



# Regional Snapshot

## SOUTHERN AFRICA

Fiscal Year (FY) 2016

The 2015/2016 El Niño climatic event—one of the strongest on record—triggered severe drought throughout much of Southern Africa,<sup>1</sup> deteriorating agriculture, food security, livestock, nutrition, and water conditions. Recent USAID Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) disaster response activities in the region have focused on providing seeds and other agricultural inputs, facilitating access to water, addressing malnutrition, and restoring livelihoods to support vulnerable populations' transition away from emergency food assistance following the next harvest. USAID/OFDA maintains a presence in Pretoria, South Africa, with humanitarian advisors deployed throughout the region to support country-level responses as needed.

### Recent Humanitarian Events in the Region

- The regional drought triggered by the 2015/2016 El Niño was the worst in 35 years; drought conditions affected 40 million people in Southern Africa, with an estimated 18.3 million individuals in need of emergency relief assistance, according to the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). The USAID-funded Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) reported that although the main harvest season in Southern Africa typically extends until July, most households in the region had concluded harvests by June due to diminished crop size or crop failure in 2016. Authorities estimated a regional cereal deficit of 6–10 million metric tons.
- Countries in Southern Africa also reported more than 600,000 drought-related livestock deaths, severely curtailing pastoral populations' ability to maintain livelihoods and cope with future shocks.
- The devaluation of regional currencies throughout the region and increased staple food prices further exacerbated the needs of chronically vulnerable people in the region. Additional factors—such as increasing insecurity and displacement in Mozambique and civil unrest in Zimbabwe—also compounded humanitarian needs among some populations during FY 2016.
- In July, SADC formally launched a regional humanitarian appeal, accompanied by a regional disaster declaration. The appeal requested nearly \$2.4 billion to address critical needs—with a focus on requirements for food and nutrition assistance and livelihoods support—for drought-affected households in the region. The UN Regional Interagency Steering Committee for Southern Africa launched a complementary response plan, requesting \$1.2 billion for priority needs in Angola, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe.
- In FY 2016, USAID/OFDA responded to six drought disasters in the Southern Africa region, facilitating humanitarian response activities in Lesotho, Malawi, Madagascar, Mozambique, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe.

<sup>1</sup> The Southern Africa region includes Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

## USAID/OFDA Priorities for 2017

- USAID/OFDA will continue to respond to humanitarian needs resulting from the El Niño-related drought in Southern Africa.
- USAID/OFDA will monitor ongoing response programs, particularly seed interventions, to ensure activities address the most urgent needs, particularly during the October 2016–January 2017 lean season when food insecurity levels will likely peak. FEWS NET anticipates that food insecurity among vulnerable households in areas of Malawi, Zimbabwe, and southern Madagascar may deteriorate from Crisis—IPC 3—to Emergency—IPC 4—levels during the lean season.<sup>2</sup>
- USAID/OFDA will coordinate with regional stakeholders to assess the situation and level of need following 2017 harvests and plan response efforts accordingly. In addition, USAID/OFDA will support resilient livelihood restoration and other early recovery interventions in the region to mitigate the impacts of future shocks.
- To facilitate a strong, coherent regional response, USAID/OFDA will continue supporting humanitarian coordination and information management among humanitarian actors.
- USAID/OFDA will support screening and treatment of acute malnutrition for vulnerable populations.

## Challenges

- Climate shocks in Southern Africa often result in migration, increased reliance on external food aid, and negative coping strategies. Repeated shocks also erode communities' ability to fully recover, causing increased fragility and vulnerability to subsequent disasters.
- Unfavorable global economic conditions continue to affect countries in the region, resulting in a higher cost of living and lower economic growth. As a result, national governments may face challenges maintaining social safety nets and other subsidies for vulnerable populations.
- Ongoing tensions in some Southern African countries, such as Mozambique and Zimbabwe, may reduce government response capacity in the medium term, heightening vulnerability of disaster-prone populations.
- Inconsistent country-level data—due to differing levels of technical capacity and available resources—make it difficult to compare and prioritize country-specific needs within the context of a regional disaster response.

## Key Lessons Learned in 2016

- While resiliency programming in the region has strengthened coping capacity, severe disasters such as the El Niño-induced drought overwhelm even improved capacity and require emergency response efforts from the international humanitarian community. Complementarity between resilience actors and humanitarian assistance programs is essential.
- The most vulnerable communities lacked access to early warnings on El Niño conditions; investments in early warning and other preparedness initiatives should ensure that activities reach the most at-risk populations.
- Flexible staffing, through both long-term temporary staff and short-term rotations, is essential for a coherent and effective regional response. In FY 2016, USAID/OFDA maintained continuous coverage in Mozambique, strengthening in-country response and coordination efforts and supporting the Pretoria-based regional advisor.

<sup>2</sup> The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) is a standardized tool that aims to classify the severity and magnitude of food insecurity. The IPC scale, which is comparable across countries, ranges from Minimal—IPC 1—to Famine—IPC 5.