

Madagascar receives emergency food aid

ANTANANARIVO, Madagascar - As a third consecutive year of drought deepens the suffering of hundreds of thousands of people in the south of Madagascar, the World Food Programme (WFP) is scaling up its humanitarian operations in response to rising levels of hunger and malnutrition.



The preliminary results of a multi-agency food security assessment, due to be released shortly, indicate that four out of nine southern districts are likely to fall into the “emergency” classification by year’s end. Unless swift action is taken, three more districts could follow.

“The situation is extremely worrying,” WFP executive director Ertharin Cousin said as she concluded a visit to the island nation. “The hunger and malnutrition we’re seeing is the result of three years of ruined harvests. We must receive the necessary funding to respond before it’s too late. This funding will also allow us to invest in people’s livelihoods, so we don’t just save lives but change lives and break the cycle of emergency response.”

The south of Madagascar has been hard hit by this year’s El Niño, which resulted in reduced rains for southern Africa. To escape this misery, one household in three, in the south of the island, has already been forced into desperate measures such as begging, selling its land or house, or migrating. Four in 10 households have already eaten their vital seed stocks, leaving nothing for the November/December planting season.

“I met women who told me they had nothing to feed their babies except the fruit of the red cactus growing by the roadside,”

said Cousin after her visit to Tsihombe district, where nearly all households are food insecure, 80% of them severely so. “It’s vital in these situations that we and our partners ensure that no child goes hungry and that every child gets the nutrition he or she needs.”

With adequate funding and in support of the Madagascar government’s own humanitarian response, WFP will scale up from November to reach as many as one million people with food and cash assistance. WFP is also expanding its programme to prevent and treat acute malnutrition among over 200,000 pregnant and nursing women, and children under five.

Starting this month, in support of the upcoming planting season, WFP will provide food to vulnerable communities, complementing the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) which will supply tools and drought-resistant seeds.

WFP currently provides a daily hot meal to some 230,000 primary school children – 42% of primary school students in the south. For most of these children, the school meal is the only nutritious meal they receive in a day. To ensure children receive nutrition and the education they deserve, WFP aligns its programme with education actors. Starting in early 2017, WFP – alongside the Government of Madagascar, UNICEF, the World Bank and other partners – is planning to reach even more children with its school meals programme.

WFP requires US\$92 million for this humanitarian response in the south of Madagascar from now until March of next year. It currently faces a shortfall of US\$78.5 million.

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