary dry rations may also be considered. A total of 40,000 under five and 15,000 pregnant and lactating mothers would be targeted.

The feeding programme is planned for a period of six months, until the harvest in May 1999.

A further technical assessment is needed to establish areas for drilling new boreholes. The ZRCS plans, where possible, that existing boreholes are to be rehabilitated, providing a reliable water supply for 20,000 - 25,000 beneficiaries. Construction of latrines will mostly concentrate on areas where there are feeding centres to reduce the spread of disease.

The water and sanitation component of the programme is expected to run over a period of three months.

The ZRCS has established plans for a separate management structure for its drought relief activities and will utilise Red Cross branch volunteers in the affected areas. A National Programme Co-ordinator and a Finance Officer will be appointed, together with co-ordinators and warehouse managers at the Provincial level. The National Society plans to ensure community involvement in the planning and implementation of the programme. The ZRCS has approached the government and UNICEF in order that a co-ordinating committee of involved organisations may be set up.

Needs

Immediate Needs •

{ *Food:*

- Urgent funding for the purchase of food items from local sources:
(Approximately CHF 600,000)

{ *Water and Sanitation:*

- Funding to rehabilitate and construct water points to alleviate water stress and reduce the spread of water-borne diseases and for construction of Ventilated Improved Pit Latrines at wet feeding points:
(Approximately CHF 120,000)
- Two vehicles for monitoring purposes.

Anticipated Later Needs •

- Funding for drought mitigation initiatives to improve food security and community health;
- Funding for capacity-building of local branches through primary health care training schemes.

The German Red Cross has committed DM 152,000 (CHF 123,546) for the Water/Sanitation component of the programme.

Potential donors are requested to inform us at their earliest possible convenience of their interest in this programme. In the event of sufficient interest on the part of the donor community, an Appeal will be launched.

For further information relating to relief needs and the ZRCS's planned activities to provide supplementary feeding for the most vulnerable and improve access to potable water in the worst-affected areas, please contact the Desk Officer for Southern Africa, Helga Leifsdottir, at (41.22) 730.43.16 or by e-mail - Leifsdot@ifrc.org

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