The impacts of El Niño began in Asia-Pacific in mid-2015 and subsequently affected at least 11 countries in the region. Effects have generally comprised of extended dry spells or drought leading to water shortages, prolonged lean seasons and food shortages.

As well as creating a need for urgent humanitarian assistance including food, water, nutrition, livelihoods and protection interventions, El Niño has also increased vulnerabilities in countries with limited preparedness and response capacity, placing vulnerable groups, including women, girls, people living with disabilities and the elderly, at increased risk of violence, discrimination and exclusion from basic services.

The El Niño phenomenon has now ended and recent rainfalls have eased drought conditions in many of the affected countries in the region, however, humanitarian needs still persist with food shortages not expected to peak in many areas until the end of the year. Additionally there is a 50 per cent chance of a La Niña event beginning later in the year that would likely compound humanitarian needs in affected countries.

This overview highlights countries with on-going, coordinated humanitarian interventions as a result of El Niño as of July 2016.

$138 million requested by six countries* with El Niño-related response plans

The key challenges and recommendations are:

- The impact of El Niño remains varied across the region with on-going humanitarian need, particularly as a result of persistent food shortages, in many areas. The combination of consecutive failed harvests as a result of El Niño induced drought and the looming effects of La Niña, means urgent action is needed to curb a potential humanitarian crisis and prevent the erosion of development gains made over the last decade.

- La Niña may affect the same areas as those already impacted by El Niño but is typically associated with the opposite weather effects creating a risk of severe flooding and further damage to crops that could exacerbate food shortages. Currently there is a 50 per cent chance of a La Niña event beginning in October-November 2016. Extreme weather events, including wetter than usual climate conditions, have already been noted in the region.

- Given the potential for an increase in humanitarian need as a result of La Niña-related extreme weather events, efforts should be made to support governments to ensure readiness in case of a deterioration of the humanitarian situation. Experience from El Niño responses has shown that the humanitarian community must work to agree on a set of triggers for response, act promptly on early warning signs, and invest in early response and preparedness work.

- Donors should be encouraged to work with affected governments, humanitarian and development partners to review funding decisions based on existing and projected needs, early warning signs and forecasting, and consider expanding the flexibility of humanitarian financing to adapt to current and changing risks.

- The impacts of El Niño and La Niña risk reversing development progress by for example, increasing inequalities and exclusion from basic services. Mitigating future risks and impacts of extreme weather events in vulnerable communities can only be effectively ensured if there is closer coordination between humanitarian and development actors. Strengthening preparedness and response capacities, must therefore be coupled with longer-term investments by Governments, humanitarian and development partners, donors and other actors such as the private sector and scientific community - in partnership with vulnerable local communities - in resilience building, disaster risk reduction and development.

* Mongolia, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Marshall Islands, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam

Creation date: 15 July 2016 | Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP): www.unocha.org/roap ocharegion@un.org www.unocha.org/el-nino-asia-pacific Regional Office for the Pacific (ROP): www.unocha.org/rop ochapacific@un.org www.unocha.org/el-nino-pacific
ASIA-PACIFIC REGION: Overview of El Niño Responses - July 2016

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Affected Areas: Remote Western Province, high-altitude locations in Enga and Hela Provinces, and Milne Bay Province

- 226,000 people at risk of extreme food shortages
- 1.5 million people affected

Priority Needs

Funding Requested: US$37.6 million
Funding Received: US$14.5 million

Situation Overview

Increased rainfall since the start of 2016 has eased the drought in most parts of the country, however, severe food and water insecurity persists in remote, isolated and inaccessible areas where slow staple crop regrowth and poor soils have contributed to delayed recovery. An estimated 1.5 million people are food insecure, of which 226,000 are severely food insecure.

National and Provincial governments in PNG have led response efforts since September 2015 to address food assistance needs, and humanitarian partners have implemented complementary WASH, agricultural recovery, health, education, nutrition and food assistance activities. The response, underpinned by emergency food assistance and nutrition interventions, continues to progress despite resource constraints, with core sectors such as nutrition, agricultural and early recovery remaining underfunded. In addition, access to affected areas remains challenging due to the physical terrain and insecurity from tribal conflicts.

TIMOR-LESTE

Affected Areas: Lautem, Viqueque, Baucau, Covalima and Oecusse (SEZ)

- 120,000 people at risk
- 400,000 people affected

Priority Needs

Funding Requested: US$25 million
Funding Received: US$1.5 million

Situation Overview

El Niño severely delayed the start of the rainy season expected in November-December last year and disrupted the planting season for thousands of subsistence farmers. El Niño-induced drought continues to severely affect 120,000 people across the four most affected municipalities and the country’s Special Economic Zone (SEZ). The Government of Timor-Leste is coordinating the El Niño response in the country with humanitarian partners providing assistance in the areas of water, sanitation and hygiene; health and nutrition; food security and agricultural recovery; as well as disaster risk reduction in support of the Government.

Current ongoing interventions are targeting over 10,000 households in six municipalities, including in the worst affected areas. Given the increased frequency of erratic weather patterns and the impact of climate change, interventions of up to 12 months should focus on increasing resilience and early recovery, awareness raising and strengthening of local coping mechanisms. The HCT will continue assessing the impacts of and response to El Niño-induced drought.

VIETNAM

Affected Areas: Central Highlands, South Central and Mekong Delta regions

- 260,000 people in five provinces still in need of food assistance

Priority Needs

Funding Requested: US$48.5 million
Funding Received: US$16 million

Situation Overview

Acute drought and saltwater intrusion linked to El Niño has affected more than 2 million people in 18 provinces in South-Viet Nam since January 2016. During the peak of the drought more than 2 million people suffered from a lack of access to drinking water, an estimated 1.1 million people were in need of food assistance and an estimated 2 million people lost their income due to damages in the agricultural sector. Water-related diseases and cases of severe acute malnutrition have also increased.

To date, the Government has provided 9,900 tons of rice and approximately US$38.7 million for water-related services and cash support to affected households. Humanitarian partners mobilized more than $15.6 million primarily for life-saving WASH, nutrition, health and food security interventions in 15 provinces. Remaining needs are predominantly related to nutrition, cash and livelihood recovery, as well as water storage and purification and hygiene promotion while significant funding gaps remain for food security and livelihoods with only 11 per cent of required emergency funds being mobilized so far.

Rains have started in most of the affected provinces but are irregular and below average. Although, drought conditions were declared over by the Government in the Mekong Delta and Central Highlands at the end of June, they are still on-going in South-Central Viet Nam.