

Lesotho: El Niño-related Drought

Office of the Resident Coordinator Situation Update. 01

(as of 19 Jan 2016)



This report is produced by Office of the Resident Coordinator in Lesotho in collaboration with humanitarian partners. It was issued by the Humanitarian Country Team. It covers the period up to 19 January.

Highlights

- Following extremely poor rains during the first half of the rainfall season, the Lesotho Government has declared a drought emergency and has established an Inter-Ministerial Task Force to oversee the response.
- The Government of Lesotho has developed a National Response Plan to address the situation and has issued an Appeal Document.
- Consecutive poor harvests since 2014-2015, the weakening Rand and drought conditions are escalating the crisis as livelihoods are affected and many people and services are without or have limited access to water.
- There is an increased likelihood of water-borne diseases and access to health and education facilities is hampered by limited water availability.
- Livestock diseases and mortality are increasing as a result of poor feeding sources and scarcity of water.
- Some projections indicate that the number of people affected will surpass the 725,000 figure during the 2012 crisis due to the increasing food prices in the sub region and the unprecedented severity of the drought.



Map Sources: ESRI, UNCS, The Times Atlas of the World.
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Map created in Sep 2013.

725 000+

People likely to be affected

338 000

Targeted for assistance

US \$27.8 m

Resource Gap to address needs

Situation Overview

The effects of the drought in Lesotho concern multiple sectors: food security and agriculture, water, health and nutrition as well as migration, protection and security. This presentation will give a brief overview over the situation in the most effected sectors.

The impact of El Niño induced drought during the 2015/2016 planting season (Sep-Dec) is having enormous repercussions in Lesotho and neighbouring areas of South Africa, adding to the dry spell registered during the 2014/2015 agricultural season. Lesotho is currently facing water scarcity and rain deficits which have led to delays or failure of the planting season and will certainly cause a sharp decline in food production. Water shortages in Lesotho do not only affect agricultural activities but also industrial production, access to basic services that are unable to function normally (e.g. health centres and schools) as well as household consumption patterns. The water scarcity severely endangers the water reserves in Lesotho's dams and has already led to water rationing in many districts.

In the light of gravity of the situation, the Government of Lesotho in collaboration with UN agencies and NGOs is preparing a joint rapid community assessment to be conducted late January and early February 2016. The available information from meteorological sources, remote sensing services, food prices indicators, district authorities reports and UN field visits provide sufficient evidence to expect that the severity of the situation is likely to surpass the 2012 crisis when 725, 000 people, roughly half the rural population or one third of the total population of Lesotho were considered as food insecure by the LVAC assessment of that year. Some of the growing evidence for it to be as severe, if not more severe than that year includes:

- Extremely poor harvest outlook:** Crop estimates (particularly area planted) and vegetation indexes show that, mainly in the lowlands and Senqu River Valley will be at historically poor levels, with a strong likelihood that they will be worse than those in 2012. Unlike in previous food insecurity crises where harvest suffered from irregular rainfalls in this occasion many subsistence farmers have not even been able to plant. In parts of Lesotho and central and south-eastern South Africa, the season is late, with delays of 50 days or more in many areas. These delays reduce the chances of successful cropping due to the shortened period available for crops to reach maturity before the cessation of rains or the arrival of low temperatures and frosts. Farmers also tend not to plant or are hesitant to plant if they do not receive sufficient planting rains by specific cut-off dates, which differ by area¹. Even many of those having dared to plant encouraged by isolated rains have reported seeds not germinating due to the lack of moisture in the fields, insufficient rainfall subsequent to the plantation and high temperatures. In areas where planting took place such as the mountains and to a lesser extend in the foothills, crops have been under water and heat stress. Frost damage in the mountain areas in early November caused significant extensions of crops to be damaged. Besides the reduction of yields, the climatological conditions have resulted in a reduction of many on-farm labour opportunities (both in Lesotho and in South Africa) which are crucial contributions to the rural household's livelihood strategies.

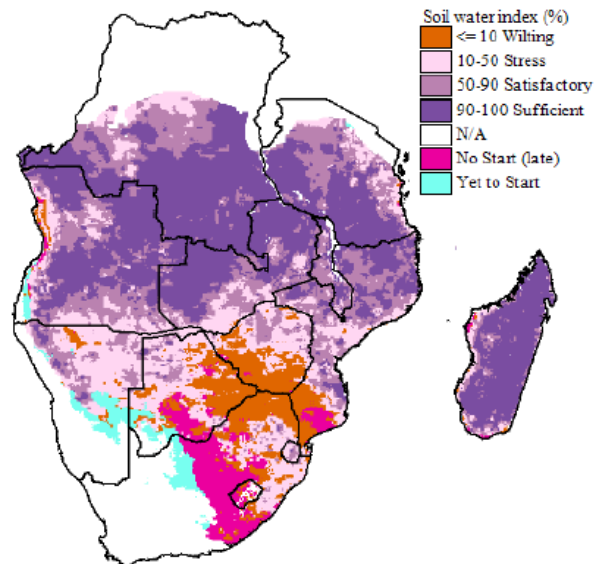
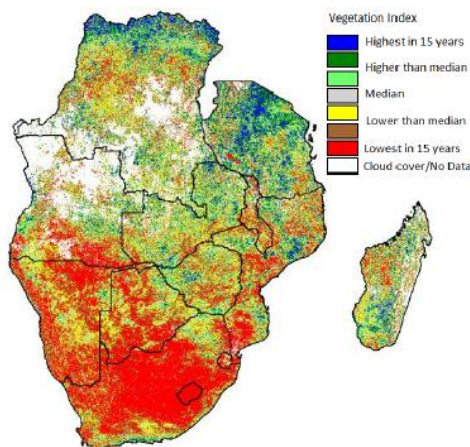


Figure 1: Soil water index as of 31 December 2015



- Worst vegetation conditions in 15 years:** As of mid-November, vegetation conditions were reported to be at their lowest in 15 years due to dry conditions, high temperatures, as well as low rainfall received since last season. Poor vegetation is indicative of the stressed state of pastures in most of Lesotho, which combined with limited water availability has resulted in a deterioration of livestock morbidity and mortality in most parts of the country².
- Water shortages have begun months earlier than in 2012:** Rivers have dried up in Berea District and other parts of the country³. Not only are there health and nutrition implications to the drying up of water sources but it also impact the delivery of basic services. Water scarcity is affecting the normal functioning of hospitals and health centres as well as schools and exposes the most vulnerable groups of the population to water-borne diseases and other health-related problems, particularly affecting people living with HIV and AIDS.
- Worse regional agricultural and macroeconomic context than in 2012** lead to sharp increase of food prices: In normal conditions, Lesotho imports approximately 70% of its cereal requirements from South Africa. The current drought will impact on Lesotho with two new elements which were not present in 2012 drought: (1) In addition to the reduced production registered in 2015, South Africa is already showing signs that El Niño will significantly

Figure 2: Vegetation Index (NDVI) for 21-31 December 2015 expressed in context of past 15 years

¹ SADC Agromet Update Issue 4, 21 Dec 2015

² FEWSNET Lesotho December 2015

³ WFP 'Relief Challenges As Drought Plunges Lesotho Into Emergency'. 29 December 2015

⁴ FAO Briefing Note No. 2- 03 December 2015 Lesotho

⁵ *ibid.*

contribute to a reduction in production, reducing the availability of maize for import in Lesotho and driving maize prices upwards; moreover, South Africa will need to import maize from other regions; and (2) The Rand (and Maloti) has lost more than 80% of its value against dollar when comparing exchange rates in 2012 and 2016; the decreased purchasing power of the weakened rand will mean that the cost of importing maize increases. The retail prices in Lesotho for white maize has increased by 12.6% in one year (by Sept, 2015)⁴. These prices are expected to rise given that South African wholesale maize prices have nearly doubled since year earlier values. The wholesale prices have increased by over 70% which is a significant increase and will usually take several months to filter to the retail market. However, according to local wholesalers once prices reach this level (above R3, 000 per MT), sales drop by 20-30%⁵. Currently prices have exceeded the R4, 000 level.

The water shortages from the drought are already costing lives and having serious health effects on the community. Currently the Ministry of Health is reporting a large increase in diarrhoeal diseases is being reported by the Ministry of Health (MoH).

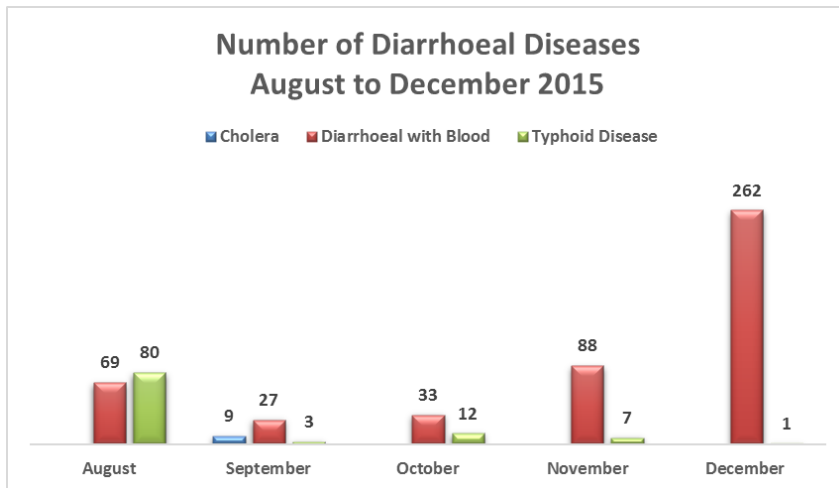


Figure 3: Number of Diarrhoeal Disease cases in Lesotho

As many health clinics are without water, and government resources to truck water to the clinics are overwhelmed, many community members are discouraged from reporting to the clinics.

Specific vulnerable groups are being impacted more than others. For example, the MoH is reporting that in some areas pregnant women are no longer presenting to give birth in health clinics due to lack of water in these facilities. They are also reporting that they have come across cases of elderly people who have died due to dehydration as they were less able to cart water from water points. In addition, observations of a number of HIV/AIDS and TB patients ceasing to take their ART

and other medication because of lack of food is emerging, including some cases that resulted in death.

Although, global acute malnutrition (GAM) is 3.4% and severe acute malnutrition is .06%, there is evidence of a silent nutritional emergency which could worsen with current food and water shortage crisis. Accompanying micronutrient deficiencies are also anticipated given the severity of anaemia in Lesotho. The 2014 LDHS, reported high anaemia rates in children 52%, whilst 26% for women of child bearing age also have some form of anaemia. Facility deliveries that are supervised by skilled providers are a critical lifesaving service to prevent both maternal and neonatal deaths including HIV transmission from the mother to the new-born.

Funding

The funding requirement for the current drought is estimated at US \$36.5 million. Government of Lesotho have announced the allocation of M 155 million (approx. US \$9.7 million) for immediate/short-term interventions lasting from December 2015 to March 2016 and medium term interventions, lasting from April to May 2016. The remaining financial gap to meet the needs outlined in the appeal is US \$26.8 million. Resource mobilization efforts are vital to meet this gap.

The Lesotho National Red Cross Society has launched an appeal for CHF 741,557 (US \$738,502).

All humanitarian partners, including donors and recipient agencies, are encouraged to inform OCHA's Financial Tracking Service (FTS - <http://fts.unocha.org>) of cash and in-kind contributions by e-mailing: fts@un.org

Humanitarian Response

- The UN and partners have stepped up response and preparedness efforts in partnership with the Government. The United Nations system together with NGOs supported the Government of Lesotho in the development of a drought resilience and mitigation plan. The process resulted in the Prime Minister's declaration of the state

of emergency on 22 December, 2015. Following this declaration, the Government of Lesotho supported by the UN and NGO partners, developed an appeal and has identified areas for support while pledging approximately 25% of the costs in the appeal from its own resources (see funding section).

- Currently, the UN and NGOs work jointly with the Government of Lesotho in the preparation of a Rapid Assessment to generate further insights of the situation, to further inform on the priority geographic areas, indicative amounts of people affected and current coping mechanisms used by communities. This exercise will inform the programming of emergency response activities and targeting.
- The National Drought Emergency Response Plan, on which the Government of Lesotho's Appeal Document is based on, outlines the area of response for both the Government and the UN. The humanitarian response will focus on the areas of Agriculture & Livestock and food security, Health & Nutrition, and WASH. These are the sectors that are facing the brunt of the drought crisis in the country and will be crucial in providing live saving assistance. The government is already responding in some areas, mainly water sector, and is looking to scale up these responses.
- The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) recommends the following actions, which are in line with the Government of Lesotho's Response Plan and Appeal:
 - Increase real and near real time monitoring of household food security, particularly markets and trade ensuring effective early warning and action as well as updating of scenarios as new information obtains.
 - Support the Government in rationalizing and expanding safety nets and lifesaving programmes.
 - Support the Government in the development of a Resilience Framework/ Strategy.
 - Raise funds for implementation of programmes in support of the Government Appeal
 - Maintain strong technical support to respective ministries as appropriate.



Agriculture & Livestock and Food Security

Needs:

- Increase in social protection nets
- Increase access to safe water sources
- Increase access to food for vulnerable groups
- Protect livelihoods and restore productive capacities among rural communities with sustainable agriculture technologies.
- Improve animal health capacities preventing public health transmissions and loss of livelihoods among vulnerable small holders.
- The drought will also have a severe impact on the availability of livestock feeding, will facilitate the transmission of anthrax and will decrease animal health conditions due to insufficient food and water quantity and quality. Insufficient livestock feeding will further lead to increased pressure on natural resources, notably rangelands, resulting in further soil erosion and deterioration of natural resources.
- Consolidate resilience building initiatives in the adequate management of Natural Resources and agricultural practices
- Improve information management and GIS enabling evidence based decision making in the sector.

3.7m

Required for
agricultural support

Response:

- From a household perspective, and depending on the severity of the crisis, FAO Lesotho intends to support communities affected by drought in the adoption of Climate Smart Agriculture technologies such as Conservation Agriculture, Home Gardening & Nutrition and Sustainable Land Management through the provision of inputs (e.g. maize and beans seeds, cover crop/fodder seeds and vegetable



Figure 4: Farmer weeding his wilted maize crop

seeds kit) and training. The poorest households will be supported with productive packages such as Home Gardening & Nutrition kits complementing Social Protection cash transfers (funded by the Government of Lesotho) and top ups channelled through UNICEF or WFP. The programme will enhance convergence of services and messages to the targeted communities through chiefs, schools, extension services and wider communication channels.

- As part of the emergency response addressing the impact on livestock and vulnerable owners, FAO plans to implement a pilot de-stocking initiative based on FAO de-stocking initiatives successfully implemented in Ethiopia, complemented with the promotion of cover crops and fodder improving the integration of crop production and livestock rearing.
- From a Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience building dimension in the food security sector, FAO Lesotho will continue to promote at national level communication activities and training on Conservation Agriculture and Home Gardening & Nutrition while completing the production of training materials on Sustainable Land Management. This includes an innovative communication campaign involving the distribution of training materials for trainers, brochures for schools, rural communities and general public and TV/radio channels enabling the combination of technical messages and music/visual inspirational messages developed with local musicians attracting attention towards this important topic across different age groups and targeting particularly the youth.
- Demonstration of mechanical Conservation Agriculture planting techniques will be expanded and continued in Agricultural Resources Centres of the country and demo plots will be supported in schools facilitating the effective inclusion of Climate Smart Agriculture in school curriculum.
- Formal training and refreshers on the different techniques and newly developed material will take place among extension officers, rangers, teachers, local leaders, traders and farmers' organizations.
- FAO Lesotho also intends to develop additional applications of the Land Cover map for Lesotho, such as early warning and monitoring systems for rangelands status, soil erosion risk analysis and customization of the Land Cover map per water catchment and subnational administrative levels enabling sub national stakeholders to understand the status of the natural resources in their area allowing adequate action to be adopted.
- These activities will be monitored closely by FAO Lesotho and its impact will be assessed with baseline and post-harvest surveys as well as pre-post training impact surveys. Lessons learnt from the implementation will be documented and incorporated in the Resilience Strategy design as it has been done since its inception in 2012.
- WFP plans to assist the most vulnerable households through unconditional cash and/or in-kind assistance.
- In line with the government's response plan to assist the affected communities on water-harvesting projects, WFP will provide the food insecure communities with conditional cash and/or in-kind aid for the creation of assets.
- At a policy level, WFP will keep assisting the government strengthen its DRR and Resilience framework. At the same time, it will continue to implement jointly with the Disaster Management Authority (DMA) and the Ministry of Forestry resilience based longer-term programmes.
- WFP will keep assisting DMA finalise the Early Warning System for effective and timely access to information to improve preparedness and response.
- WFP will keep implementing a school feeding programme for both pre- and primary school children.



Figure 5: Cattle search for food in Mohale's Hoek (Source WFP)

Planned response:

- Construction of water harvesting infrastructure including dams and roof harvesting tanks at the household level.
- Carrying out of culling and exchange programs for sheep to relief degraded rangelands and to assist livestock farmers to reduce the large number of livestock in their possession.
- Create awareness on the mitigation initiatives.

Gaps & Constraints:

- There are currently financial constraints in Lesotho to cover the needs of this sector.
- More accurate number of people affected and priority geographical zones will emerge from the planned needs assessments and will inform planning and targeting.

**Health and Nutrition****Needs:****3.7m**

Required to support Health and Nutrition

- Provide assistance to vulnerable groups including children below the age of five, pregnant and lactating women, elderly people and people living with HIV and AIDS or TB
- Promote health facility maternal health care services such as deliveries
- Provide safe water for vulnerable populations
- Develop national capacity at all levels to mitigate the anticipated El Nino effects.
- Identify vulnerable communities.
- Weak disease and nutrition surveillance system at all levels
- Need for timely response to outbreaks associated with the crisis
- Need for proper management of different forms of malnutrition at community and facility levels
- Strengthen public awareness on the health and nutrition related aspects of the crisis , HIV/TB prevention care and treatment
- Strengthen monitoring and evaluation of the Health response

Response:

- Strengthen Government safety net
- Support awareness raising on household treatment of drinking water
- Strengthen public awareness on the health and nutrition related aspects of the crisis
- Implement water Quality Surveillance at District level

Planned Response:

- WFP will provide specialized nutrition supplements to children 6-59 months of age, pregnant and lactating mothers of identified food insecure households and patients on ART and TB treatment. It will also include in the MAM treatment the TB and HIV and AIDS patients through the food-by-prescription approach and will support the food insecure households of the PLHIV and TB clients with food rations.
- Provide therapeutic and specialized nutrition supplements for acutely malnourished groups.
- Facilitate access to other critical health services, including HIV prevention, provision of disposable maternity delivery kits, care, treatment and support for targeted populations.
- Facilitate access to safe water and sanitation at health facilities and in the community.
- Support water quality monitoring and surveillance
- Strengthen disease surveillance system at national, district, facility and community levels using the integrated disease surveillance and response strategy
- Deploy teams from WHO and CDC to support investigation and response to outbreaks associated with the crisis (water-related outbreaks, foodborne outbreaks and zoonotic diseases)
- Support outreach services for provision of integrated community health services
- Support Health facility and community management of malnutrition
- Facilitate monitoring and evaluation of the targeted interventions.

Gaps & Constraints:

- There is an information gap on the number of people affected and the communities affected by the drought.
- Financial restraints.
- Weak disease surveillance systems



Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Needs:

- Increased water sources for both human and animal consumption as well as other domestic uses.
- Increased access for services such as hospitals and schools who are currently not meeting their required water amounts in order to maintain their services.
- Water shortages are being reported from several districts where restrictions have started to be applied to rural communities (e.g. Mohale's Hoek). Some health centers and schools are reportedly unable to function normally due to lack of drinking water for patients and students respectively (e.g. Butha Buthe). Local initiatives on water trucking and supply of water tanks have started in some areas though no systematic arrangements seem to have been made yet to address these shortages at national level. Important water sources and streams such as river Makhalleng River (Mohale's Hoek district) have dried up during the month of November.

16.6m

Required to support
WASH



Figure 6: Collecting water from drying river in Mokhotlong

Response:

- Currently, the Government of Lesotho is already responding in the sector particularly with regards to mobile water treatment. This needs to be urgently scaled up.

Planned Response:

- Identification of areas that are at risk as well as increasing access to drinking water and sanitation facilities.
- Identification of water sources and distributing clean water to affected communities.
- Repairing broken water systems and installing new ones in other areas.
- Acquiring water cleaning trucks/vehicles and drilling rigs for exploration of new underground water sources.
- Strengthen household water storage and treatment of drinking water
- Strengthen water quality monitoring and surveillance

Gaps & Constraints:

- Financial restraints limit possibility of implementing the planned responses above.
- Need to identify affected communities and communities who are at risk.

General Coordination

An Inter-Ministerial Task Force has been established and the Disaster Management Authority and has finalized a Drought Mitigation and Resilience Plan, supported by the UNCT (United Nations Country Team), for presentation to cabinet.

To further strengthen humanitarian coordination for the food security response, the UN Resident Coordinator established a Humanitarian Country Team (HCT). This coordination structure provides guidance to the humanitarian response for the current drought. This coordination mechanism seeks to optimise the collective efforts of UN, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, the Red Cross movement as well as the donor community to strengthen the overall drought (current and anticipated) response for the provision of assistance to and protection of the affected populations.

A drought response monitoring team has been established and terms of reference for the team have been finalized.

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