

# THE HUMANITARIAN IMPACT OF EL NIÑO IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Key Messages

March 2024



Photo: Viviane RAKOTOARIVONY/UNOCHA

In Southern Africa, the El Niño weather phenomenon is a significant factor, driving humanitarian needs. Its effects, including drought, erratic rainfall, flooding, and high temperatures, vary across different areas within countries. The region is experiencing extremely dry conditions during the 2023/24 El Niño season, including one of the driest Februaries in over 40 years, resulting in widespread crop failure across central parts of the region. These conditions have also led to water scarcity, diminished crop yields, and subsequently, food shortages, along with displacement and the proliferation of diseases. These challenges are expected to escalate food insecurity and malnutrition levels, disrupt education and healthcare services, and exacerbate economic hardships in the region. The areas of highest concern due rainfall deficits from January to March are Zambia, Zimbabwe, southern Malawi, central Mozambique, southeastern Angola and northeastern Botswana. Lesotho, eSwatini and southern Madagascar will also be severely affected.

*The key messages were developed by a RIASCO El Niño task force. The Regional Interagency Standing Committee (RIASCO) is a senior-level forum whose main objective is to identify, help address, and advocate on key operational and strategic issues that are critical to the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance in Southern Africa. The detailed technical version of the key messages is available in the [Annex section](#).*

## KEY MESSAGES

- 1. El Niño effects will have severe consequences on livelihoods across the region. An estimated 70 per cent of the population in Southern Africa is dependent on agriculture for subsistence,** communities affected by El Niño are projected to have lower harvests and fewer livelihood opportunities. These factors will culminate in a deeper and earlier 2024/2025 lean season, which usually starts in November.
- 2. Reported drying water points for livestock and poor pasture establishment will result in livestock deaths, loss of income, increase the movement of people, livestock, and wildlife** in the affected areas, triggering increased outbreaks of transboundary livestock diseases, including zoonotic like anthrax.
- 3. El Niño effects are hitting at a time of already significant protracted unmet needs, with alarming levels of food insecurity. About 18 million people are currently experiencing crisis levels of food insecurity (IPC Phase 3+)** in Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, Madagascar, Mozambique, Zambia, and Zimbabwe while Malawi is estimated to have 4.4 million people or 22 percent of the population facing IPC 3 and worse between October 2023 and March 2024. Unless response is urgently scaled-up, the situation will deteriorate further.
- 4. The impact of El Niño on children's nutrition and health is grave, with 3.5 million children in need of nutrition treatment services, out of which more than 900,000 will require treatment for severe malnutrition in Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Malawi, Namibia, Madagascar, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Eswatini and Lesotho.** An estimated 21 million children under five are stunted in the Southern Africa region. This is an increase from 18.6 million reported in 2022. Further deterioration in the nutritional status of children is expected as the lean season continues. Even where food is available, price inflation makes a nutritious diet inaccessible to many. Malnourished children face a higher risk of death from preventable diseases such as diarrhoea, pneumonia, and malaria.

- 5. Local water scarcity is a concern, with potentially serious implications for public health and security, and livelihoods in a region already battling a serious cholera outbreak.** Vector-borne diseases such as yellow fever, malaria and dengue often increase in dry conditions while the increased usage of unsafe water sources can lead to a rise in trachoma, cholera, typhoid, and bilharzia cases. Furthermore, evidence suggests that women and girls are exposed to increased risks of gender-based violence when water is scarce as they are forced to travel long distances (often alone) in search of potable water, making them vulnerable to sexual violence.
- 6. Health services may be disrupted due to extreme climatic events caused by El Niño. Floods and cyclones cause damage to health infrastructure and displace communities.** Displacement, crowding and lack of access to vaccinations are likely to increase the risk of several vaccine-preventable diseases, such as measles and polio. Demand for healthcare services will also likely increase at a time when most countries in the region are struggling to sustain public healthcare systems.
- 7. Climate induced shocks and the associated closure of schools, full or partial destruction of school infrastructure and learning materials have a devastating impact on children's learning.** El Niño effects, mainly drought, contribute to children's vulnerability to dropping out of school as families are forced to prioritize food and water over education, leaving them more vulnerable to child labour, child marriage and recruitment into armed groups.
- 8. Normal to above-normal rains in some areas provide a window of opportunity** for investing in increased agricultural production to address food insecurity and the enhancement of water harvesting and management techniques.
- 9. Funding gaps are hindering response efforts. For example, in the nutrition sector, 70 percent of 2023 needs in southern Africa remained underfunded, with the highest funding gaps noted in Zimbabwe, Angola, Malawi, and Mozambique.** This means a significant number of children and pregnant and breastfeeding women will remain unreached in these countries despite the immense needs resulting from El Niño and other drivers.

## WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

- 1. Rapid scale-up of emergency multi-sectoral interventions,** including in food, nutrition, WASH, health care, protection, education and livelihoods assistance to prevent a deterioration in the overall humanitarian situation.
- 2. While El Niño-induced extreme weather events cannot be prevented, they should not result in humanitarian emergencies.** There is a need to implement adaptive strategies, scale up Anticipatory Action, strengthen monitoring systems and effectively respond with urgent livelihoods recovery and resilience building interventions across the region.
- 3. Humanitarian funding is urgently needed to address immediate life-saving needs** alongside protecting livelihoods in drought prone areas.
- 4. In areas likely to receive normal to above-normal rains, investing in increased agricultural production to address food insecurity and the enhancement of water management techniques will be critical.**

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# THE HUMANITARIAN IMPACT OF EL NIÑO IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Annex: Technical Version

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Photo: Viviane RAKOTOARIVONY/UNOCHA

## GENERAL OVERVIEW

**El Niño is linked with conditions such as drought, unpredictable rainfall, and elevated temperatures, which result in a lack of water, decreased food supply, and the spread of diseases.** The rise in food prices due to El Niño, along with a reduction in agricultural work opportunities, loss of livelihoods, and disruptions in supply chains, that lead to malnutrition, food insecurity, and economic hardship. The situation is further aggravated in areas affected by limited adaptability, humanitarian crises, displacement, and migration.

**El Niño effects will have severe consequences on food and nutrition security and livelihoods across the region. An estimated 70 per cent of people in Southern Africa are dependent on agriculture for subsistence.** Communities affected by the effects of El Niño are projected to have lower harvests and fewer livelihood opportunities. Community watering points for livestock are drying up, while pasture regeneration has been poor in some areas with thousands of livestock deaths already being reported in parts of Zimbabwe. The drying up of watering points and depletion of pasture will increase the unregulated movement of people, livestock, and wildlife in the affected area. This will trigger increased outbreaks of transboundary livestock diseases, including zoonotic like anthrax. In the last week of February, new outbreaks of African Migratory Locust have been reported in Botswana's Gumare area and Gambos in Huila. These factors will culminate in a deeper and earlier 2024/2025 lean season (which usually starts in November).

**Effects of El Niño will erode the production capacity of millions of vulnerable smallholder farmers due to the loss of seed, livestock, and other productive assets. It will also erode the purchasing power of these groups and with reduced income affordability of nutritious foods is low.** Vulnerable demographic groups, such as pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, and young children, are particularly vulnerable to malnutrition during the lean season. Insufficient access to essential nutrients, especially nutrient-dense foods providing sources of protein, fats, and micronutrients during critical periods of growth and development, can have long-term consequences on health. Adoption of extreme coping mechanism such as skipping meals, reducing amounts, and reducing the quality of meals, if likely. A high proportion of young children are already living in food poverty, and the effects of El Niño are likely to worsen this further. For example, in Malawi, analysis of pre-El Niño Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) data shows that the prevalence of child food poverty among children of 6 to 23 months of age is 82.7 per cent, where 25.5 per cent of them live in severe food poverty - meaning they were fed with a maximum of only two food groups per day.

**The month of February has brought extremely dry conditions to many countries in the region.** The central part of the region, across the Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana border is experiencing the driest February in the past forty years. Severe rainfall deficits have also occurred in southern Malawi, eastern Angola, and parts of Mozambique. The dry spell is expected to continue into March. The short-range forecast predicts persistently dry conditions across most of the region through the end of February and into March, coinciding with the crucial vegetative and flowering stages for crops. The impact of the drought conditions on crops is already severe and cannot largely be reversed even if there was to be improvement in rainfall received going forward. Therefore, severe decreases in maize yields are expected in the affected countries, namely Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique, Botswana, Namibia, and Angola. Even South Africa, which was spared the harshest conditions earlier

in the season and is responsible for two thirds of regional maize production, may experience some yield reduction due to the February and March dryness.

**While most of the region has been dry, excessive rainfall in Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Republic of Congo, and Madagascar have brought floods and landslides.** On the border between DRC and Republic of Congo, there was severe flooding on the Congo River in late December and early January. In Tanzania, heavy rainfall led to a severe landslide in Hanang district in January. In Madagascar, Tropical Storm Alvaro made landfall in early January and heavy rainfall since the start of February has led to flooding in the north of the country.

**El Niño effects are hitting at a time of already significant protracted unmet needs. About 18 million people are currently experiencing crisis levels of food insecurity (IPC Phase 3+)** in Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Some countries in the region are also facing significant economic deterioration, that constrains their ability to respond effectively, such as rising inflation and a growing debt burden. Although governments and partners are responding with food and cash assistance for the current lean season as well as Anticipatory Actions to mitigate the impact of drought based on the high probability forecast since late last year, these responses are not sufficient due to funding shortages and more needs to be done.

**Even where food is available, price inflation makes a nutritious diet inaccessible to many. This is particularly the case for groups that have higher nutritional requirements: children, adolescent girls, pregnant and breastfeeding women.** An estimated 21 million children under the age of five are stunted in the SADC region (JME 2023) – one in every three children. This is an increase from 18.6 million reported in 2022. Micronutrient deficiency – hidden hunger – robs children of their vitality at every stage of life and undermines the health and well-being of children, young people, and mothers. In Malawi, food inflation has reached 44.9 per cent, with maize prices soaring to 80 per cent higher than the previous year and 250 per cent above the five-year average. Zimbabwe has seen its local currency (ZWL) depreciate by approximately 50 per cent in January 2024, leading to a 600 per cent surge in the cost of living compared to January 2023 and a high food inflation rate of 60.3 per cent. Similarly, in Mozambique, maize prices are 80 per cent higher than the previous year, contributing to food inflation. In Zambia, a significant maize exporter in the region, prices have increased by 45 per cent compared to last year. To meet their food needs, households may revert to negative coping mechanisms with direct consequences to their nutrition, health, and productivity status.

**Local water scarcity is also a concern, with potentially serious implications for public health and security, and livelihoods. Vector-borne diseases such as yellow fever and malaria often increase in dry conditions. Increased usage of unsafe water sources can lead to a rise in trachoma, cholera, typhoid, and bilharzia cases.** The region is already battling a serious regional cholera outbreak. These health concerns are likely to further undermine the nutrition status of the population. Inadequate clean water at health facilities poses serious challenges for infection prevention and control, this could lead to increase in health facility acquired infections especially during deliveries by pregnant women. In addition to the health concerns, evidence suggests that women and girls are exposed to increased risks of gender-based violence when water and decent sanitation are scarce. They are forced to travel long distances (often alone) in search of potable water, making them vulnerable to sexual violence with sexually transmitted disease and unplanned pregnancies as some of the negative outcomes. The poor filling of river systems that support power generation such as the Zambezi (Zambia and Zimbabwe) will have serious negative impact on irrigated agriculture and operations of industries. In addition, some of the current government measures implemented to mitigate the spread of cholera, have in some ways impacted other fundamental rights, such as the right to education and the right to freedom of movement (IDPs, cross border movements) and the right to freedom of assembly. Furthermore, how these types of measures impact livelihoods is still unclear, but those unable to move around as part of their livelihood activities (e.g., street vendors) could be impacted.

**Based on the latest available data, the areas of concern are Zambia, Zimbabwe, southern Malawi, central Mozambique, southeastern Angola, and northeastern Botswana.** Lesotho, eSwatini, and southern Madagascar may also be affected. The rainfall deficits from January to March in these countries will have substantial, adverse impacts on the harvest and consequent implications for food security in the Southern Africa region during the upcoming lean season.

## COUNTRY OVERVIEW

**Angola:** The El Niño phenomenon has disrupted food supply chains in Angola, particularly in Luanda, due to heavy rains, affecting both urban and rural areas. Despite these challenges, traders are expected to recover gradually. Approximately 1.6 million individuals in southern Angola are currently facing food insecurity, exacerbated by rising food prices and underlying factors such as poverty, limited access to diverse diets, and sanitation facilities. Agropastoralists who practice transhumance are among the most vulnerable groups. The prevalence of acute malnutrition is alarming, underscoring the urgent need for interventions to address malnutrition. Food insecurity is expected to persist for rural households due to limited crop production, late rains, and rising prices, particularly impacting the south. Urban areas also struggle with high food prices, leading to Crisis outcomes (IPC Phase 3) for many households. Despite expectations of improvement with the main harvest, concerns linger, especially in the southeast.

**Botswana:** During the cropping season, Botswana faced adverse weather conditions such as lower-than-average rainfall, uneven temporal distribution of rain, and high temperatures. These factors collectively led to a 15 per cent decline in total cereal production in 2023. Furthermore, remote sensing data from September 2023 highlighted that vegetation conditions in grazing areas across the country are generally poor due to extreme heat waves. This situation directly impacts the availability of forage for livestock. The 2023/24 season is faced with poor rainfall in the most productive areas of the country. The prevailing El Niño event is expected to persist, bringing drier-than-average weather conditions up to April/May 2024. To address these challenges, enhancing resilience and implementing adaptive strategies are crucial. Despite Botswana's upper-middle-income status, the stunting rate in the country stood at 21.6 per cent in 2022 (JME). Additionally, the government's latest livelihood assessment, released in July 2023, indicates that approximately 37,000 people (estimated to be around 1.5 per cent of the total population) need food assistance until at least March 2024.

**Mozambique:** Rains started in November and December with a [delay of more than 20 days](#) in most parts of the country, while in coastal areas of Zambézia Province and northern Manica and Sofala provinces, delays exceeded 30 days. These delays are likely to shrink the crop-growing season, and rainfall is expected to end before crops are ready for harvest, as is typical during an El Niño. Substantial rainfall in mid-and late December prompted the start of planting activities in most areas throughout the country, particularly in the northern provinces. In January, rainfall was average to above-average levels in northern Mozambique but below-average in southern provinces. In Cabo Delgado, localized flooding in the districts of Mueda and Macomia destroyed infrastructure, including shelters for internally displaced people in resettlement centres. The food and nutrition insecurity in Cabo Delgado may be further exacerbated by the increase in terrorism activities by Non-State Actor Groups (NSAGs), that displace people internally.

In early January, FEWSNET conducted a rapid qualitative assessment of food security in the semi-arid zones of southern and central Mozambique. Preliminary findings indicate a more favourable situation than expected in the semi-arid areas of the south, while the central areas are experiencing the typical impacts of El Niño. In the south, most early planted crops had managed to survive and, together with later-planted crops, were initially in good condition and have vegetative and flowering growth phases. Conversely, early planted crops were lost in the central zone, followed by multiple unsuccessful planting attempts. As a result, most households were focusing on preparations for second-season production, increasing the demand for vegetables and short-cycle maize seeds. The February dry spells in Gaza, Sofala, Tete provinces had a devastating impact on crops. In Mozambique, maize prices are 80 per cent higher than the previous year, contributing to food inflation.

**Malawi:** Below-average rainfall is expected in southern Malawi from January to March, and the food and nutrition security situation is of concern. One of the world's poorest nations, Malawi, grapples with high poverty rates and severe malnutrition issues. An estimated 4.4 million people (22 per cent of the populations) are in IPC Phase 3 or higher (Crisis or worse) amidst extended lean season prospects and deteriorating economic conditions, including high food inflation. The Food Security and Nutrition situation in Malawi could deteriorate further as the country faces a critical shortage of maize, with maize procurement significantly below targets, leading to dwindling official reserves capable of feeding only 200,000 households for one month. At the same time, maize prices continue to soar due to low supplies, economic challenges, and rising transportation costs. In Malawi, food inflation has reached 44.9 per cent, with maize prices soaring to 80 per cent higher than the previous year and 250 per cent above the five-year average. The dietary diversity is low, thus predisposing the population to acute malnutrition and persistence of micronutrient deficiencies.

**Madagascar:** The humanitarian situation in the Grand Sud has relatively improved due to a significant scale-up in assistance and the positive impact of the rainy season (February and March 2023); however, the situation became fragile after the crop period in May 2023 as harvest did not cover the needs. The first impacts of El Niño, primarily characterized by rainfall deficits, began in November and December 2023 but were alleviated by the rains brought by Cyclone Alvaro and the cloud masses of January 2024. A general deterioration of the food security situation is expected to start from February to April 2024, mainly due to the predicted rainfall deficit as an impact of El Niño, where seven districts will be in phase 3. More than 262,000 children under 5 are in acute malnutrition and the capability to produce adequate and diverse foods is still far in the horizon; hence any additional shock will depress the situation further.

**Zambia:** In Southern Zambia, the delayed onset of rains was followed by a strong dry spell affecting germination. Other regions experienced mixed planting levels, concluding the planting season. Lusaka faced heavy rains and a large cholera outbreak in the first week of January. In the first three weeks of February, parts of Eastern, Lusaka, Southern, and Western provinces of the country face serious dry spells with widespread moisture stress, wilting and drying of crops being reported. In Zambia, a significant maize exporter in the region, prices have increased by 45 per cent compared to last year. On 29 February, the Government declared the drought a national disaster and emergency noting that 84 of the country's 116 districts were affected by the prolonged drought.

**Zimbabwe:** The performance of the 2023/24 rainfall season has been below average in most parts of the country, characterised by the season's late start, prolonged mid-season dry spells experienced in January and February, and poor spatial distribution. Drier conditions are forecasted to persist in most parts of the country during the greater part of February. Crop conditions have ranged from fair in Mashonaland, parts of Midlands, Manicaland and Masvingo provinces, while in Matabeleland North and South provinces, the crop is reported to be wilting. Most of the crops in Matabeleland had reached the permanent wilting stage by mid-February 2024. Livestock conditions are fair in most parts of the country except in Matabeleland North and South, parts of Masvingo and Midlands provinces, where it is reported to be poor due to the unavailability of pasture and water. If the dry conditions persist, as it has also for the month of February, parts of the Southern Region will likely see an increase in food insecurity and challenges in accessing water for human and livestock consumption. Zimbabwe has seen its local currency (ZWL) depreciate by approximately 50 per cent in January 2024, leading to a 600 per cent surge in the cost of living compared to January 2023 and a high food inflation rate of 60.3 per cent. Zimbabwe is also experiencing a surge in cholera cases, which might worsen with the dry weather condition.

## SECTOR SPECIFIC

### 1. AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY

- While El Niño-induced extreme weather events cannot be prevented, they should not result in humanitarian emergencies. El Niño events are highly predictable, allowing governments and partners to implement coordinated preparedness interventions early action, crucial to mitigate its worst impacts on vulnerable people. Since July 2023, many members of the Regional Anticipatory Action Working Group (RAAWG) have initiated Anticipatory Actions (AA) in the countries' most at risk. However, huge funding gaps are hindering the scale-up of early action and monitoring efforts.
- In a phased and context specific approach there is a need to scale up AA, strengthen monitoring systems and effectively respond with urgent livelihoods recovery and resilience building interventions to reach more people at the right time, in a cost-effective manner. For every US\$1 invested in preparedness and early action, households can gain up to US\$7 in benefits and avoided losses (FAO). Therefore, urgent collective action and increased resources are essential to address these critical gaps and ensure no one is left vulnerable to the compounded effects of El Niño and climate change.
- The repercussions of El Niño effects on food security will directly impact farmers, causing a loss in farming livelihoods and impeding their capacity to produce sufficient food for household consumption and sale of surplus to meet basic needs. The most substantial impact is expected to occur after the peak of El Niño. This could result in an earlier and more intense lean season in 2024-2025 in some areas, potentially starting as soon as July 2024 and lasting until the next harvest in April 2025. This follows already reduced harvests in 2023, high food inflation in Angola and Zambia, and economic challenges in Malawi and Zimbabwe.
- El Niño is anticipated to exacerbate the situation by negatively affecting employment opportunities and increasing food prices, thereby counteracting recent benefits from falling inflation. In addition, conflicts in areas such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Mozambique increase the demand for food aid. Harvests that are below average are likely to result in increased needs for food assistance at the start of the next lean season in late 2024 and early 2025, particularly in areas with food deficits such as Zimbabwe, southern Malawi, southern and central Mozambique, and southern Madagascar.
- There is need to take urgent and phased actions aimed at safeguarding the food and nutrition security of affected communities through Anticipatory Action (AA), timely response and resilience building; rehabilitation/establishment of community livestock watering points, livestock supplementary feeding, provision of seed and other appropriate agricultural inputs, food production using efficient low water requirement systems, fish re-stocking and surveillance and control of transboundary livestock diseases.
- The food security sectors' funding remains low: 90 per cent of the current lean season requirements remain underfunded, despite the IPC 4 (Emergency) category for populations in Malawi, Madagascar, Eswatini, Zambia, and Mozambique. Although Anticipatory Actions are already activated in Lesotho, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe, to mitigate the impact of the upcoming lean season of 2024/2025, the coverage remains low, and more needs to be done. The limited

funding and response mean that a significant number of people will be using coping strategies already during the current lean season and will resort to severe coping mechanisms in the next lean season which is expected to start earlier than usual due to El Niño.

## 2. [NUTRITION](#)

- The El Niño phenomenon comes at a time when the region is facing high levels of malnutrition. Over the past year, the nutrition situation has remained critical, specifically in Angola, Madagascar, Malawi, DRC, and Mozambique. The cholera outbreak, conflict and sporadic floods have compounded the situation. With a nutritious diet costing thrice an energy dense one, according to past Fill the Nutrient Gap (FNG) Analysis of Lesotho, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Any negative effects on people's livelihood are expected to worsen the non-affordability of nutritious diet.
- The impact of El Niño on children's nutrition and health is grave. An estimated 3.5 million children are in need of nutrition treatment services, out of whom 923,424 will require treatment for severe malnutrition in Angola, DRC, Mozambique, Malawi, Namibia, Madagascar, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Eswatini and Lesotho. Further deterioration in the nutritional status of children is expected as the lean season continues. Reduced rainfall has also greatly affected water availability for communities, as well as for crops and livestock, which impacts the milk and food availability for children in pastoral and agro-pastoral areas. Access to diversified diets remains low, with less than 30 per cent of children having access to more than 3 different food groups. Likely adoption of coping mechanism such as skipping meals, reducing amount, lower food diversity and school dropouts will affect people's nutrition wellbeing and bring other social issues, with longer term effect.
- UNICEF, WFP, and other partners support governments in various countries to prevent and treat acute malnutrition. However, the intervention coverage remains low. For instance, in 2023 (Jan- November 2023, only 49 per cent of the nutrition burden was met. Poor-quality diets are one of the most significant obstacles to children's survival, growth, development, and learning. The stakes are highest in the first two years of life when insufficient dietary intake of essential nutrients can irreversibly harm a child's rapidly growing body and brain. Nutrition partners are particularly concerned about the health and nutrition well-being of women and children, noting that the current interventions' scale remains low for prevention and treatment actions. So far, only a few countries have been funded to start nutrition anticipatory actions, and investments in resilience and prevention actions still need to be financed.
- Limited Funding: The sectors' funding for nutrition remains low on average; 70 per cent of 2024 needs remain underfunded, with the highest funding gaps noted in Zimbabwe, Angola, Malawi, and Mozambique. The limited funding in these countries mean that a significant number of children, pregnant and breastfeeding women will remain unreached despite the immense needs resulting from El Niño and other drivers. Promotion of integration of nutrition in other sectors, to boost diversity in food production, access and consumption will also be limited.

## 3. [HEALTH](#)

- The past months have demonstrated that several of the predicted weather-related risks and attendant health consequences associated with El Niño have already come to pass in multiple settings around the globe including southern Africa. El Niño conditions increase the probability of drought, floods, storms, and cyclones, all of which are detrimental to human health.
- The magnitude of health impacts associated with El Niño vary depending on how intensely the phenomenon influences the local climatic conditions of an area, as well as local health vulnerabilities and preparedness and response capacities.
- Populations already affected by humanitarian crises such as those in internally displaced persons and refugee settings face heightened risk of the health consequences of both wet and dry conditions.
- The food insecurity triggered by the drought leads to increased malnutrition, and reduced immunity especially for young children, pregnant and lactating mothers thus enhancing vulnerability to infectious diseases, negative pregnancy outcomes and increasing the risk of avoidable deaths.
- Disruption of health services due to extreme climatic events such as La Niña or El Niño causes lack of water supply in drought situations, or damage to health infrastructure, or infrastructure disrupting access to healthcare, by floods and cyclones, as well as reduced access as a result of displacement. Damage or closure of health care facilities and migration or displacement of populations and of health workers hinders access to essential and lifesaving health and social services during the emergency and well beyond the event.
- El Niño-related warmer temperatures can impact the way people use water, leading to practices that promote the breeding of mosquitoes which may result in vector-borne disease epidemics such as the dengue virus.

- Displacement, crowding and lack of access to vaccination are likely to increase the risk of several vaccine-preventable diseases, such as measles and polio (vaccine-derived). Populations with high rates of malnutrition are more susceptible to measles. The authorities involved in the health response should ensure the availability, accessibility, acceptability and good quality of health care facilities, goods, and services to affected populations preferable through Universal Health Coverage as implied by the right to health and target SDG 3.8.
- Droughts, flooding, and intense rainfall (including cyclones) may cause loss of life, significant population displacement, damage and associated economic loss, also impacting mental health.
- Extremely hot and dry conditions may lead to heat waves, wildfires, increased smoke, and deteriorated air quality, causing or exacerbating respiratory diseases and heat stress.
- The key humanitarian response elements for mitigating the health effects of El Niño are disease surveillance and control, provision of safe water and sanitation services, risk communication and community engagement, provision of emergency health supplies, vaccination, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, and assuring continued access to health care.

#### 4. WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE (WASH)

- The current El Niño situation is an opportunity to draw lessons from the 2017-19 drought, mainly looking at what worked well and areas that require improvement in hydrological drought risks monitoring, coordination, partnerships, partners' capacity; drought response projects. Lessons should be analysed, understood, and incorporated into a response and capability building plan. This will inform capacity gaps to be addressed among the service providers, authorities, and NGOs.
- Anticipate water supply disruptions in selected areas (most at risk groups, in situ or displaced people).
- Monitor water insecurity and define thresholds and triggers: monitoring of water resource and supply systems in selected areas. The outcome is an analysis/bulleting with colour coded map or matrix showing water insecurity trends and updated monthly (example: Drought Bulletin Madagascar Grand Sud). Some risks of disruptions are predictable (i.e., countdown to "day zero water supply" based on decline of water resource in Johannesburg) but others are more difficult to predict (i.e., breakdown of equipment with poor supply chain). Data obtained from domestic Meteorological Services Departments, drought monitoring centres; national or subnational monitoring systems of water levels and alert thresholds in dams and aquifers; other agencies drought monitoring maps such as FAO; regional institutions: SADC Climate Services Centre, Africa Union Situation Room and UNOCHA - Global El-Nino Outlook.
- Business Continuity Planning for avoiding service disruption: Encourage service providers and duty bearers to prepare service continuity plans with contingency water supply services.
- Triple convergence -geographic, thematic, programmatic- through a WASH, nutrition, education, and health sector collaboration: i. Geographical convergence; ii. Thematic convergence (i.e., nutrition sensitive WASH for addressing health risks and nutrition specific WASH for securing water for food and livestock; plan and projects for keeping schools open); iii. Programmatic convergence (same project cycle: assessment, results framework, project design, grants, etc.)
- Programmatic arrangements that allow rapid disbursement of funding -even small tranches- through Anticipatory Action initiatives. Each agency to put in place contingency ready-to-sign humanitarian assistance projects.
- Emergency-stabilization-recovery-development with resilience nexus.

#### 5. PROTECTION/CHILD PROTECTION/GBV

- Food insecurity contributes to children's vulnerability (particularly girls) and an increase in child protection risks (family separation, child labour, child recruitment and use by armed forces, neglect, gender-based violence including child marriage, and female genital mutilation).
- The Southern Africa region is among the regions with the highest rates of Gender-based violence. It is estimated that 1 in 3 adolescent girls will experience some form of GBV in their lifetime and the situation exacerbates in emergency situations.
- Countries affected by El Nino already face different types of shocks (conflict, drought, floods) and already have high rates of violence and the situation is more likely to exacerbate as the protection systems and structures are destroyed. In such contexts, families make decisions in survival mode, to meet immediate food security needs which have long-term consequences for their families, especially children (child marriage, FGM).
- Addressing GBV risks can create an enabling environment for families to access food and other basic needs.



- There is a need to strengthen the integration of protection into the food security sector. Very limited resources are allocated to protection, especially GBV, including to cover the costs of human resources to support the timely implementation of quality GBV programs at the country level which creates a significant gap in the country's ability to effectively address protection risks.

## 6. EDUCATION

- Many countries affected by El Nino face multiple compounding shocks including drought, floods, conflicts, and public health crises which erode the resilience of already fragile education systems, schools, communities, and children to respond and recover.
- The impact of climate induced shocks and associated closure of schools, full or partial destruction of school infrastructure and learning materials have a devastating impact on children's learning, with evidence confirming a strong correlation between high climate risks and poor learning outcomes.
- El Nino effects contributes to children's vulnerability to drop out of school as families adopt negative coping mechanisms and strategies that often directly or indirectly affect children, especially when families are faced with difficult decisions to survive. Drought, floods, livelihood- and food insecurity as well as displacement leads to reduced access to education, which in turn, leaves children more vulnerable to child labour, child marriage, food and water insecurity, and recruitment into armed groups. The impacts on children are gendered, with girls and boys facing different risks.
- The currently promoted Home Grown School Feeding, that benefits from the interaction with local food system for regular provision of a range of diverse foods is likely to be interrupted and may results to increased cost of operations. This may affect the quality of meals consumed in school feeding or with the increase in cost may results in reducing the numbers served, leading to non-achievement of the nutritional goal of school feeding.
- Country evidence confirms that once children drop out of school, there is a high risk of not returning altogether, which has detrimental, lifelong, intergenerational consequences on health, socioeconomic wellbeing, and poverty.
- Schools serve as platforms for multi-sectoral interventions that can meet different needs of children in a holistic way, thereby maximising the impact on multiple child outcomes: from education to protection, food (school feeding) and nutrition, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and health, including mental health. For many children, schools offer the only nutritious meal of the day.
- Strengthening the resilience and shock responsiveness of education systems and schools to keep children learning during and after crises hit, whilst continuing to offer all other school-based services, is a critical step to supporting children - especially the most vulnerable – to stay in school. Once children have dropped out, opportunities to access the same services are a vital pull factor to get children back to school. When this is not possible, multiple alternative pathways to continue learning must be offered.

## 7. SOCIAL AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE COMMUNICATION (SBC)

- Tailored Forecasting and Action Plans: Provide hyperlocal forecasting information early to enable communities to take appropriate actions. Local practices and consultation with affected populations should inform adaptation and protection measures.
- Targeted Communication Strategies: Understand diverse community information needs and preferences, employing a multi-channel communication approach. Train field staff to interpret technical forecasts and engage local journalists and media for public awareness.
- Community Engagement and Feedback: Conduct vulnerability assessments and rapid assessments to understand barriers to action. Establish two-way communication systems to incorporate community insights into decision-making and engage formal and informal networks for information dissemination and credibility-building.

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