



© FAO/Madagascar

- Late rains, extended dry periods, two major cyclones and economic challenges have proved a recipe for disaster for food security and livelihoods across Southern Africa.
- Currently, 9.3 million people are severely food insecure in the nine most affected countries – a figure that could rise to over 12 million at the peak of the lean season (October 2019–March 2020) without immediate intervention.
- The severe impact of the 2018/19 drought on affected households and communities is such that two to three production seasons will be required for normal production capacity to be restored.

## Climatic shocks and stressors put livelihoods and food security at risk across Southern Africa

The devastating drought in Southern Africa has seriously eroded the capacity of affected farming households and communities to produce in the 2019/20 season, which has already started in some countries. There is urgent need to scale up systematic recovery support and invest in resilience building initiatives to address the root causes of rising needs in the region. Without this, food security and nutrition gains made over the past years could rapidly be reversed, requiring even more costly humanitarian actions in the years to come. In the 2018/2019 agricultural season, countries such as Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe saw their lowest rainfall for nearly 40 years and declared national drought emergencies. Since 2012, the region has only seen two favourable agriculture seasons, with many areas yet to fully recover from the devastating impact of the 2015/16 El Niño event.

Poor harvests due to drought and plant pests and diseases led to production deficits throughout the region. The first half of 2019 also saw tumultuous weather patterns, with the situation taking a dramatic turn for the worse when tropical cyclones Idai and Kenneth made landfall in the Comoros, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, affecting more than 3.5 million people and destroying swaths of crops just before the main harvest. The greatest deficits were seen in Botswana and Namibia, with outputs estimated to have fallen by 50 percent on a yearly basis, and Zimbabwe where the maize harvest was around 40 percent lower than the five-year average. Cereal production is estimated to be about 7 percent below 2018 levels, which were already below the five year regional average. Livestock have also been impacted by limited water availability and increases in transboundary animal diseases, particularly foot and mouth disease.

Based on forecasts, the 2019/20 season is expected to receive good rains for the bulk of Southern Africa, offering opportunities for good production and restoring agriculture-based livelihoods. Despite this, in some areas pan baked soils will increase rainfall water runoff. Localized flash floods that could affect crops and livestock can therefore be anticipated.



to assist

**12.4 million people**



FAO requires

**USD 107.75 million**



period

**October 2019–  
June 2020**



over **41 million people**

food insecure in 13 out of 16  
Southern African Development  
Community member states

### Nine most affected countries:

- Angola
- Mozambique
- Eswatini
- Namibia
- Lesotho
- Zambia
- Madagascar
- Zimbabwe
- Malawi

## Emergency Response Plan 2019-2020

The Southern Africa Emergency Response Plan was launched in October 2019 to protect and restore agricultural production, incomes and assets in the immediate and medium term, while enhancing nutritious and diversified diets for the most vulnerable farming and pastoral households facing climate extremes in the countries at highest risk. In partnership with all Governments of concern, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) aims to scale up the level of current response prior to, during and after the main agricultural season in order to cover increased needs of the food and nutrition-insecure populations affected by climatic shocks and stressors.

### Response to date

Acting early is crucial to reverse the rise in food insecurity ahead of the peak of the lean season, targeting the most vulnerable farmers and pastoralists. Under an Early Warning Early Action window, FAO geared up to respond to the devastating consequences of climate crises such as drought from December 2018 to September 2019 - the critical window of opportunity for mitigation before the first effects on food security were felt. Internal funding attuned to USD 2 million was triggered for early action in addition to resources mobilized through the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) at country level. Agricultural emergency response was thus kick-started by early 2019 in the priority countries of Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. This enabled tens of thousands of beneficiary households to maintain their food stocks by boosting production of winter season crops, including vegetables, and are now in a better position to prepare for the main agricultural season.



Provided inputs such as seeds and tools before the planting season (October 2019–February 2020) to reduce household food gaps, restore food production capacities and diversify diets



Provided supplementary feed and nutrient supplements to safeguard pastoral and agropastoral livelihoods



Established and rehabilitated community watering points and identified perennial water sources to enhance access to and availability of water for livestock and agricultural use

FAO is working with regional institutions, governments and UN and NGO partners to support a transition from post-crisis reaction to Early Warning Early Action for resilience.

## Emergency Response Plan 2019-2020 outputs



**Output 1. Reduce food gaps, restore production and diversify diets**

► **USD 60.2 million** needed to assist **1 081 240 households**



**Output 2. Safeguard pastoral and agropastoral livelihoods**

► **USD 29.5 million** needed to assist **570 000 households**



**Output 3. Enhance availability of and access to water resources for agricultural use**

► **USD 10.95 million** needed to assist **405 000 households**



**Output 4. Improve preparedness and response through food security and nutrition information, analysis and coordination**

► **USD 7.1 million** needed to assist beneficiary and humanitarian communities

The time to scale up agricultural emergency response is now. Ensuring farmers and agropastoralists take advantage of good rainfall performance is crucial in helping them rebuild their livelihoods.

## Contact

FAO Subregional Office for Southern Africa  
Harare, Zimbabwe | [FAO-SFS@fao.org](mailto:FAO-SFS@fao.org)

FAO Emergency and Resilience Division  
Rome, Italy | [PSE-Director@fao.org](mailto:PSE-Director@fao.org)

Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations  
[www.fao.org/emergencies](http://www.fao.org/emergencies)



Some rights reserved. This work is available under a [CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/) licence