

Drought relief for Swaziland

NEW YORK, USA - The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) has started relief distributions of food assistance in Swaziland in response to rising hunger due to the worst drought in the region in more than two decades.



Image by 123RF

Some 350,000 people – nearly a third of the population of Swaziland – are in urgent need of food assistance, according to the Swaziland Vulnerability and Assessment Committee.

“Many rural communities are in the grip of hunger and this is set to continue until at least the harvest next April,” says Alberto Mendes, WFP country director in Swaziland. “We’re working with the Government and donors to mobilize assistance, but without more funding we will not be able to continue to assist those most in need.”

The first cycle of distributions by WFP and non-government partners has targeted 78,000 people in the worst-affected areas of the country in support of the National Disaster Management Agency.

WFP plans to reach 100,000 people in August and to scale up again to reach some 150,000 people by the height of the lean season in early 2017 through a combination of food and cash assistance. The Government has also committed substantial resources to assist those in need.

The Government declared a state of emergency in February and launched its National Emergency Response, Mitigation

and Adaptation Plan requiring almost US\$85 million, of which some US\$61 million has yet to be secured.

“The Government is aware of the needs created by the drought and appreciates the support by partners like WFP whose efforts complement those of the Government, especially in providing food assistance to those who need it the most. The Government has committed about US\$10 million for food relief,” says Russell Dlamini, the chief executive officer of the National Disaster Management Agency.

The United Nations has contributed \$2.8 million to food relief through its Central Emergency Response Fund. However, WFP still requires more than US\$10 million to scale up its operations to meet needs of the most vulnerable through the lean season into next year.

Swaziland is among the countries in the region hardest hit by two years of successive drought, most recently as a result of the El Niño weather event in southern Africa.

During the last agricultural season, many farmers in Swaziland planted not just once but twice, only to see their crops wither and die in the ground. Parents at WFP food distributions have reported going hungry themselves in order to feed their children.

Water sources have declined by more than 50% in Swaziland due to the lack of rain. Contributing to the hardship faced by many has been a jump in food costs – maize prices have more than doubled since last year.

In addition to supporting the National Disaster Management Agency, WFP is working with non-government organizations including World Vision International, Save the Children Fund, Caritas and Africa Co-operative Action Trust Lilima (Swaziland).

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