



MEDIA RELEASE

Food insecurity continues to rise in Southern Africa - new SADC Report

Projection puts 41 million at risk

10 July 2019, Gaborone, Botswana - According to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) 2019 *Synthesis Report on the State of Food and Nutrition Security and Vulnerability in Southern Africa*, 41.2 million people in 13 countries are estimated to be food insecure in the 2019/20 year. Comparing the 11 Member States that provided data last year, food insecurity has increased by 28 percent and is 7.4 percent higher than it was during the severe El Niño- induced drought of 2016/17.

The Report was compiled by the SADC Regional Vulnerability Assessment and Analysis Programme from the 2019 assessments and analysis conducted by National Vulnerability Assessment Committees of Member States.

The countries with the most significant increase in food insecurity compared to last year are Zambia, with a 144 percent increase; Zimbabwe, with a 128 percent increase; Eswatini with a 90 percent increase; Mozambique, with an 85 percent increase; and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) with an 80 percent increase.

The Report warns that the most vulnerable households are expected to exhaust their 2019 crop harvest within zero to three months, compared to the average three to five months, resulting in significant food consumption gaps, especially during the coming lean season.

Speaking on behalf of the government of Namibia, the current Chair of SADC, I-Ben Natangwe Nashandi, The Executive Director of the Office of the Prime Minister said “the increasing food insecurity is a warning that Member States need to accelerate and scale up innovative approaches to strengthen the resilience of the population to climate-related disasters”.

Malnutrition, still a public health problem

As in previous years, the 2019 Report reveals again that the problem of chronic malnutrition in all its forms remains unacceptably high in the region. In 10 out of 16 Member States, stunting prevalence (low height for age) is above 30 percent - classified as very high. There are also pockets of high wasting (low weight for height) rates (above 10%) in the DRC (Greater Kasai, North Kivu, South Kivu, and Tanganyika provinces), Mozambique (Cabo Delgado Province), southern Angola (Cunene and Huila provinces) Madagascar (Atsimo Andrefana and Amosy regions). Wasting and stunting are associated with increased mortality.

The prevalence of childhood overweight in three Member States (Botswana, Seychelles, and South Africa) is 10 percent or higher, revealing an emerging problem.

Drivers of food insecurity, malnutrition, and vulnerability

The Report attributes the worsening food security, nutrition, and vulnerability situation to frequent and intense climate-related disasters, poor diets, economic hardships, pests and diseases, and conflict, among others.

Southern Africa remains extremely vulnerable to climate-related disasters, including droughts, cyclones, and floods. The nature and pattern of these disasters is increasing in frequency, intensity, and magnitude as a result of climate change. These recurrent shocks negatively affect livelihoods, agricultural production, and economies, and erode the population's 'ability to fully recover, leading to more fragility and vulnerability to subsequent disasters.

During the 2018/2019 rainfall season, drought affected central, southern and western parts of the region. Large parts of southern Angola, northern and southern Botswana, northern Namibia, north-western South Africa, southern and western Zambia, and north-western Zimbabwe received their lowest seasonal rainfall totals since at least 1981. Rains were delayed and erratic, resulting in reduced area planted, poor germination and wilting. The low rainfall resulted in reduced crop harvests and water levels; and poor pasture conditions. Because of general drought conditions experienced in most parts of the region, Botswana, Lesotho, and Namibia declared State of Drought Disaster and are implementing response plans.

In response to the recurrent climate-related disasters affecting the region, Mr. Duncan Samikwa, the SADC Secretariat's Senior Programme Officer, Food Security, and Agriculture, who spoke on behalf of the Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Director, said the Secretariat was strengthening the regional approaches to disaster preparedness and response within the framework of the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) .

"The Secretariat will continue implementing and strengthening the capacities of Member States in generating, disseminating and utilizing vulnerability, food security, and climate information products to ensure better preparedness and response to disasters," he said.

Mr. Samikwa added that the SADC Secretariat was developing a regional Resilience Strategy to provide a broad strategic framework towards the understanding and building of resilience in the region.

The *2019 Synthesis Report on the State of Food and Nutrition Security and Vulnerability in Southern Africa* notes that the minimum acceptable diet (MAD) - a measure of the quality of young children's diets, is very low in the region, with most Member States having MAD of less than 15 percent. This is attributed to the consumption of monotonous diets and lack of knowledge on appropriate feeding practices; uninformed behavioural patterns which are often influenced by culture; and caregivers' limited access to health and nutrition services.

Food insecurity and vulnerability in the region has further been compounded by prevailing negative economic factors, amid growing poverty and inequality. Southern Africa economy is projected to grow at a slower pace than other regions of the continent — at 2.2 percent in 2019 and 2.8 percent in 2020 (Southern Africa Economic Outlook, 2019). At the core of this slow growth are the major headwinds of high inflation, increasing government debt, and slow growth in South Africa, which contributes about two-thirds of the region's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) but only grew one percent in 2018. In Zimbabwe, the volatile macroeconomic situation continues to deteriorate with increasing fuel prices, staple food prices, and foreign exchange shortages further weakening household access to food and other basic needs. Food prices in Lesotho, have been increasing since January due to the anticipated poor harvest in South Africa.

Crop pests, particularly the Fall Armyworm, continued to affect crop production across the region. The level of impact varies between countries depending on the levels of farmer awareness and capacity to manage the pest. The Report also notes that a new strain of Foot and Mouth Disease has broken out in Zambia, potentially threatening the livestock industry in the region.

The Report further notes that conflict is driving acute food insecurity in the DRC and northern Mozambique.

Recommendations

The *2019 Synthesis Report on the State of Food and Nutrition Security and Vulnerability in Southern Africa* recommends that national governments and development partners assist the food insecure populations with food and cash-based transfers and scale up shock-responsive social safety nets programs to protect the vulnerable from recurrent severe climate-related shocks.

It also calls for greater efforts to build the resilience of the population against recurrent climate-related disasters, including creating employment in rural areas, and promoting conservation agriculture.

To improve nutrition outcomes, the Report recommends that member States and development partners implement high-impact nutrition interventions and step up efforts to encourage the consumption of variety and quantity of micronutrient-rich foods.

It also calls for the rehabilitation and establishment of community watering points for livestock and crops in the areas affected by drought.

The Report further calls on Member States to monitor and respond to transboundary pests and diseases, particularly the fall armyworm, that continue to affect agricultural production in the region.

Methodology

The “Synthesis Report on the State of Food and Nutrition Security and Vulnerability” is released annually by the SADC Secretariat and provides estimates of the number and proportion of food and nutrition insecure and vulnerable people in the region. It clarifies the main factors driving food and nutrition insecurity and vulnerability in each country and provides short, medium, and long-term recommendations.

The SADC Regional Vulnerability Assessment and Analysis (RVAA) Programme coordinates and supports the Members States to undertake annual vulnerability assessments and analysis and synthesizes the results to provide a regional outlook on food and nutrition insecurity and vulnerability. The 2017 – 2021 phase of the RVAA Programme is funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented with technical support from the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) Regional Bureau for Southern Africa and Landell Mills.

About SADC

SADC is an organization of 16 Member States established in 1980. The Mission of SADC is to promote sustainable and equitable economic growth and socio-economic development through efficient, productive systems, deeper cooperation, and integration, good governance, and durable peace and security; so that the region emerges as a competitive and effective player in international relations and the world economy.

Media contacts:

Rachel Nandelenga, Communication and Advocacy Officer, SADC RVAA Programme +26776756993| rmandelenga@sadc.int