

# Alert

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## Malawi

# Looming food crisis in Malawi

Geneva, 20 July 2012

### **Brief description of the emergency and impact**

Malawi faces a food security crisis in the year 2012/2013 for a period between three and eight months due to several factors<sup>1</sup>, among them the poor onset of the rainy season in 2011, erratic rainfall and prolonged dry spells. This was exacerbated by the poor rainfall in all the districts of the country for about 20 days in the month of December 2011 (Met dept, 2011 reports) resulting in wilting of crops. Farmers were forced to re-plant their crops in January 2012 but in some districts, there was an outbreak of the army worm which affected the second crop. Floods also hit some districts of the southern region that include Nsanje, Chikwawa, Phalombe and Mulanje.

In its press release of 13 July 2012 the World Food Programme (WFP) reported that:

"The situation is very serious - our field staff have observed that households in parts of the country have harvested almost nothing," said WFP Country Director Abdoulaye Diop. "Our first priority will be to make sure that vulnerable people have enough food to sustain themselves through this lean season. At the same time, we must invest in more long-term solutions to build resilience and break the cycle of hunger."<sup>2</sup>

Results of a food security assessment exercise undertaken by the Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee (MVAC forecast – April 2012 to March 2013<sup>3</sup>) shows that an estimated total population of 1,630,007 will need food assistance in the 2012/2013 consumption season. Almost all the districts in southern Malawi have been affected with the food shortage, among them Balaka, Blantyre, Chikwawa, Machinga, Mangochi, Mulanje, Mwanza, Neno, Nsanje, Phalombe, Thyolo, and Zomba. Salima, Ntcheu and Dedza districts are the three districts heavily affected in the central region.

Prices of maize and other food commodities have already started escalating due to several reasons, among them fuel shortages which leads to high transportation costs, the low yield levels and the devaluation of the local currency in the month of May 2012 from Malawi Kwacha (MWK)168.00 to MWK250 per one United States dollar. In spite of this, income of most Malawians has not improved in line with the devaluation and the inflationary effects making it difficult for most Malawians to purchase

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<sup>1</sup> USAID FEWSNET Food Security Outlook report. May 2012 to March 2013. The Malawi Food Security Outlook.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.wfp.org/news/news-release/wfp-gears-food-relief-thousands-malawi>

<sup>3</sup> Govt. of Malawi/ MVAC report 2012. The Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee. National Food Security Forecast, April 2012 to March 2013. Bulletin No. 8, Volume 1

food and other household necessities. MVAC projects that the prices of maize (the main staple food crop in Malawi) will increase to a maximum of MWK100.00 per kg during the lean period of the season.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Why an ACT response is needed.**

ACT Malawi Forum members have been working in most of the affected districts for some time implementing both development and humanitarian response programmes. In order to save lives of those affected, reduce morbidity and mortality among children and ensure that development work in is minimally affected, there is need to respond to this crisis.

Christian Aid, one of the ACT members, set up a resilience programme for most of the districts that are now affected by the hunger crisis in 2011. Supported by the Royal Norwegian Embassy, through the Norwegian Church Aid in Malawi, a Malawi forum joint programme to address food insecurity was implemented in 2010 and 2011. Livestock and irrigation equipment was distributed to the communities. If no action is taken the communities will resort to negative coping mechanism such as selling household items, and livestock which are gains from projects mentioned in this paragraph.

There are also reports of cholera outbreak in some districts of the country. Chikhwawa, Nsanje and Thyolo districts have registered 358, 464 and 11 cases already<sup>5</sup>. This situation is likely to worsen with a food crisis scenario. The low rainfall yields also mean that there is likely to be insufficient safe and clean water for use by the communities. With such a situation, communities would resort to using water from unprotected sources, leading to a surge in water-borne diseases, cholera being one of them.

#### **National and international response**

The government of Malawi, in collaboration with the MVAC and United Nations (UN) agencies in Malawi are working on modalities of how best to respond to the food crisis. Several meetings have been held and contingency response clusters have been set. The UN World Food Programme has called for expression of interest from interested NGO's to register with it in readiness for the response. Other non-governmental organisations are carrying out nutritional surveys to assess the situation. A food security outlook forecast by FEWSNET Malawi (May 2012 to March 2013) in collaboration with USAID has so far been released highlighting that southern part of the Malawi are in phases three and four of the food insecurity stages.

It should be noted that the upcoming crisis is huge and the government of Malawi is calling for concerted efforts and collaboration to address the problem. A total of 75, 394.32 metric tonnes (MT) of maize equivalents will be required to respond to the crisis for eight months.

#### **ACT Alliance response**

The Malawi ACT Forum through one of its partners, CARD, and with support from DANIDA and ECHO, and through the Danish Church Aid, embarked on a food distribution response for the affected people in Nsanje district from March to June 2012 and a water and sanitation program from February to June 2012 respectively. These are however short – term responses and they are not sufficient for the looming crisis.

Meanwhile, the Malawi Forum Coordinator and other ACT members are actively attending stakeholder meetings to get updates on the country situation and the plans. Malawi ACT forum members, have also been collecting data on the food security situation in their respective areas of work .

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> . Ministry of Health and the government of Malawi humanitarian update. Issue no. 10/11-12

**Planned activities:**

Based on this forecast, the Malawi ACT forum intends to respond to the disaster through food distribution, recovery projects such as food security and nutrition, and sanitation and hygiene promotion. These interventions will be implemented in areas where ACT members are already working. Cross cutting issues such as advocacy, gender, and HIV and AIDs and psychosocial based activities will be central in the invention. The ACT Forum plans to respond to this emergency through an ACT appeal.

**Constraints:**

The Malawi Forum has capacity to respond to the looming crisis. The major constraint currently is lack of funding. However the Malawi ACT forums members are in the process of engaging possible funders to support the response.

**Any funding indication or pledge should be communicated to Jean-Daniel Birmele, Director of Finance ACT Alliance ([jbi@actalliance.org](mailto:jbi@actalliance.org))**

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