



WFP Southern Africa COVID-19 Response Situation Report 27 January 2021

Situation Overview

With the total number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 at 1.7 million and the number of deaths at 46,000 — an increase by more than 50 percent in just one month — Southern Africa has entered its worst phase of the pandemic. While South Africa makes up the vast majority of confirmed instances, partly due to its testing and documenting capacity, a number of countries in the region have seen dramatic increases in recent weeks.

To curb the surge, several governments — among them Lesotho, Malawi and Zimbabwe — have tightened border controls and imposed far-reaching restrictions on the movement of its citizens and aspects of their livelihoods. The latest stipulations add to months of socio-economic hardship, with the pandemic having changed the face of hunger, pushing up urban joblessness and greatly reducing vital remittances. Depressed commodity prices and earnings have tightened budgets, undermining the ability of governments to respond to the growing needs.

Even without the additional burden of the pandemic, Southern Africa has long grappled with hunger underpinned and aggravated by pervasive poverty, pronounced inequality and alarming child stunting. Extreme climate and weather conditions continue to hamper the region — most recently illustrated by Cyclone Eloise, forming in the second half of January, hitting much of the same areas in Mozambique that are still recovering from Cyclone Idai in 2019. While the full damage of Eloise is still to be assessed, it is estimated that at least 250,000 people have been affected across Mozambique, Madagascar, Zimbabwe, Eswatini and South Africa.

Overall, analysis by the Southern African Development Community's (SADC) Regional Vulnerability Assessment & Analysis Programme indicates that 51 million people in urban and rural areas are food insecure — the highest number recorded by the programme — a figure that is yet to include the full impact of COVID-19.

While the effects of weather patterns vary across the region, large parts have suffered from consecutive droughts allowing little respite for vulnerable populations.

Photo top of the page: Chifundo, 18 months old, is slowly recovering from poor nourishment as he receives nutritious corn-soya blend from WFP. Wyson, his uncle, collects the food as the boy's grandmother, who normally takes care of him, is too frail to walk. While times are tough as casual labour is scarce during the pandemic, Wyson is grateful that Chifundo has received support from WFP: "Now he looks healthy and he is showing emotions; he smiles and he recognizes me." WFP/Badre Bahaji

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is now the world's biggest hunger crisis, with almost 20 million people acutely food insecure. Escalating conflict and displacement, disease, economic decline and natural hazards are all factors contributing to an enormously complex situation.

Southern Madagascar has seen three successive years of drought and a third of the population — 1.35 million people — need food assistance urgently to avoid a humanitarian disaster. Families have resorted to desperate measures and the little food they can find — such as tamarind fruit — is sometimes stretched by adding clay for the semblance of satiation.



Children are particularly affected by food insecurity in southern Madagascar. Many have dropped out of school to beg or help their parents forage for food. WFP/Theodore Mbainaissem

In Zimbabwe, while the upcoming harvest is likely to improve compared to the previous three years which were hard hit by drought, crop production is expected to remain 30 percent below the five- and ten-year averages. It is also evident that food security in urban settings is deteriorating, necessitating a refocused humanitarian response.

In Mozambique, hunger is particularly concerning in the northern province of Cabo Delgado, where escalating violence has led to massive displacement — the number quadrupled to 565,000 since March 2020 — with families leaving cultivated land behind, with limited means to meet their food needs. The volatile situation is proving challenging to the humanitarian response which requires an immediate boost in terms of resources, engagement and attention.

WFP Response

The pandemic has tested – and validated – WFP’s ability to adapt its operations under trying circumstances. It has launched – or strengthened – shock-responsive urban safety net operations in the form of cash-based programmes in six countries, supporting more than one million people. In Madagascar, WFP has reached 425,000 city dwellers; in Zambia, more than 300,000; and in Zimbabwe the programme is scaling up to support 550,000 vulnerable urban residents by April.



In Malawi’s Dzaleka refugee camp, cash-based transfers reduce exposure to COVID-19. The assistance provides much needed relief for Nsimire Muderhwa and the other eleven members of her household. WFP/Laura Ballester-Nieto

A critical component of the health and other humanitarian responses to COVID-19 and its impact has been the WFP-run Johannesburg staging centre for humanitarian personnel and cargo, operational since June. It has carried over 2,300 humanitarian workers from more than 110 organisations, to eight destinations in the region and elsewhere in Africa. It has enabled the movement of more than 10,000 cubic metres of essential cargo – including Personal Protective Equipment and other medical items – for 29 organisations.

WFP has significantly improved its remote monitoring capacity, vital under the pandemic, through its mobile Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (mVAM) allowing for near real-time data about household food insecurity, earnings, access to markets and services, and challenges and needs. Working with SADC, WFP aims to further integrate mVAM into national assessments.



US\$700 million urgently required

But adapted and scaled-up programming is only possible with adequate financial resources. WFP requires immediately an additional US\$700 million to address the food needs due to the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic and the increased seasonal demands for the next six months. Some 17 million people need WFP’s food assistance in 2021 – a record for the region – and girls, boys, women and men in rural and urban areas are particularly vulnerable right now.

In Madagascar, WFP currently provides food assistance for almost 500,000 severely food-insecure people in the nine hardest hit districts in the south. Given the rapidly deteriorating situation, by June 2021, WFP intends to scale up its assistance to reach almost 900,000 of those most vulnerable. However, support will be needed for struggling families well beyond the current lean season. The humanitarian community [appeals](#) for urgent funding.



Food distribution in southern Madagascar – Ankariera, Taolagnaro district – badly affected by consecutive droughts. WFP/Tsiory Andriantsoarana

Immediate funding is also needed to assist people affected by the rapidly deteriorating situation in northern Mozambique. WFP aims to provide food assistance to 750,000 people (500,000 internally displaced and 250,000 from host communities) and has introduced cash-transfers in the district capital of Pemba, Montepuez, Balama, and, more recently, in Palma, to meet the needs as effectively as possible.

In DRC, in 2021, WFP continues with its large-scale assistance, and plans to reach 8.7 million people with food and nutrition assistance, despite an extremely tough operating environment. In 2020, WFP adjusted its programmes to the changing situation, and, among other activities, a safety net programme using mobile money was introduced in Kinshasa with the support of UNICEF and FAO. While schools were closed due to COVID-19 restrictions, WFP provided vulnerable children with take-home rations, crucial for many families. To continue its assistance, and scale up much needed nutritional support, WFP needs prompt and predictable funding.

The need for additional resources is also notable in Zimbabwe, where the economic, climatic and governance related concerns are even more evident as they are compounded by the pandemic. Inflation and cash shortages challenge WFP as adjustments to cash-based assistance must be responsive. WFP aims to reach 4 million people with food assistance in rural and urban areas as the lean season deepens in the first quarter of the year.

While more than three-quarters of WFP’s funding gap is accounted for by the three biggest operations – DRC, Zimbabwe and Mozambique – we must not lose sight of the smaller countries and operations. For example, land-locked Lesotho experiences unique challenges due to its geographical dependency; with food security at alarming levels, WFP needs uninterrupted funding to continue supporting those most at risk of critical food insecurity.