Food insecurity and floods affect almost 2 million people

In the first four months of this year, 34 disasters affected 1,894,496 people. Four countries in Central America are at risk of food insecurity, exacerbated by coffee rust. Rains caused floods and landslides in nine countries. Bolivia, which has been suffering from severe drought since 2013, was affected by seasonal rains that began in November 2013 and intensified in early 2014, affecting more than 315,000 people.

In early 2014, assessments and technical reports on the humanitarian impact of coffee rust were released. The number of people affected by food insecurity exceeds the number of people affected by floods, although emergencies for heavy rains represent 67 per cent of disasters for this quarter.

A report from the Centre for Research on Epidemiology of Disasters indicates that 315 disasters were recorded in 2013 worldwide, 64 of which occurred in the Americas. Mexico is the only country in the region in the top 10 for economic losses, with about $5.7 billion in losses from cold weather, hurricanes and a cholera outbreak. Globally, 95.4 million people were affected by disasters in 2013, of whom 3.6 million (3.8 per cent) were in Latin America and the Caribbean.

For the last quarter of 2013, the number of people affected by disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean increased by 37 per cent. Floods make up the majority of disaster events, but coffee rust has affected the most amount of people. Floods in Bolivia and the impact of coffee rust were the main events in this first period of 2014, both in resources and number of people affected. Source: National authorities’ reports, published on www.redhum.org.
BOLIVIA: The country faces one of the worst floods in its history. Trinidad is the most affected city.

More than five months of heavy rain have affected 315,000 people across the country, killed 42 and damaged 1,700 homes, mainly in Trinidad in Beni department. About 71,000 hectares of crops were destroyed and 125,000 cattle were killed. Authorities declared a national emergency at the end of January. By late March, river and water levels began to decrease, revealing the level of affectation and vulnerability in the region. National authorities are responding to the emergency and have only requested assistance in acquiring tents and installing camps for displaced people. The United Nations system and cooperation agencies responded to the request. The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) allocated $3.2 million, which allows the humanitarian community to complement camp-management activities in agriculture, food, health, protection, logistics, nutrition, shelter, and water, sanitation and hygiene.

In 2013, CERF allocated $2.4 million to assist people affected by drought. Since 2006, Bolivia has received nearly $17 million from CERF in response to natural disasters and $30 million in aid appeals. The Government allocated $27 million for infrastructure-recovery projects, which are expected to be completed by September 2014. It has invested another $6.5 million in immediate emergency response. The international humanitarian community mobilized about $7.6 million for response efforts.

Percentage of CERF allocation per cluster

Shelters & non-food items, 28%
Food, 27%
Water, sanitation and hygiene, 13%
Protection, 9%
Agriculture, 7%
Health, 4%
Education, 4%
Logistic, 3%
Nutrition, 3%

School tent set up by UNICEF in Gran Mamoré camp, installed by White Helmets and managed by the Comando Conjunto de Bolivia in Trinidad. UNICEF will provide supplies for this temporary school. Photo: Antonio Miranda/OCHA – Redhum.

The Government of Bolivia and the United Nations system mobilized 1,500 tents from the Panama-based deposit network of the UN and the International Federation of the Red Cross. UNDAC supported the OCHA team in Bolivia in coordination and information management.

1 Includes UN agencies, funds and programmes, ECHO, OXFAM, World Vision, Plan International, CARE, HelpAge International, Christian Aid, CRS, Government of Denmark, Hivos, Fondo de Conexión, BID, CAF, COSUDE, Red Cross Federation, Government of Italy, JICA, CARITAS, REPSOL, Bolivia Solidaria, Save the Children, AECID.
CHILE: Massive fire in Valparaiso affects 12,500 people

A fire that began in Valparaiso on 12 April destroyed 965.2 hectares, 28.2 of which were residential areas. Close to 12,500 people were affected and evacuated, 15 were killed and 2,900 houses were destroyed. Authorities set up 13 emergency shelters, which housed 913 people. The Government declared a state of disaster in Valparaiso and provided humanitarian assistance to affected people. Some 13,000 tons of debris were removed after the fire was controlled. OCHA supported Chilean authorities by deploying three experts to assist the local United Nations team with assessments. The National Emergency Office, the International Organization for Migration, the International Federation of the Red Cross and OCHA worked together to provide preparedness recommendations for the upcoming rainy season, which could affect areas recovering from the fire.

GUATEMALA: Low temperatures affect more than 8,000 people

Data from the National Coordinator for Disaster Reduction shows that since November of last year, 8,470 people sought shelter in eight temporary emergency shelters across the country during the period of low temperatures. Quetzaltenango department had the highest caseload, followed by Quiche and Huehuetenango. The shelters are part of the authorities’ cold-season programme. In Guatemala, temperatures drop to 0°C between November and March. This puts homeless people and people living in unsuitable infrastructures at risk.

CARIBBEAN: Epidemiological alert as chikungunya virus spreads

Since the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) released its report on the chikungunya virus in December 2013 and issued an epidemiological alert, 10 countries in the Caribbean have reported cases of the virus. The latest reports were in the Dominican Republic, where authorities registered 3,690 suspected cases. Haiti has reported 20 cases. The virus was registered for the first time in South America with the confirmation of a case in French Guiana. On 21 February, PAHO reported 140 confirmed cases, approximately 6,675 suspected cases, and a general increase in the number of cases and affected countries. Chikungunya is transmitted by the Aedes mosquito, especially Aedes aegypti (the dengue-transmitting mosquito) and Aedes albopictus. Symptoms usually appear after an incubation period of three to seven days. Chikungunya can cause severe, moderate and chronic illness. With the severe illness, symptoms usually appear abruptly and include high fever, headache and joint pain. For more information, visit: http://bit.ly/1iq4pF9
Coffee rust: No short-term improvement expected

A report from the Famine Early Warning Systems Network reveals that coffee rust has reached the epidemic proportions of 2012 and is affecting Central America, Mexico, Dominican Republic and Colombia. The current epidemic occurred due to atypical climate, bad agriculture practices and a continual decline in coffee prices, which reduces incentives for farmers to invest in the crop. About 2 million people depend on coffee production as their main source of income. Food insecurity risks have increased, and Government data suggests that about 1.4 million people are at risk, mainly in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.

Coffee rust affected almost 50 per cent of productive areas in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua in the 2012-2013 agriculture cycle. In the 2013-2014 cycle, between 25 and 74 per cent of planted areas were affected.

In countries where crops are vulnerable to climatic events, coffee rust is exacerbating the risk of food insecurity.

In mid-2013, four countries declared national emergencies (Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Dominican Republic). After the ministers of the Central American Agriculture Council approved an action plan for coffee rust, the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and key partners undertook a programme to assist Governments with food-insecurity assessments to better understand the scope of the emergency, the number of people affected and the geographic areas.

Experts consider that loss of production in the 2013-2014 season is not as severe as originally forecast. Expected losses for the season (which ended in February) were reassessed and estimated to be 6 per cent in Guatemala, 20 per cent in El Salvador, 15 per cent in Honduras and 20 per cent in Nicaragua. In Honduras, yields are expected to rise by 10 per cent compared with the last cycle, due to efforts to control coffee rust and the maturing of new plantations. However, production will be less than a typical year without coffee rust.

Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua export approximately 90 per cent of their annual production of Arabic coffee. Given the region’s dependence on this variety, producers are vulnerable to fluctuations in global prices, which have decreased by almost 60 per cent from its peak in April 2011. Small-scale producers in these countries have limited income sources other than coffee. Organizations in the region note that some farmers are abandoning coffee plantations or are considering replacing them with more economically viable crops.
WFP provided food aid to 53,000 families in 2013. Guatemala is most affected by coffee rust. The problem is worsened by drought cycles and seasonal famine, placing thousands of people at risk of food insecurity. WFP estimates that at least 61,000 families (about 305,000 people) suffer from severe or moderate food insecurity and need assistance. It will aid national authorities with humanitarian assistance for affected people—an operation that will cost about $20.4 million.

The region has a history of food insecurity. In 2010, the food crisis in Guatemala became critical as Tropical Storm Agatha hit the country and areas that were struggling from a prolonged drought. The international community responded with $8.1 million in funding.

Coffee rust is a fungus that forms on leaves. It causes the foliage to wither and stops the bean-producing cherries from growing. Rust also makes plants more vulnerable to other diseases.

**PERU: thousands of people affected by lack of rain in the north and floods in the south**

At the start of the year, heavy rains caused floods and overflowing rivers that affected more than 10,200 people and their livelihoods, mostly in Madre de Dios department. More than 5,000 people lost their homes, 780 hectares of crops were affected and 600 farm animals died. Regional authorities declared a state of emergency to expedite the response.

In contrast, the northern highland regions have been suffering from a lack of rain since November 2013 (Piura, Tumbes and Lambayeque departments). About 5,000 hectares of crops and 3,500 animals were lost in this period. Authorities declared an emergency and began mitigation activities to minimize the impact on people. The risk of animal losses has been reduced, but the impact on the agricultural period is still unknown.

**Seismic activity and preparedness measures increase**

Two earthquakes defined the first half of April. On 1 April, an 8.2-magnitude earthquake hit northern Chile, and between 10 and 11 April three earthquakes shook Nicaragua (two measuring 6.2\(^3\) and one 6.7). In Chile, the Ministry of Interior’s National Emergency Office reported that 21,813 people lost their homes due to the earthquake. Authorities responded to affected people’s needs. In Nicaragua, the series of earthquakes affected houses and infrastructure. About 24,000 people were affected and 2,950 houses were damaged. Scientists have confirmed the reactivation of the geological faults that caused the earthquake that destroyed Managua in 1972.

The International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG), created in 1991, is a global network of more than 80 countries and organizations that deal with urban search and rescue (USAR) of victims trapped under rubble. It also facilitates the coordination of field operations.

The strategy of INSARAG’s regional Latin America and Caribbean group is to help interested countries with real seismic threats and/or similar emergencies to strengthen their capacity for receiving regional and international cooperation. In the region, INSARAG has coordinated earthquake-simulation exercises for Mexico (2012) and Peru (2013), and it is planning a big simulation for Chile next year. These exercises test countries’ response capacities and the international community’s support in a major earthquake.

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3 There were two 6.2-magnitude earthquakes on 10 and 11 April. The 6.7-magnitude earthquake occurred on 11 April.
Latin America and Caribbean prepare for World Humanitarian Summit

In preparation for the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in Turkey, OCHA and REDLAC partners will carry out a regional consultation process. It will begin shortly and culminate during early 2015 within the framework of the VII Mechanisms for International Humanitarian Assistance meeting.

WHS will set a forward-looking agenda for humanitarian action to collectively address future humanitarian challenges related to natural hazards and conflicts. The aim is to build a more inclusive and diverse humanitarian system committed to humanitarian principles. Both the global and regional processes will gather inputs not only from the traditional humanitarian actors, but also from sectors such as academia, the private sector and civil-society organizations, and from affected people and communities. At the regional level, the process will be an opportunity to bring together key stakeholders, share best practices and seek innovative ways to make future humanitarian action more effective.

The summit will focus on four discussion themes that have been identified through consultations with Governments, humanitarian organizations, communities and other partners.

- **Humanitarian effectiveness**: current and future perspectives on effectiveness; accountability; implications for humanitarian funding; and transparency and performance monitoring, profitability and professionalism of humanitarian action.
- **Reducing vulnerability and managing risk**: identify ways to improve resilience to humanitarian crises, advancing efforts to reduce disaster risk.
- **Transformation through innovation**: analyse trends and challenges and identify recommendations on the role of innovation in humanitarian action; implement new products, processes and positions to address operational challenges.
- **Serving the needs of people in conflict**: strengthen the humanitarian system’s capacity to reach people with vital assistance and protection; prevent and respond to movement and meet the specific needs caused by violence in urban environments.

Please join the conversation by visiting the World Humanitarian Summit’s official website.
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN:
Humanitarian Overview – people affected (as of 15 April 2014)

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