

RD SPEECH TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD MAY 2015

Looming food insecurity

Mr. President, Esteemed members of the Board;

As we near the mid-point of the year – summer for you here, winter for those of us who live in the southern hemisphere – it is apparent that much of southern Africa is facing one of its worst food security crisis in several years.

In fact, the warning signs have been there for some time. As I said in my last address to this Board in February, extreme weather events in our region were even then pointing to reduced crop production and higher levels of food insecurity than last year.

At the beginning of this month, the Southern Africa Food and Nutrition Security Working Group confirmed that the outlook is indeed very serious. The group - which comprises WFP, FAO, FEWSNET, OXFAM, WVI and the Southern African Development Community among others -

warns of “significant food supply challenges” much earlier than normal this year.

Reduced harvest

The main cause of the looming food crisis has been erratic and poorly distributed rains that led to reduced harvests in April in many countries. The southern African maize harvest is expected to shrink by about a quarter compared to last year. The early maize production forecast stands at about 21 million tons. This puts it 15 percent lower than the five-year average and significantly below last year’s bumper crop.

Chronology

MAP 1

This is how the situation unfolded. As you can see from the map, there was a poor start to the growing season with rains generally late to arrive in the final months of last year. The dark brown areas received only one-third or less of average rainfall for that time of year.

MAP 2

Then, in the latter part of December and early January, very heavy persistent rainfall over parts of Malawi, Mozambique and Madagascar caused severe flooding in those countries. In all, more than a million people were affected and huge areas of cropland were devastated.

MAP 3

Most of the region, however, experienced below-average rainfall. The light-yellowish shaded parts of this map show areas that received half of the usual amount of rain while the brownish parts show areas which received only a third of the normal rainfall in January. Particularly badly affected by drought in January and February – a crucial period for the growing of maize – were southern Mozambique and southern Zimbabwe and the eastern part of South Africa. Botswana, Namibia and southern Angola were also badly affected.

Map 4

Pronounced drier-than-average conditions continued into March across much of the region. Particularly affected at this time were parts of Angola, Namibia, Botswana, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In

southern Madagascar, the dry spell became a fully-fledged drought, the worst there in years.

Map 5

Then, in late March, rains finally started to fall. The turquoise (or greenish) and dark blue-shaded areas show where above-average rain fell. But it was a case of too little, too late, and it provided limited or no relief for crops, particularly maize.

Food prices

Maize prices so far have remained relatively low throughout southern Africa due to remaining supplies resulting from last year's surplus. However, as supplies dwindle, food prices are set to rise. In fact, in the flood and drought affected areas of Zimbabwe, Malawi, Madagascar, and Mozambique, we can already see an upward trend in prices.

Imports

Large volumes of maize imports are forecast in Zimbabwe this year and in the deficit-producing countries of Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland. Most of the regional needs are expected to be imported from South Africa and Zambia.

Numbers affected

May-June is when the various food security assessments are finalised in our region, with the numbers of people facing hunger determined as the final results are released in coming weeks.

Map 6

As you can see in this map, all countries in the region have been affected to some degree. What is emerging is that the three worst-affected countries - in terms of scale - are Zimbabwe, Malawi and Madagascar.

Zimbabwe

At least a half of Zimbabwe's farming land has failed to produce crops, prompting what the Food and Nutrition Security Working Group is calling "a potential huge food deficit".

Many poor households in the south are reported to have exhausted cereals from the previous harvest and are relying mainly on market purchases. Maize grain prices will likely start rising from July.

Nearly all crops in the south-east are reported to have been written off. Some farmers have already begun distress sales of livestock.

Based on similar conditions in the last decade, it is possible that up to 2.5 million people could be food insecure at the peak of the lean season (Dec/Jan).

Malawi

The floods which hit southern Malawi in January were the worst in more than 20 years. A March food security report released says more than 600,000 flood victims will need food assistance through to July. The flooding devastated huge areas of farmland which combined with the subsequent prolonged dry spells, means Malawi will suffer an estimated 28 percent reduction in crop output this year. Over the last three years, an average 1.6 million Malawians required emergency food during the lean season, despite good harvests. While awaiting final assessments, we expect even more serious food insecurity this year, with need for an earlier - and much longer - intervention.

Madagascar

The situation is also precarious in southern Madagascar which has been hit by the worst drought in six years. A food security cluster assessment conducted in February concluded that about 80 percent of the surveyed

population in the south is in moderate food insecurity - with about half in severe food insecurity. We are already assisting 222,000 people and fresh assessments now indicate that this number will rise to 600,000 in the three southern regions as of August. Even for this vulnerable region, the levels recorded are exceptionally high for this time of year. The situation is very worrisome, combined with the continued political turbulence over the country's leadership.

Lean Season Response

As always, and with your support, WFP will be there to step in to provide food assistance to those who are most vulnerable during the lean season – which starts in November and lasts until March. This year, however, it is starting earlier in the three countries I have been talking about. And, consequently, we will begin our response as early as September, using both food and cash.

Cash and vouchers

In line with corporate commitments to use cash and vouchers to complement food in addressing the needs of the vulnerable, our RB has been developing a unique regional service platform to save time, money and to streamline processes. Where market conditions and available

funding allow, such as in Malawi etc. we are committed to deploying cash and vouchers to the extent possible.

Resilience

The erratic rains that have plagued the region may not have the immediate impact of sudden onset disasters like this year's flooding in Malawi and Mozambique, or that of earthquakes or armed conflict, but they can still have a devastating effect on households, especially those who depend on subsistence agriculture for their livelihoods. We are committed to working with other actors to link emergency response to early recovery and resilience building, integrating activities with longer-term development goals to bolster against future shocks.

Cash-and Food- Assistance-for-Assets

For example, in several districts of Zimbabwe and in Southern Madagascar, 250,000 people are benefiting from either food or cash while working on community projects such as irrigation and water harvesting schemes, to create assets that help earn income while building resilience to unpredictable weather events.

Malawi is a good example where flood victims, most of whom have already returned to their home areas, are now rebuilding their lives. While WFP

provides cash or food, other partners are offering items such as shelter material, tools and seeds to support the rebuilding of homes and the clearing, planting and irrigation of fields.

Namibia

Like many countries across the region, Namibia has suffered from extremely poor rainfall this year with particularly prolonged dry spells in most parts of the country. The national crop production is estimated at about one-third below the five-year average.

In Namibia WFP's approach is different. We have a solid partnership linked to WFP technical expertise and capacity building backed by Government funding. For example, the joint investment made in food security monitoring systems will strengthen the Government's capacity to respond to its unfolding emergency food needs. I am hopeful that soon we would be able to support the Government of Angola through a similar type of engagement.

MAP OFF SCREEN

Cost of Hunger

An important tool helping countries understand and assess the burden of hunger and malnutrition on their economies is the Cost of Hunger in

Africa, a ground-breaking series of studies conducted so far in six countries. Undertaken by the African Union, the UN Economic Commission for Africa, WFP and national governments, the studies estimate the economic and social cost of child under-nutrition on a country's GDP.

The latest to have benefited from this exercise is Malawi which launched its own Cost of Hunger report earlier this month together with the Minister of Finance, who asked his government departments to propose solutions after learning that a shocking US \$ 600 million - more than 10 percent of the country's GDP - is lost every year because of child under-nutrition in Malawi.

Burundi

Unrest in Burundi has already caused tens of thousands of people to flee to neighbouring countries. Most refugees have fled into Tanzania with many thousands more having also crossed into the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda. With HCR and other agencies, we have made contingency plans for 70,000 refugees in Tanzania and 30,000 in DRC over the next six months.

People crossing the border into Tanzania have been receiving ready-to-eat snacks of dates and high energy biscuits, and upon arriving in more established settlements, hot cooked meals and dry rations.

DRC

In the DRC, one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world, humanitarian needs continue to be acute, particularly in the east of the country where violence against civilians by more than 40 armed groups remains widespread. According to OCHA, more than 2.7 million people are currently displaced.

WFP is assisting more than 50,000 refugees from the Central African Republic in the DRC and thousands of refugees from Burundi in the east. Unfortunately, conflict, pre-2016 election tensions, and the potential drawdown of MONUSCO's peacekeeping force next year, may all conspire to keep DRC high on the world's humanitarian agenda.

Conclusion

Mr. President & Distinguished Members of the Board: WFP's battle to fight hunger and malnutrition on multiple fronts, and our efforts to meet the Zero Hunger Challenge in southern Africa, have gained added urgency this year. It is clear that we will have to significantly scale up our response

in coming months to address the growing needs, and I note with concern, that we are starting from a very low base of contributions for all countries of our region.

While responding to acute needs, we must keep a vigilant eye on the upcoming rainy season in October. Mr President, the lessons we have learned in Ethiopia during the last Horn of Africa drought, and also in the Sahel, demonstrate that resilience programming approach pays off with less people sliding into destitution when shocks hit.

I am hopeful that you will stand with us during the response this year so that next time the rains fail, which we all know will happen, less people will require our help. We can't and won't walk this path alone. The success to overcoming the challenges ahead will be a collective effort - strong partnership amongst us all, and with deep common purpose - true to the South African expression of "Ubuntu and human generosity – I am because you are".

Mr President, Thank You.