

INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE
IASC WEEKLY MEETING

Summary Note

16 January 2008
Geneva

I Briefing on the Southern African Floods

Mr. Alfred Nabeta (Humanitarian Affairs Officer, OCHA/GCMS) and Mr. John Roche (Operations Coordinator for Africa, Coordination & Programmes Division, IFRC) briefed participants on the floods in Southern Africa. Heavy rains have hit the Zambezi river basin since December 2007. The rains started earlier than usual and have caused localised flooding in Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe. So far, 63,000 persons have been displaced in the region, but figures are likely to change while assessments are ongoing and heavy rains continue. (For updated figures, please compare the situation reports issued by the respective country teams.)

Mozambique has been most severely affected. About 57,000 persons have been displaced, two killed, 1,000 houses destroyed and 37,000 hectares of arable land washed away. The Government has declared a red alert and has evacuated 30,000 persons. The Government of Zambia, where 800 people have been affected, has put 34 out of the country's 72 districts on red alert. So far, assessments have revealed that damage to infrastructure includes washed away bridges and some roads will need substantial repair. In Zimbabwe, heavy rains have continued since December 2007 and the resulting floods have affected 10,300 persons. The Chipinge region is most affected and humanitarian interventions will be needed. There are concerns about possible increase in waterborne diseases such as cholera and malaria. The situation is likely to be aggravated by continuing heavy rains, which have also affected Malawi and Madagascar, albeit with limited damages so far. There is no official confirmation on estimated damages to 176 houses in Malawi at this point, and impact on crops has remained limited. Madagascar was affected by the tropical storm Elnus in December 2007, displacing 90 households in the Antananarivo area, but people are now able to return. Rains have also come to hitherto drought stricken areas, such as Botswana and parts of Madagascar.

The humanitarian response has benefited from a higher level of preparedness following contingency planning efforts organised by the OCHA regional Office. OCHA has deployed humanitarian affairs officers to both Mozambique and Zambia and IFRC has a network of 500 volunteers. Information management capacity may need to be enhanced to support the region's response. The situation is especially precarious for vulnerable populations, which had already been affected by floods a year ago and are susceptible to further displacement and destruction of their livelihood. Regarding Zimbabwe, one of the main concerns is that the current floods are added to existing humanitarian situation. The flooding is still very localized and response is well underway led by Governments and supported by humanitarian actors. However, the situation requires continued attention.

The IFRC has issued grants of a total of 1,191,281 CHF from the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) in December 2007 and January 2008 covering the affecting region. The organisation is currently providing clean water, sanitation, food and non-food items to 3,380 households

and providing technical and capacity building. Furthermore, a preliminary appeal to address the needs of 20,000 households is being drafted. OCHA is assisting in the preparation of a regional appeal, which is to be launched within the next two weeks. The decision to go ahead with a regional appeal has allowed for the inclusion of countries that may subsequently be affected, such as Namibia and Angola. The appeal is set to cover a period of six months and will mainly focus on preparedness and response. There may be discussion on including recovery programmes and protection issues. With respect to the response in Mozambique, it was pointed out that the Government is in charge of the overall response and has activated the National Emergency Operation Centres. The Humanitarian Country Team is supporting this effort. Current response initiatives are centred on evacuating populations from low-lying areas. As a continuation of the response to the floods a year ago, the cluster approach has been active and nine clusters are operational. UNICEF has requested \$2.4 million to meet immediate and medium-term needs and a CERF proposal is under preparation by the Humanitarian Country Team.

As regards expected challenges, the presenters identified (i) the damaged infrastructure, which restricts access in some areas, (ii) the early start of the rain season and a likelihood for the situation to get worse, (iii) the present response relying on in-country resources, which may be difficult to sustain if the situation worsens, and (iv) the preparation of a regional appeal which involves a broad spectrum of stakeholders in the respective affected countries.

The matter of inclusion of HIV/AIDS issues in the response to the floods was drawn to participants' attention and it was pointed out that these crosscutting issues are considered. There is a good overview of the affected communities, but there is a need to step up the response in order to ensure access of persons living with HIV/AIDS to drugs, hygiene facilities and basic health care. Participants also discussed the issue of climate change, and it was stressed that the increase in amounts of rain and changes in the pattern of weather phenomena will require adaptations of the humanitarian response in both timing and location.

II Briefing on the IASC Priorities for 2008

Ms. Marilena Viviani (Chief, IASC Secretariat) gave a general briefing on the final draft of the IASC Priorities for 2008. Based on the discussions at the IASC Principals and the IASC Working Group Meetings in 2007, the 2008 Agenda consolidates the main issues that emerged during the recent IASC discussions into three overarching strategic themes, namely (i) Strengthening Humanitarian Response, (ii) Overarching Policy Issues, and (iii) Support to IASC Subsidiary Bodies and Retreat Follow Up.

Participants

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