

Up to 500,000 displaced by southern Africa cyclone



As roads to affected communities have been reconnected in southern Africa, the full scale of the humanitarian crisis has been revealed for the first time since the storm struck

A cyclone which struck southern Africa has affected almost three million people, of whom nearly 500,000 have been driven from their homes, the United Nations said on Tuesday.

Cyclone Idai smashed into Mozambique on March 15, unleashing hurricane-force winds and rain that flooded much of the centre of the country and then battered eastern Zimbabwe and Malawi.

More than 700 people have been killed in Mozambique and Zimbabwe alone and hundreds are missing, according to an AFP toll compiled from figures provided by governments and some UN agencies.

The UN's World Food Programme (WFP) said roughly 3,125 square kilometres (1,200 square miles) of land had been swamped, and nearly three million people across the three countries had been affected.

"Close to 500,000 have been displaced," the agency said in a briefing note.

In New York, UN humanitarian aid chief Mark Lowcock launched an appeal to provide Mozambique with \$282 million (250 million euros) of relief aid over the next three months.

Similar campaigns will shortly be launched for Zimbabwe and Malawi, he said.

Hunger

Survivors of the cyclone began receiving medicine, food and tents Tuesday as floodwaters receded, enabling a detailed picture of the crisis to emerge for the

first time.



Flooding in Mozambique

In the small village of Bejaga, some 150 survivors were hungry.

In the past week relief workers have dropped off “just a cup of (vitamin fortified) soya per family. It’s way too little,” said peasant farmer Francisco Lopez. “We are waiting,” he told AFP.

He had salvaged a few maize cobs in the mud and he sifted through them grain by grain, looking for any edible morsel. He had dried the food on a tarpaulin, but much of it was rotten after nearly two weeks under water.

“We really have nothing to eat, we have received almost nothing in aid,” he said.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs’ Sebastian Rhodes Stampa said Monday that 30 aid missions were flying in while others were going by road “so we can really deliver volume.”

International Organisation for Migration (IOM) chief Antonio Vitorino cautioned, though, that food shortages were likely for months to come because of destruction to farmland.

“Given its devastating impact, Cyclone Idai could rank as the worst disaster to hit the region in decades,” he said in a statement.

An estimated half a million hectares (1.2 million acres) of crops have been destroyed, much of which had been ready to harvest, and loss of livestock is likely to be severe.



Nearly three million people have been affected in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi

Health peril

Stagnant water, decomposing bodies and lack of sanitation in overcrowded shelters in Mozambique could create breeding grounds for cholera, typhus and malaria, experts say.

The WHO says it is withdrawing 900,000 doses of cholera vaccines from a global

stockpile to help forestall an epidemic.

The government has already identified some suspected cases of cholera, the head of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Elhadj As Sy, said.

“The worst thing is the children crying and looking for their parents... It is heartbreaking,” he said, adding that it remained unclear how many children may have been orphaned.

Medical services in the affected region were stretched even before the cyclone hit.

Beira hospital’s operating theatre sustained serious damage. As many as 17 health centres have lost their roofs, Doctors without Borders (MSF) said.

The South African military has deployed several aircraft to the affected area and an EU-funded WFP helicopter is supporting rescue and recovery efforts.

Source: <https://phys.org/news/2019-03-displaced-southern-africa-cyclone.html>

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