

## Southern Africa is on the grip of a severe drought.

**Nairobi, Kenya, 20 May 2024** - The United Nations (UN) and its humanitarian partners today urged for solidarity with drought-affected people in Southern Africa and called on the international community to help ramp up a timely emergency response to drought in the region. More than 61 million people in Southern Africa have been affected by drought and other extreme weather conditions caused by El Niño and worsened by the climate crisis, including the most intense mid-season dry spell in over 100 years.

The region is on the grip of a severe drought with possible catastrophic consequences unless urgent action is taken to avert further deterioration before the lean season in July. The UN and partners issued the call after the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Extraordinary Summit held on 20 May in Luanda, Angola to launch the SADC Humanitarian Appeal. The SADC plan is seeking \$5.5 billion to assist more than 56.6 million people with urgent multi-sector humanitarian assistance, including 3.5 million children in need of nutrition assistance.

The areas worst affected by the drought include most of Zambia, Zimbabwe, southern Malawi, northern Namibia, south-eastern Angola, much of Botswana, Lesotho, central Mozambique, central South Africa, and parts of Madagascar where crop production, livestock and water supplies were impacted. Of these, three countries in the region, i.e., Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, have declared the drought a national disaster with more countries likely to follow suit. Heavy rains due to torrential rains and tropical storms/cyclones have also caused flooding in Madagascar, Mozambique, Malawi, and Zambia displacing thousands of people, with Madagascar declaring a national disaster due to Tropical Storm Gamane in March 2024.

The upcoming lean season could lead to a significant rise in food insecurity and high levels of acute malnutrition, while water scarcity is affecting people, livestock, and wildlife. Women and children face exacerbated risks of discrimination, violence, abuse, and exploitation. Drought, floods, livelihood- and food insecurity as well as displacement may lead to reduced access to education and school drop-outs, leaving children more vulnerable. The severe drought is also unfolding at a time when the region is grappling with one of the worst cholera outbreaks in decades, food prices are significantly rising in many drought-affected areas and HIV and gender-based violence remain important challenges.

“This drought is hitting communities already enduring consecutive climate and economic crises,” said Reena Ghelani, the United Nations Climate Crisis Coordinator for the El Niño/La Niña response. “Time is of the essence. Unless the response is urgently scaled up, millions of people in the region will face worsening levels of acute food insecurity, malnutrition, water scarcity and various health risks. There is a short window of opportunity to intervene in advance of the lean season in July.”

The launch of the SADC Humanitarian Appeal demonstrates leadership by Member States as it reinforces their commitment to effectively respond to shocks and protect affected population and mobilize resources for a timely response. Humanitarian partners are supporting government-led efforts, including through national Flash Appeals. However, an immediate scale-up of the response is urgently required to avert large-scale loss of life in the period ahead.

Humanitarian partners are calling on donors to help save lives and protect livelihoods, while enabling communities to build resilience against future shocks. Key priorities include food assistance, safe water for people and animals, and agriculture inputs to capitalize on the improved rainfall likely to be brought about by the forecasted La Niña phenomenon.

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*This statement is issued on behalf of the Regional Interagency Standing Committee (RIASCO). RIASCO is a regional inter-agency humanitarian coordination forum for Southern Africa and works with SADC and its member states to strengthen humanitarian coordination for effective disaster risk management. It also complements the SADC's role in its regional coordination with member states.*

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