



MEDIA RELEASE

Climate variability accelerates food and nutrition insecurity in Southern Africa Food insecure population on the increase

09 July 2018, Gaborone, Botswana - The number of food insecure people in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region in the 2018/19 consumption year is 29 million people, representing 14 percent of the population, according to the “State of Food and Nutrition Insecurity and Vulnerability in Southern Africa” report. The report was compiled from results of the 2018 vulnerability assessments and analysis of 11 SADC Member States. The number of the food insecure population is 13 percent higher, compared to last year, 2017/8.

The increasing food insecure population reverses the improvement in 2017/18 when the number fell to 27 million from 38 million in 2016/2017.

Over the past ten years, the food insecure population in the region has remained above 22.7 million.

With increasing climate-induced shocks, there needs to be urgent action and sustained resilience building, or the food insecure population is likely to grow.

Stunting levels declining at a slow pace

The SADC region is off-track in reducing childhood stunting by 40 percent which is the World Health Assembly target by 2025. The proportion of stunted children is increasing in Angola, Botswana, DRC, Madagascar, Mozambique, Seychelles and South Africa. The DRC, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Zambia have a high prevalence of stunting above 40 percent. Stunted children are more likely to fall ill and develop poor cognitive skills and learning. Their labor productivity, employment potential, and socialization are also affected later in life.

The report highlights the critical need to increase the investment in high-impact interventions that address chronic food and nutrition insecurity. It is important for national governments and development partners to use this information to improve planning and design appropriate programmes to respond effectively to food and nutrition insecurity.

At a regional meeting in Maseru, Lesotho which discussed the impact of food insecurity on the regional population, representatives of Member States and development partners said it is important to focus on sustainable strategies that address chronic food and nutrition insecurity which has plagued the region.

“We need to employ new ways of working to address food and nutrition insecurity because it is a threat to the region. We must find a way out of this situation”, said Mr. Haretsebe Mahosi, the Chief Executive Officer, Disaster Management Authority of Lesotho.

Carry-over stock buttresses reduced cereal production

Based on the nine SADC Member States that provided cereal balance sheets for the 2018/19, the region is estimated to have a cereal surplus of 6,294,000 MT compared to 7,513,000 MT for the same countries the previous year. Carry-over stocks and surplus from South Africa, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and Zambia are compensating for those with deficits, such as Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, and Namibia.

Prices for maize grain in the region are generally low. For example, in Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe maize prices are 20 – 33 percent below the five-year average. However, given the below-normal maize harvest this year, prices are likely to increase earlier than usual as farming households start depending on markets earlier.

Climate change – the primary driver of food and nutrition insecurity

Southern Africa is prone to climate change and variability, which adversely affects the food security and livelihood of the population. Between 2014 and 2016, the region suffered the worst drought in 35 years, caused by the El Niño phenomenon. Climate change continues to manifest as prolonged drought, floods, and cyclones.

The region’s dependence on rain-fed agriculture has also led to volatile output levels from one year to the next. Only seven percent of the region’s arable land is irrigated, yet 70 percent of the population relies on agriculture for a living.

The first half of the 2017/18 agricultural season was affected by an extended dry spell from late December 2017 to late January 2018 in central parts of the region, causing a significant negative impact on early-planted crops. Although the improved rainfall experienced between February and March 2018 aided crop recovery in some areas, permanent wilting occurred in others. In Madagascar, Cyclone Ava and Cyclone Eliakim made landfall and caused fatalities, displacement, damage to infrastructure and flooding; impacting 330,000 people. Northern Mozambique was also affected by heavy rainfall in January.

The report notes that global models run by international climate forecasting institutions predict an El Niño phenomenon during the 2018/2019 season. El Niño has historically been associated with the more frequent occurrence of below average rainfall in central and southern parts of the region, while the northern-eastern parts of the region have historically experienced a more frequent occurrence of above average rainfall during El Niño years.

Transboundary pests and diseases

The fall armyworm is a hardy pest that now has adapted to local conditions. It is present in 13 SADC Member States and continues to affect crop production, although not too significantly this year. The regional vulnerability report urges the Member States to use integrated pest management approaches and context-specific practices to manage the pest. The report also noted that the cassava brown streak virus was affecting cassava production in Zambia, and maize lethal necrosis diseases were in Tanzania.

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) continues to affect poultry production in the DRC, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. Since the outbreak was first reported, up to 32,000 chickens and ducks in DRC, 813,000 breeding stock and backyard chickens in South Africa and 857,000 breeding stock chickens in Zimbabwe have been affected by the virus. Egg production losses in DRC, South Africa, and Zimbabwe totaled the US \$ 810 million and caused about 3,000 jobs losses.

Member States also reported the presence of the Foot and Mouth Disease, *Peste des Petit Ruminant* (PPR), contagious bovine pleuropneumonia, and Newcastle disease.

HIV, Tuberculosis and food and nutrition security nexus

The report advises that food and nutrition insecurity negatively impact the uptake of Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) among people infected with HIV and Tuberculosis. Southern Africa experiences the most severe HIV epidemics in the world, with adult HIV prevalence over 10 percent in several countries - Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Eswatini, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. At an estimated 26 percent, Eswatini has the highest HIV prevalence rate in the world, followed by Lesotho at 25 percent, and Botswana at 23.4 percent.

The report points out that food insecurity is a significant driver of HIV in the region and calls for more investment in community mobilization to improve access to HIV testing, prevention, and treatment services. The report also calls for creating synergies with other development sectors such as education, health, social protection and gender equality to improve HIV outcomes.

Resilience-building, a priority

The report makes short-medium and longer-term recommendations to address chronic food and nutrition insecurity and vulnerability, including building the resilience of people, communities, and institutions to prevent, anticipate, prepare for, cope with, and recover from shocks

“It is evident that the weather influences food security in Southern Africa. When the region receives sufficient rainfall that is well-distributed, the numbers of the food insecure population drop, but when the region experiences extreme weather conditions, the numbers increase. Given the increasing frequency and magnitude of extreme weather events that are influenced by climate change, we must employ new ways of sustaining our food security systems and climate-proof our national strategies and plans”, said Clement Kalonga, the Head of Disaster Risk Reduction at the SADC Secretariat

The report highlights the role of robust social protection systems targeting vulnerable populations, the adopting of climate-smart agriculture practices such as the use of drought-tolerant crop varieties, irrigation, staggered planting and integrated soil fertility management.

It also proposes scaling-up the high-impact nutrition interventions that target children under five years and women of reproductive age as well as encouraging the growing and consumption of diversified diets.

The report calls on the Member States to improve women and girls’ access to nutritious food, education, services and production resources and in ensuring that they participate in policy decision-making processes.

Overall, the report asks Member States to prioritize programmes and response planning that address these key regional issues while building sustainable monitoring and evaluation systems.

Methodology

The “State of Food and Nutrition Security and Vulnerability” report is released annually by the SADC Secretariat and provides estimates of the number and proportion of food and nutrition insecure and vulnerable people in the region. It clarifies the main factors driving food and nutrition insecurity and vulnerability in each country and provides short, medium and long-term recommendations.

The SADC Regional Vulnerability Assessment and Analysis (RVAA) Programme coordinates and supports the Members States to undertake annual vulnerability assessments and analysis and synthesizes the results to provide a regional outlook on food and nutrition insecurity and vulnerability. The 2017 – 2021 phase of the RVAA Programme is funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented with technical support from the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) Regional Bureau for Southern Africa.

About SADC

SADC is an organization of 16 Member States established in 1980. The Mission of SADC is to promote sustainable and equitable economic growth and socio-economic development through efficient, productive systems, deeper cooperation, and integration, good governance and durable peace and security; so that the region emerges as a competitive and effective player in international relations and the world economy.

Note: The 2018 “State of Food and Nutrition Security and Vulnerability” report will be published on the SADC website later.

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