



19<sup>th</sup> December 2008

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## Context

Zambia is approaching the middle of the rainy season. Weather reports on the Tropical Convergence Zone are indicating that there might be floods this year as well. The lean season i.e. December to April, is already here and reports from around the country shows alarming figures of severe malnutrition. The reason for this is probably a combination of high, and rising food prices as well as failed crops in many parts of the country due to floods earlier in the year. There are reports already that have been captured by Government controlled media that in some districts people have already started eating roots and tubers as a sign of impending hunger. There are also threats of a mass outbreak of cholera due to contaminated water and general low standards of hygiene among the population. Whereas cholera is a perennial problem, the risk of mass outbreaks increases during the wet season. High density areas in urban areas are hot spots for cholera. Cholera outbreaks are also common around fishing camps. Cholera is usually spread from there by traders who travel long distances to buy the fish from fishing camps.

## Current Situation/Response

### *Flood Emergency*

At the moment there have been no reports of floods in the areas that were affected by either flash or normal floods last year. Despite a sustained amount of rainfall since the end of November; this was followed by a dry spell of about one week in the central, southern and eastern parts of Zambia. These dry spells did not affect the germination of crops but because of the dry conditions some seeds were exposed to pests that ate them before germination. The general picture is that, the average rainfall is still below the seasonal normal to date. The period until 20<sup>th</sup> December has seen an increase in rainfall activity around the whole country mainly the Southern part.<sup>1</sup> Because of this increase in rainfall, all partners in humanitarian response are preparing to respond in case of floods and increased cholera cases. The UN and its NGO partners are in the process of preparing a response plan anchored on the national contingency plan for 2008/09 whose final draft is going for final round of comments. Some agencies have already started pre-positioning supplies especially in districts that are likely to be cut off. In relation to weather related disasters, there was a report of a hail storm in Katete that affected 80 households. This has been dealt with using local resources, but a report has been submitted to the central disaster management and mitigation unit (DMMU). The UN through UNICEF is preparing to distribute chlorine and hand washing soaps in Southern Province through its partners.

There are also reports that Lundazi district in eastern province has been cut off from the rest of the country. Two bridges on the Lundazi - Chipata road were washed away. Meanwhile Lusaka urban was also flooded with water in some areas and parts of some roads were submerged in water. This is caused by drainages that are usually blocked by careless disposal of solid waste.

### *Hunger Situation*

The Government has received several reports of hunger and malnutrition as reported by the Government and private media. The Vice President Mr George Kunda announced that the Government is well aware of the hunger situation in some areas and is doing everything possible to address the unfolding situation. In the interim the DMMU under the Office of Vice President conducted an assessment of 34 of the affected districts with support from the UN and other humanitarian partners. The comprehensive report is expected to be released by the DMMU in the week beginning 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2008 with the situation, requirements and gaps if any.

In the meantime the Food Reserve Agency (FRA), which is the institution charged with the responsibility of keeping food stocks is reported to have admitted that there might not be enough food stocks in the country. As such it has signed an agreement with South African firms to supply the estimated shortfall. The deal is estimated at 183 billion Zambian kwacha (roughly US\$35.2 million). This is to supply 75,000 of the required 100,000 metric tonnes of maize. In the meantime the exchange rate and the mealie meal prices have stabilised albeit at a very high rate. Where as a month ago the exchange rate was about 3,900 to a US dollar the current rate is about 5,000 to a dollar representing over 25% fall in a month. The mealie meal prices are now trading at between 60 and 70 thousand from between 45-50 thousand three months ago.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Zambia Meteorological Department, Ministry of Communications and Transport



The University Teaching Hospital in Lusaka is reporting an unusually high number of severely malnourished children being admitted to the hospital. This has triggered the National Food and Nutrition Commission to hold several urgent meetings on the Nutrition situation. Tuesday 23 December Ministry of Health will hold a meeting on the Nutrition Emergency at UTH and other parts of the country with all partners involved in nutrition activities. A draft Action Plan to meet the Nutrition Emergency has been worked out and will be presented at the meeting.

### *Cholera Situation (and the Zimbabwe Dimension)*

Cholera is almost a perennial issue in this country especially in high density areas and some fishing areas. It intensifies during the rainy season. The country has recorded a cumulative total of 1277 cholera cases from 10<sup>th</sup> September to 17<sup>th</sup> December 2008<sup>2</sup>. The provinces affected are Northern-(Mpulungu and Kaputa), Luapula (Chiengwe and Nchelenge), Lusaka-(Lusaka) and Southern-(Siavonga, Mazabuka and Livingstone) provinces. So far there has been a 26 deaths recorded 15 of whom were brought in dead. This represents 0.86 % case fatality rate.

The overall picture indicates a 6% increase in the number of cholera cases from the previous 1,129 cases by 5<sup>th</sup> December. Significantly, the number of cases in Lusaka has increased by almost 50% from 106 as of 5<sup>th</sup> December to 158. Siavonga, a town bordering Zimbabwe, has also recorded five more cases compared to two last week. Cholera has also spread to the Southern Province in the districts of Mazabuka, Kalomo, and Livingstone [bordering with Zimbabwe]. Treatment centres have been established in all these districts.

According to the reports from the Ministry of Health it is not clear whether the Zimbabwe situation has exacerbated the situation especially in the border towns. And it is also not clear why the cases in Lusaka have gone up and whether the source of the infections has been traced.

At the moment the Government has been able to respond to the cholera situation. They have asked for limited assistance from some UN partners especially for material supplies such as chlorine and other water treatment supplies. However the following specific actions have been taken:-

- The Ministries of Health and Local Government and Housing have developed an emergency response plan to cover the aspects of preventive, promotional and curative services to mitigate the cholera outbreak. The total budget stands at approximately US\$3,400,000. The funding gap stands at US\$2,500,000.
- During this week's meeting held by cooperating partners and chaired by the WHO Representative, the budgets from the Ministries of Health and Local Government and Housing were discussed. CPs observed that removal of street vendors, orientation of medical personnel and training was urgently required and that investment in sensitization would be the most helpful intervention. CPs recommended that the budgets be reviewed to identify priority activities and possibly reduce the funding gap, while offering technical and financial support.
- WHO in collaboration with the Ministry of Health has sent a team of surveillance officers to the Zimbabwe/Zambia border districts of Siavonga, Chirundu and Livingstone. This is in order to monitor the disease situation and support mitigation measures.

<sup>2</sup> Weekly Cholera Update, Government of the Republic of Zambia

# Humanitarian Update

United Nations Disaster Management Team

UNCT Zambia

P.O Box 31966,

Lusaka

Tel: +260-211-254417/+260-977790824/+260-966-120021



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## UN Country Team Contact List

Name	Designation	Contact Number	e-mail
Mr Macleod Nyirongo	Resident Coordinator	+260-97-8772539	<a href="mailto:macleod.nyirongo@undp.org">macleod.nyirongo@undp.org</a>
Ms Jennifer Kargbo	Director - ECA/SRDC	+260-97-7790312	<a href="mailto:jkargbo@uneca.org">jkargbo@uneca.org</a>
Ms Viola Morgan	Country Director - UNDP	+260-97-7405606	<a href="mailto:viola.morgan@undp.org">viola.morgan@undp.org</a>
Dr Olusegun Babaniyi	Representative - WHO	+260-97-7771270	<a href="mailto:babaniyio@zm.afro.who.int">babaniyio@zm.afro.who.int</a>
Mr James Lynch	Representative - UNHCR	+260-97-7862004	<a href="mailto:lynch@unhcr.org">lynch@unhcr.org</a>
Mr Gerry Finnegan	Representative - ILO	+260-97-7640954	<a href="mailto:finnegan@ilo.org">finnegan@ilo.org</a>
Ms Lotta Sylwander	Representative - UNICEF	+260-97-7770385	<a href="mailto:lsylwander@unicef.org">lsylwander@unicef.org</a>
Dr Nouredin Mona	Representative - FAO	+260-95-5742009	<a href="mailto:nouredin.mona@fao.org">nouredin.mona@fao.org</a>
Mr Pablo Recalde	Country Director - WFP	+260-97-7790824	<a href="mailto:pablo.recalde@wfp.org">pablo.recalde@wfp.org</a>
Dr Duah Owusu-Sarfo	Representative - UNFPA	+260-97-8343384	<a href="mailto:duah.owusu-sarfo@undp.org">duah.owusu-sarfo@undp.org</a>
Mr Josiah Ogina	Head of Mission - IOM	+260-97-8770760	<a href="mailto:jogina@iom.int">jogina@iom.int</a>
Ms Maha Aon	OIC - UNAIDS	+260-97-8016093	<a href="mailto:aonm@unaids.org">aonm@unaids.org</a>
Dr Kapil Kapoor	Country Manager - World Bank		<a href="mailto:k Kapoor@worldbank.org">k Kapoor@worldbank.org</a>