



Nalukui, from Nalwei, Western Province, Zambia, only harvested 10kg of maize after El Niño-induced drought destroyed her crops. Her children have dropped out of school for the first time and they now weed other people's farms or sell charcoal. Photo: Misozi Tembo/Oxfam

# A PREVENTABLE CRISIS

El Niño and La Niña events need earlier responses and a renewed focus on prevention

**The devastating impacts of the 2015–16 El Niño will be felt well into 2017. This crisis was predicted, yet overall, the response has been too little too late. The looming La Niña event may further hit communities that are already deeply vulnerable. To end this cycle of failure, there is an urgent need for humanitarian action where the situation is already dire, to prepare for La Niña later this year, to commit to comprehensive new measures to build communities' resilience, and to mobilize global action to address climate change which is creating a 'new normal' of higher temperatures, drought and unpredictable growing seasons.**

# SUMMARY

The 2015–16 El Niño has now dissipated, but its devastating impacts will be felt well into 2017. As a result of droughts caused or exacerbated by El Niño, 60 million people across four continents, particularly those dependent on rain-fed agriculture, require immediate assistance. Oxfam assessments show people becoming more and more desperate:

- In Ethiopia, the loss of livestock means the loss of livelihoods; men are suffering negative psychological effects and women's trading businesses are folding.
- In Malawi, people will run out of food by August 2016, with no staple harvest until April 2017.
- In the Philippines, farmers have consumed their seed stocks intended for the next planting season and fish catches have shrunk by half.
- In Haiti, some people are walking 5–10km to find water and there are very few day labouring jobs to provide income.

With prolonged lean seasons starting soon in the Horn and southern Africa, as well as some parts of the Pacific, humanitarian needs will grow over the coming months as people continue to face food insecurity, poverty and disease. The shock is likely to worsen in length and severity if a significant La Niña event also occurs.

This was a well forecast event. Both governments and international stakeholders have responded, but not at the scale and speed to preserve livelihoods, hope and dignity. The funding gap is currently \$2.5bn.

This El Niño was a broadly preventable crisis, and as such, is a modern day tragedy. The severity of this El Niño's impacts is a reflection of the world's failure to provide comprehensive and long-term strategies to anticipate, prepare and adapt. Many of its impacts—hunger, loss of livelihoods and displacement—could have been prevented or mitigated by well-planned investments in sustainable agriculture, basic social and physical infrastructure, and essential health and social programmes, among others.

For slow onset crises, particularly drought, the collective response is almost always too little too late. Early warning systems and forecasting have steadily improved and continue to do so, but turning an early warning into early action is hampered by a lack of strong cross-disciplinary leadership, willing to act on the basis of forecasts; agreed triggers for early action; and funding.

This crisis, while particularly severe, is not a one-off. Climate change has supercharged this El Niño and will bring more extreme weather events, and make strong El Niño and La Niña events more likely. Clearly more finance is required for adaptation. Oxfam estimates that international grant and grant-equivalent public finance for adaptation is a mere \$4–6bn annually, while adaptation costs for developing countries could reach around \$240bn per year by 2030.

# SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

For further detail on the recommendations, please see Section 5.

## Recommendations to address the current El Niño and forecast La Niña

**Governments**, with the support of international actors, should:

- Ensure data is available to design an effective response.
- Deliver a multi-sector El Niño response, including support for livelihoods and social safety nets.
- Provide clear and timely information to communities.
- Host a visit of the UN Special Envoys on El Niño and Climate.
- Develop regularly updated and detailed forecasts for La Niña.
- Implement preparedness programmes and early action 'no regrets' measures for La Niña.
- Call for an international conference on La Niña in September 2016.

**Regional bodies** should strengthen coordination, including meetings in early September and late November, to feed into likely global meetings.

**UN agencies** should:

- Ensure data is available to design an effective response.
- Use the Emergency Response Preparedness framework to ensure preparedness for La Niña.
- Accelerate the development of the standard operating procedures for El Niño and La Niña.
- Schedule regional and global meetings for the next six months.
- Consider increasing UN resources allocated to the crisis.

**Donor governments** should:

- Review existing business cases and make more funding available.
- Provide bilateral funding to national and international NGOs.

## Recommendations to address underlying vulnerabilities

**Governments**, with the support of international actors, should:

- Develop clear leadership, better preparedness, improved forecasting, and increase accessibility of forecasts.
- Ensure support systems, particularly social protection, can scale up.

- Mainstream climate change adaptation (CCA) and disaster risk reduction (DRR) in the development plans, allocate budget and ensure monitoring.
- Increase investment to expand resilience in small-scale agriculture.
- Champion the call to develop a road map for the delivery of the \$100bn commitment at COP22.

**Regional and international agencies** should support this:

- **Development partners** should find new ways of providing early action funding, potentially forecast-based financing on a global scale.
- **Development partners** should increase focus and funding for preparedness, adaptation and risk reduction.
- In the **UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)**, **governments** should agree on a road map that will deliver the annual \$100bn for climate action by 2020.
- **UN Humanitarian Country Teams or Resident Coordinators** should be held accountable for risk analysis and preparedness planning.
- The **African Development Bank's** commitment to nearly triple climate finance should be swiftly implemented, primarily through grants.
- **The Southern African Development Community (SADC)** should encourage member states to consider diversification and strategic investments beyond maize subsidies and build climate change into national and regional food security strategies.
- **The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)** should create a regional resource base for DRR and CCA policies and plans, and increase member states' capacity to implement such policies by expanding partnerships.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

The 2015–16 El Niño has now dissipated, but its devastating impacts will be felt well into 2017. As a result of droughts caused or exacerbated by El Niño, people across four continents, particularly those dependent on rain-fed agriculture, are suffering from severe food and water shortages; lost income, crops and livestock; and higher food prices. Sixty million people require immediate assistance.<sup>1</sup> People's hopes are fading as they descend into poverty; women's burden of providing food, fuel and water for families increases while they often eat last and the least.

This is not just about the weather. It is a multi-layered crisis that has trapped people in a vicious cycle of poverty:

- This is possibly the most powerful El Niño on record. Its impact was particularly severe in southern Africa because it fell precisely at the time of the region's annual rains.
- Most regions had at least one poor agricultural season before El Niño hit, due to droughts, floods, erratic rains and/or the creeping effects of climate change; Central America has had three years of drought.
- The impact was deepened by other factors, such as coffee rust in Central America, political turmoil in Haiti, and the fall in international commodity prices and weakening currencies in southern Africa.
- Underlying this is chronic poverty, high inequality and poor governance. Rain-fed agriculture accounts for more than 95 percent of farmed land in sub-Saharan Africa and 90 percent in Latin America,<sup>2</sup> where unpredictable rain patterns and drought are increasing due to climate change—yet many governments are failing to support communities to adapt and diversify.

With prolonged lean seasons starting soon in the Horn and southern Africa, as well as some parts of the Pacific, humanitarian needs will grow over the coming months as people continue to face food insecurity, poverty and disease. The shock is likely to worsen in length and severity if a significant La Niña event also occurs.

At household and national level, current needs are being met by mortgaging future prosperity. Recovery from livelihood and asset loss will take years. The economic costs of this El Niño threaten to have a ripple effect on development gains and economic growth; the economic cost is estimated at \$10bn for Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the obvious immediate and long-term needs, the response remains massively underfunded—the funding gap for appeals was \$2.5bn in June.<sup>5</sup> There is an urgent need for humanitarian action where the situation is already dire, to prepare for La Niña later this year, to commit to comprehensive new measures to build communities' resilience, and to mobilize global action to address climate change and the 'new normal' of higher temperatures, drought and unpredictable growing seasons.

*'We haven't thought of leaving, but we are worried because we don't know what to do.'*

Rosa Elvira Martinez, Centro, Chiquimula, Guatemala.

*El Niño-assisted forest fires in Indonesia released more carbon into the atmosphere per day than from the whole of the EU—11.3 million tonnes per day.<sup>3</sup>*

# 2 THE RESPONSE SO FAR

## A slow start

Strong warnings were issued from mid-2015 that El Niño would affect food security and water availability, thus impacting agricultural production, health, nutrition, protection and education. These early warnings were still not met with early action and funding at scale.

Several governments in the affected countries heeded the forecasts. Kenya in particular undertook comprehensive preparedness measures, and Ethiopia has demonstrated strong leadership and coordination. However, much of the current response should have happened significantly earlier. Many affected countries have launched appeals (19 to date) but most did so in 2016 rather than 2015.

Several donors provided funding relatively early for preparedness, but overall, there has been insufficient funding at scale to enable a response that saves livelihoods, as well as lives, despite the huge body of knowledge around the cost-effectiveness of early action and building resilience, compared to late humanitarian responses.<sup>6</sup>

The appointment of UN Special Envoys on El Niño and Climate is a very welcome step to raise the profile of such crises; however, these roles were not announced until May 2016, many months after impacts from El Niño had taken hold around the world.<sup>7</sup>

## Institutional barriers

While drought response is always challenging, this crisis has been particularly so, with a range of factors hampering an effective response:

- There is enormous pressure from humanitarian crises elsewhere, which has absorbed funding and organizational capacity to respond.
- The international humanitarian system is not well-adapted to respond to slow onset crises, particularly if they are global (rather than national or regional). This is apparent particularly in terms of developing appeals, generating early funding, clarity on scale-up processes, information flows and coordination.
- Initially, many countries affected in this crisis did not have sufficient humanitarian capacity to lead and respond—in terms of government institutions, UN presence (particularly the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which did not have a strong presence in a number of affected countries), as well as NGOs' culture and preparedness to shift gear and adjust their programmes.
- Underlying governance issues in many affected countries have resulted in structural gaps in agricultural policies or health systems; lack of adaptation plans;<sup>8</sup> reluctance to provide clarity on a situation or declare disasters; lack of critical data (such as malnutrition, Integrated

*'The toughest part of the recent drought is that it slowly killed all our animals. I am afraid for the future, regardless of whether the rain comes or not. We have lost all our assets and means of survival. Our animals are sources of milk, meat and a means of cash... With this drought, our animals, which are our backbones for survival, are lost.'*

Alishica Abdulaih, Ethiopia

*'The reason a donor's global portfolio for El Niño looks the way it does is not based on raw need, but on who has asked for assistance, and who has not. There are countries that to this day have refused to acknowledge the severity of the situation, and as long as they do not do that, donors' hands are tied.'*

An influential analyst, March 2016

Phase Classification (IPC) of food insecurity<sup>9</sup>), which are either not available or not disclosed due to sensitivities; and/or donors being unable to fund government-led responses.

Oxfam experienced similar challenges: in some countries, its development programmes did not react quickly enough to changes in context and did not scale up appropriately. Often this was due to difficulties attracting funding.

## Impact – but not enough

The current El Niño response is having an impact. This is the worst drought in 30–50 years, depending on the region, but it has not become a famine. Yet this is not a time for self-congratulation; we should be aiming considerably higher than famine prevention. Predictable food crises are broadly preventable. The knowledge and know-how is there—what is needed is funding, political will and accountability.

What is startling is the growing gulf between the strong political rhetoric on reducing risk in both development and humanitarian spheres—in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Sustainable Development Goals, the Principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship,<sup>10</sup> the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation<sup>11</sup> and the Paris Agreement under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)<sup>12</sup>—and the reality.

While \$1.4bn has been committed to the response, and this is clearly meeting some needs, the funding gap across the response was \$2.5bn in June, representing over 64 percent of all needs.<sup>13</sup> This is leading to critical gaps in the response. For example, due to lack of funding, WFP's programme in the Somali region of Ethiopia has been unable to provide food aid to 900,000 people for May, June and July, out of 1.5 million supported under the Productive Safety Net Programme<sup>14</sup>—this means that humanitarian standards are not being met and people are going hungry.

Communities in areas where the next harvest is not expected before September 2016 (e.g. the Philippines and Ethiopia) or March 2017 (e.g. southern Africa) are experiencing extremely long lean seasons. The severity of need varies across regions and within countries: some countries have thousands of people in geographic 'hotspots' who have lost their livelihoods; other countries have millions of people in IPC 4 ('Emergency') conditions.

El Niño's impacts on water availability, and pastoral and agricultural production, has had cascading effects on food security, livelihoods, health, water, sanitation, protection, education and other sectors. Yet the response so far has largely focused on meeting immediate food needs. More attention must be paid to other sectors. In particular, the understanding of the gender-specific impacts of the drought and El Niño related shifts in gender dynamics is quite poor across affected countries, and most response plans make assumptions on gender not clearly supported by evidence and research.

*'About five years ago, it wasn't like this. In the last three years, it's as if we're going backwards. It is the first year I wasn't able to grow enough corn for my family and had to buy it.'*

Sofia Tista Sis, El Aguacate, Guatemala

*'We are surviving because of the water we are getting. I always look for the water truck to reassure my children.'*

Seido, Harisso IDP site, Siti Zone, Ethiopia

In short, the humanitarian and development community—including governments, donors, UN agencies and NGOs—are not where we should be. We have missed an opportunity to prevent substantial losses by vulnerable people. Once again, we have failed to apply the lessons of past crises.

## Limited regional cooperation

This crisis has had regional impacts and many governments and international partners expected regional leadership. Several regional organizations have hosted information sharing meetings and encouraged coordination—such as Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Eastern Africa and CEPREDENAC in Central America—and the regional Climate Forums have had a strong role both in providing forecasts and stimulating debates.

But overall, regional bodies have missed opportunities for facilitating learning, taking strong regional leadership and leveraging funding from external partners. Some efforts came too late, when affected communities and those at risk were already in critical need of assistance. IGAD, ASEAN and others could have provided stronger leadership and coordination as well as collective and concrete commitments to respond, including allocating country-level funding and declaring droughts on time.

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has taken important steps, including organizing regional meetings, undertaking region-wide assessments, and issuing a broad humanitarian funding appeal for the region calling for \$2.7bn, with a funding gap of \$2.4bn.<sup>15</sup> Work is beginning at last to consider how regional approaches and coordination around grain movements can improve local supply.

*'I used to have 942 pupils, but since January 2016, only around 400 are still coming to school. The others have left school to help their parents with daily labour in farms to raise money to survive.'*

Vasco Nyirenda, Headteacher of Malepera Primary School, Malawi

### Box 1. Gender in Ethiopia

Oxfam's gender assessment in the Somali and Afar regions of Ethiopia<sup>16</sup> found varying impacts on men, women, girls and boys. While the loss of livestock disproportionately affects men as the main owners of livestock, women's access to livestock products for household consumption (such as milk) has shrunk, as has their access to income from selling dairy products, over which they had relatively independent decision making power before the drought. With limited money circulating, petty traders (mostly women) have been forced to close, or significantly curtail business activities. Pastoralist women with children have resettled in sites for internally displaced people where they receive assistance, while girls are being taken out of school to help with the increased burden of household chores. Men, who suffer from more negative psychological effects due to their inability to provide for their families, are increasingly migrating to urban areas, along with adolescent boys and girls, to search for jobs.



## Box 2. Malawi

In Malawi, the majority of people interviewed by Oxfam in May 2016 across four affected districts<sup>17</sup> reported only having one meal per day, and were expecting not to have any food to eat by August. Respondents also mentioned that the water table is reducing, that they expect their normal water source to have dried up in August, and that the majority of borehole water is saline. According to them, women and girls are walking longer distances to fetch water and are facing greater risk of violence while collecting firewood. Girls are being removed from school in order to work to support their families.

## Box 3. The Philippines

During an Oxfam assessment in Mindanao in April 2016,<sup>18</sup> communities reported that food stocks from the 2015 harvests had run out, and that they cannot afford to purchase food from the market. Families reported having already started to reduce the number and quality of their meals—eating less or no meat and fish, and relying more on root crops. Women reported reducing their calorie intake in favour of their husbands and children. Farmers had already consumed seed stocks intended for the next planting season, compromising their chances for recovery, and had begun selling their livelihood assets, livestock and poultry at low prices because of animal feed shortages. The next harvest will not happen before September/October 2016. In some communities, fisherfolk reported that their catches had shrunk by as much as half due to fish migrations brought about by warmer waters. In addition, communities face water scarcity for both production and consumption. Women and children are responsible for gathering water for household consumption, and now have to walk an extra 1–2km to do so. Some areas have already seen increased incidences of water-borne diseases such as diarrhoea and skin diseases.

## Box 4. Haiti

In Haiti, a third of the population (3.6 million people) is food insecure. Forty districts are currently in IPC3 ('crisis' phase), and over 130,000 children are suffering from acute malnutrition.<sup>20</sup> An Oxfam study<sup>21</sup> found that there is a lack of water both for domestic consumption and livestock, and that households, particularly those in Belle Anse and Anse Rouge, have to walk 5–10km to gather water. Those who normally rely on income-earning labour in the agricultural sector have seen opportunities dwindle. Due to recent political instability and the government's reluctance to prioritize support for crops, these needs are not being addressed. Crops should be harvested in July or August but they will not allow for much improvement due to lingering drought and erratic rains. Even with coping strategies such as gathering wild food, making charcoal, and selling poultry and small livestock, the poorest households will not be able to meet their food and non-food needs without assistance.

*'We sold everything we had left in order to be able to eat. If only we could have the opportunity to choose an alternative solution to stop going hungry every year, this would be ideal. We can't stay inactive, yet the current situation is so difficult that we feel that our hands are tied and we can't give water or food to our children; but we want something better for ourselves.'*

Cristina Alejo Usulután, El Salvador

*The cost of personal and corporate tax evasion and avoidance in Latin America and the Caribbean is more than \$200bn a year. This is equivalent to 4.1 percent of regional GDP, and could be used to nearly double public investment in health<sup>19</sup> or boost social protection systems.*

# 3 GEARING UP FOR LA NIÑA

According to forecasts from the International Research Institute for Climate and Society, La Niña is expected to develop during August–October, with about a 55–60 percent chance of La Niña from October to December 2016. Some uncertainty remains, and the strength is not yet known (current forecasts are for a weak event).<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, the probability of this forecast, and the fact that this would affect people already extremely vulnerable due to El Niño, calls for action.

It is not possible to know precisely what La Niña could bring in October, but we can expect cooler- and wetter-than-average conditions in currently drought-affected areas including southern Africa, slightly increased hurricane risks in the Atlantic,<sup>23</sup> and dry conditions in Somalia, southern Ethiopia and northern Kenya.

Increased rain could be positive for harvests, restore pasture, and recharge depleted water sources. But, in some places, it is likely to bring flooding which could lead to further crop and livelihood losses, infrastructure damage and increased risks of water-borne diseases, such as cholera, as well as vector-borne diseases like malaria, dengue, chikungunya and zika. Food prices are likely to remain high until the next harvest—which is April 2017 for southern Africa.<sup>24</sup>

At the global level, early warnings are being issued, but donors are yet to respond in a decisive way. At the national level, a few countries (such as the Philippines) have started comprehensive preparedness work, but elsewhere much more needs to be done now to prepare for the arrival of La Niña. Note that there are two distinct types of work (see Annex for more details):

- Preparedness, which involves very detailed planning to get ready to respond, including risk analysis, developing triggers for action, mapping start-up timelines and decision points, and registering people for cash transfers etc.
- Early action, which is direct programming to reduce the risk of the forecast event. It could include commercial destocking, cash for work programmes, water source rehabilitation, and protection etc. This requires significant funding, but can be designed in such a way as to be ‘no regrets’ in that it delivers returns even if the forecast crisis does not materialize.

Preparedness is critically important and has been shown to save both money and time.<sup>25</sup> But to achieve its intended impact, it should lead to early action measures to avoid missing the window for cost-effective early action again.

Programmes should be developed now which combine response and recovery for El Niño with preparedness for La Niña.

*‘Now we fear the coming of La Niña. We are simple farmers and we don’t know how to deal with these changing weather conditions. As farmers, how can we fight the coming La Niña when we are just struggling to survive El Niño? I hope aside from food assistance, the government will give us technical knowhow for farming.’*

Johnny Lazarate, Barangay Kagawad, the Philippines

# 4 FINDING LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

The crisis caused by this El Niño was broadly preventable, and as such, is a modern day tragedy. The severity of this El Niño's impacts is a reflection of the world's failure to provide comprehensive and long-term strategies to anticipate, prepare and adapt. Many of its impacts—hunger, loss of livelihoods and displacement—could have been prevented or mitigated by well-planned investments in sustainable agriculture, basic social and physical infrastructure, and essential health and social programmes, among others. The negative effects of wasted resources, reversed development gains and human suffering—and potentially even conflict and migration—are severe and worsening.

Addressing this is crucial as higher temperatures, drought, erratic rains and unpredictable growing seasons are becoming the new normal—this is what the future looks like under climate change. This crisis, while particularly severe, is not a one-off. Climate change has supercharged this El Niño and will bring more extreme weather events, and make strong El Niño and La Niña events more likely.<sup>26</sup> The lack of climate finance hindered much-needed climate change adaptation (CCA) in many communities in developing countries, which made people living in poverty more vulnerable to drought. Only an estimated 16 percent of international climate finance is used for adaptation.<sup>27</sup>

## Addressing institutional barriers to effective responses

For slow onset crises, particularly drought, the collective response is almost always too little too late. Early warning systems and forecasting has steadily improved and continues to do so, but there remain some critical weaknesses in the system which must be addressed. Technology, ways of working and institutional capacity must be harnessed and adapted to build a better response next time.

**Stronger leadership and accountability for forecast crises.** While the solutions for slow onset crises are now well understood (and not subject to such complex political factors that stymie progress in other crises), decision making at all levels (government, UN, NGO, donor) is not adequate. This may be due to risk aversion (inability/unwillingness to respond proactively on the basis of forecasts and the fear of 'getting it wrong'), or development actors' lack of familiarity with appropriate response frameworks or political sensitivities.

Knowing that decision making is challenging, while also understanding that early action is supremely effective, we must seek to support accountability through clear strategic leadership at both national and international levels, bringing together stakeholders from different

*'It is no longer effective to view the devastating impact of these climate events from a humanitarian lens alone. Governments and the international community must urgently focus on reducing vulnerability of the poorest communities so that these events are not recurring humanitarian crises.'*

Mary Robinson, Special Envoy on El Niño and Climate, July 2016<sup>28</sup>

spheres: development, humanitarian, climate, IFIs, donors, and key private sector organizations (such as agricultural producers and traders, water providers, and other critical industry affected).

### **Development of agreed triggers and thresholds for early action.**

Acting early in the face of forecasts tends to fall between development and humanitarian spheres. It requires a level of comfort with uncertainty, a preventative approach, and working within long-term systems and structures. To address this, new ways of working need to be institutionalized. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Food Programme (WFP) and OCHA are developing standard operating procedures (SOPs) for El Niño and La Niña events, which is hugely welcome. Critical to this is the development, agreement and harmonization of triggers for early action.

**Funding ‘no regrets’ early action measures.** Despite unequivocal evidence that early action is both effective and cost-effective, finding funding for early action on the basis of forecasts is difficult because it falls between the funding envelopes for humanitarian and development work. There are various initiatives that offer promise (crisis modifiers, forecast-based financing, programme-specific initiatives like WFP’s Food Security Climate Resilience FoodSECuRE<sup>29</sup>), but these are not available to all or sufficient to provide early action funding at scale. A new way of funding early action measures must be found.

## **Investments in development**

The devastation caused by this drought highlights the importance of looking at El Niño not just as a humanitarian concern, but as a challenge to development, and an urgent reminder for the world to act on climate change. Investment strategies should start by understanding the causes of communities’ vulnerability. This requires a commitment from donors and policymakers to work with communities to better understand the risks and hazards they face from a broad multi-hazard perspective (including weather, climate, geography, political and socioeconomic factors).

Many of the actions needed to prepare people for, and cushion them from, the impacts of a severe drought require long-term development interventions, including critical investments in addressing poverty and inequality. These include:

**Scalable programmes – particularly social protection.** For countries that are susceptible to climate-related shocks, it is important that existing services and support for vulnerable members of society can be expanded in times of need, and reduced at others, rather than adding external, parallel humanitarian support systems (which are generally more inefficient and costly, as well as late). This is particularly the case for social protection, which is a crucial buffer for the most vulnerable and supports the sustainable development of markets for goods and services. Kenya’s Hunger Safety Net Programme offers a particularly good example of a system that was designed with flexibility and scalability in mind; it enables cash to be transferred to bank accounts within approximately two weeks of a decision being made.<sup>30</sup> Scalability is also

*‘I don’t know if you can imagine the situation for farmers here. But it’s quite a disaster. It’s a calamity. And it’s not happening to just one of us, it’s destroying the entire region. We have to leave our lands because there is no other way; there is no way for us to survive this situation.’*

Farmer in Montecristi, Dominican Republic

important for other key services and programmes that aim to build capacity, such as farm input subsidy programmes, veterinary services and health services for the treatment of malnutrition.<sup>31</sup>

**Greater emphasis from all actors on, and funding for, preparedness, adaptation and disaster risk reduction (DRR).** Interventions to mitigate El Niño's effects must be put in place well before the first signs of drought. This includes developing water supply and management facilities, promoting agro-ecological farming principles, building up food stocks and reserves, providing accurate and timely meteorological information and agricultural forecasts, building or strengthening extension services, and using farmer-led participatory research to develop context-specific crop improvement techniques, among others.

These activities are shown to save money and have a range of social benefits, yet they are often deprioritized by governments, implementing agencies and donors. Donors on average only allocate 0.7 percent of development aid to disaster preparedness and prevention;<sup>32</sup> some vulnerable governments do not even have dedicated budget lines for DRR and emergency response, and there remains a critical gap in adaptation funding.

## Tackling climate change

Governments need to work together to address climate change and its impacts. Unfortunately, international support to help poor communities adapt to climate change is woefully insufficient. Oxfam estimates that international grant and grant-equivalent public finance for adaptation is a mere \$4–6bn annually.<sup>33</sup> Meanwhile, the costs of adapting to climate change are rising. An Oxfam-commissioned study by Climate Analytics suggests that with a 3°C temperature rise, adaptation costs for developing countries could reach approximately \$240bn per year by 2030.<sup>34</sup>

In Paris, countries agreed on a long-term goal to 'enhance adaptive capacity, strengthen resilience and reduce vulnerability to climate change', and urged developed countries to increase adaptation finance commitments. Increased funding for climate adaptation in developing countries can help finance support and services essential to dealing with climate-related shocks. Unfortunately, the Paris agreement was not able to provide for concrete mechanisms on how to increase funds for climate adaptation and address the climate adaptation finance gap.

The 22nd Conference of Parties (COP22) in Morocco in November 2016 and subsequent UNFCCC meetings are important opportunities to ensure that there are sufficient funds to support CCA in developing countries. In Morocco, governments should aim to agree on a road map that will deliver \$100bn per year in climate finance by 2020, including clear and quantified goals for CCA and progress on the accounting and governance of climate finance flows. At the same time, governments, especially from developed countries, must increase efforts to realize ambitious targets for the reduction of the greenhouse gas emissions that are driving climate change and exacerbating extreme weather events.<sup>35</sup>

*'I planted my soya in December 2015, just after the first rains. To my surprise, the rain just stopped and the dry spell continued for a period of three weeks. It just started raining sometime in January. However, this has affected my crop, as growth has been stagnated. I wish there was a way I could have known about this delay in the rains. As for now, my crops have been lost.'*

Ruth Chitambala, Zambia.

# 5 RECOMMENDATIONS

## Recommendations to address the current El Niño and forecast La Niña

**Governments in countries affected by El Niño should**, with the support of regional and international actors:

- **Ensure data is available to design an effective response**, including on malnutrition, water availability and health. Use objective measures, gender analyses and disaggregated data to help identify ‘hotspot’ areas of need and vulnerable groups.
- **Ensure a multi-sector response**, stressing the need for support in neglected sectors. Support **livelihoods** through, for example, ensuring that appropriate agricultural inputs are available for the next planting season; scale up appropriate **social safety net** mechanisms; and use **market analyses** to support effective modalities for beneficiaries.
- **Provide clear and timely information to communities** on plans and how affected individuals can access assistance.
- **Host a visit of the UN Special Envoys on El Niño and Climate** and potential donors, to raise the profile of the crisis and leverage funding.

*‘It is critical that international donors stay engaged and focused on supporting efforts to respond both to the immense immediate needs and long term requirements to build resilience’*

Mary Robinson, Special Envoy on El Niño and Climate, July 2016<sup>36</sup>

**Governments in countries at risk from La Niña should**, with the support of regional and international actors:

- **Develop regularly updated and detailed forecasts** with national or international meteorological and agricultural services. Ensure that these are translated into locally usable information and concrete advice on how communities can prepare and adapt.
- **Identify needs**, in terms of resources, training and developing appropriate communication channels.
- **Implement preparedness programmes and early action ‘no regrets’ measures** that will mitigate the impact of a major La Niña event, and work to improve resilience in the event of more minor impacts. Combine efforts to recover from El Niño with preparedness work for La Niña where appropriate.
- **Call for an international conference on La Niña** to be held in September 2016 to validate national and regional plans, and consider increased funding needs.

### Regional bodies should:

- **Develop effective coordination structures and plans;** provide a dynamic approach that brings governments and partners together; provide technical support; increase leverage with donors and international actors; and encourage cross-regional learning.
  - SADC should continue efforts to ensure the coordinated, expedited movement of urgently required food and non-food commodities across the region.
  - IGAD should conduct regular joint humanitarian/development analyses through its Programme Coordination Unit and set up a strong coordination body to link with member states' preparedness and communication structures.
- **Plan now for regional meetings** in early September and late November, to feed into prospective global meetings on La Niña in late September and early December, respectively.

### UN agencies should:

- **Work with others to make data available** about the severity of the impact, the level of response, remaining response gaps, funding needs and the impact of unmet needs by country.
- **Use the new IASC Emergency Response Preparedness framework<sup>37</sup>** to ensure preparedness for La Niña.
- **Accelerate the development of the SOPs** for El Niño and La Niña events, so that they can be tested in real time in this La Niña episode.
- **Schedule events for the next six months** to enable effective planning and participation, including regional meetings in early September and late November and global meetings in late September and early December.
- **Review whether UN resources currently available to support the crisis are sufficient,** and actively support the essential work of the two Special Envoys on El Niño and Climate.

*'If we lose our assets,  
we become nothing.  
Our moral hope dies.  
We will be broke forever  
and will not be able to  
look after our children...  
I can tell you about my  
life before and after the  
drought—the difference  
is great. Now we are  
reliant on aid. It is the  
biggest challenge I have  
seen in my life.'*  
Habodo Gele, Siti Zone, Ethiopia

### Donor governments should:

- **Review existing business cases** to increase the allocation of funding to meet urgent preparedness, response and recovery needs, considering all applicable aid portfolios and funding streams.
- **Facilitate flexible responses** by providing bilateral funding allocations to national and international NGOs.

## Recommendations to address underlying vulnerabilities

**Governments vulnerable to climate change shocks** should, with the support of regional and international actors:

- Develop clear leadership and effective response models for **better preparedness**; strengthen local authorities' capacity; and improve **forecasting** by increasing the quantity and quality of weather data collection facilities, ensuring that information is communicated in ways that are accessible to rural farmers and other relevant stakeholders.
- Ensure support **programmes can swiftly scale up** to meet increased needs, particularly for **social protection**.
- **Mainstream CCA and DRR** in development plans. This includes allocating sufficient budget to support community-level initiatives. This requires an effective monitoring and evaluation system to ensure that projects reach and benefit communities, especially small-scale farmers, women and the most vulnerable.
- Support communities to **diversify and adapt their livelihoods** and farming practices. This includes improving water and natural resource management and access, and protecting small farmers' land ownership and livelihoods.
- Support and champion the call to develop a **road map for the delivery of the \$100bn commitment** at COP22 by developed countries to support climate action in developing countries. The road map should include quantified goals for CCA finance, and progress on accounting and governance of climate finance flows.

**Regional bodies** should support this. In southern Africa, the **SADC** should:

- Encourage member states to look beyond maize input subsidy schemes, and consider **diversification and strategic investments** specifically targeted at women and smallholders, such as water management, research and development, market access and extension services.
- Encourage member states to account for climate change impacts on agricultural production in **national/regional food security strategies**.

In Asia, **ASEAN and SAARC** should:

- Create a **regional resource base** that consolidates and facilitates the exchange of information, knowledge, expertise, funds and other resources to support the implementation of DRR and CCA policies.
- Increase member states' capacity to implement DRR and CCA policies by **expanding partnerships with stakeholder groups** and civil society organizations, and ensure that vulnerability reduction and resilience are top priorities.



**International agencies** should support this:

- **Development partners** should find new ways of providing **early action funding** (including crisis modifiers and Early Action Funds), and potentially more innovative approaches—such as forecast-based financing—on an international scale.
- **Development partners** should **increase focus and funding for preparedness, adaptation and risk reduction**. They should increase DRR funding to five percent of official development assistance.
- In the **UNFCCC**, **governments** should agree on a **road map that will deliver the annual \$100bn** for climate action by 2020, including clear commitments to significantly increase public funding.
- **UN Humanitarian Country Teams or Resident Coordinators** should be held **accountable** for the timely and effective leadership of national risk analysis and preparedness planning.
- The **African Development Bank's** commitment in October 2015 to nearly triple its climate finance to almost \$5bn by 2020—half of which will be dedicated to adaptation – is welcome.<sup>38</sup> This **should be swiftly implemented**, ensuring that adaptation resources are mainly in the form of public grants, rather than loans or private co-finance, and focused on specific needs of communities affected by climate change.

# ANNEX: EXAMPLES OF PREPAREDNESS AND EARLY ACTION ACTIVITIES

## Preparedness

### General measures

- Undertake risk analysis: combine meteorological and agricultural data to forecast impacts.
- Strengthen national and community-based early warning systems; communicate results effectively to all relevant groups.
- Develop multi-sectoral national action plans.
- Map start-up timelines and decision points.
- Identify resources, agree contingent funding.
- Develop and agree triggers for early action. Develop clear processes for triggering, escalating, recording and justifying decisions; harmonize these across organizations.
- Set up coordination, communication and information management structures and systems.
- Identify potential partners and traders, develop memoranda of understanding (MoUs).
- Provide training for local, district and national officials and partners.
- Provide information on how best to prepare at household and community levels.
- Undertake vulnerability assessments and register people for cash transfers.
- Build crisis modifiers into existing projects/donor proposals.
- Pre-position stocks.
- Identify key response modalities (cash, in-kind, vouchers etc); develop voucher templates if appropriate.
- Ensure evolving contingency plans that are updated with regular field information.

### Examples of food security and livelihoods approaches:

- Identify critical markets and create/update market and livelihoods baselines in light of forecasts to determine appropriate food assistance and livelihood support.
- Support cereal banks or investigate the creation of new ones.
- Collect regular indicators from community and national levels for use in early warnings.
- Identify key geographical access routes to get to markets in the event of flooding.

### **Examples of WASH approaches:**

- Collect community indicators and early warning information on surface water levels and yields, groundwater table levels, community indicators and seasonal trends in disease patterns
- Establish baseline data on access to water and sanitation, and hygiene habits and practices.
- Conduct water, sanitation item and non-food market baselines and analyses.
- Develop a water trucking contingency plan with community involvement by: identifying water sources; conducting market analysis of water trucking actors etc; identifying/mapping distribution points; and mapping health centres, ensuring all have minimum WASH standards.
- Promote good hygiene practices, household water treatment and water conservation for water scarce environments.
- Protect wells, boreholes and springs from run-off contaminated water.
- Promote raised latrines in flood-prone areas.
- Undertake evacuation drills.
- Prepare sandbags and pumps for use.
- Identify emergency flood refuge sites and develop a WASH plan.

## **Early action**

### **General measures**

- Activate MoUs with pre-identified service/commodity/cash providers.
- Engage actively with donors.
- Develop clear proposals and budgets.
- Activate crisis modifiers in existing projects.
- Activate existing contingency plans and coordination structures.
- Deploy surge capacity.
- Undertake rapid assessments and continuous surveillance.
- Use the UN cluster system to map needs, responses and gaps.
- Scale-up safety nets.
- Coordinate humanitarian work closely with development actors and, where possible, integrate with development programmes.

### **Examples of food security and livelihoods approaches**

- For pastoralists: undertake commercial destocking, provide veterinary services (mass vaccination programmes and diagnosis and treatment of diseases), and survival feed to core breeding animals.
- Provide cash for work and support for livestock diversification or flood protection.
- Support crop diversification/rotation, distribute and promote early-maturing and drought-resistant varieties, and shift crop calendars.

- Activate market-based systems to ensure adequate cereal supplies (support traders, lift export bans, make careful use of strategic grain reserves).
- Strengthen community adaptation capacity and improve the resilience of agro-ecosystems through training, farmer field schools, and techniques such as agroforestry, conservation farming and integrated production models.
- Begin food assistance in the most appropriate modality or combination. Increase size and duration of safety nets.
- Provide materials and support communities to protect their livelihoods assets (e.g. through elevated platforms/safe spaces to keep food, livestock, seeds and tools).
- Pre-position grain and seed protection bags.
- Establish flood/drought monitoring and early warning systems, and ensure that essential meteorological and related information are actively disseminated to farmers and the general public.
- Expand investment in irrigation and other water supply development and management facilities.
- Design and implement agricultural insurance schemes that minimize the risks that occur as a result of extreme weather events and other impacts of climate change.

### **Examples of WASH approaches**

- Assess WASH-related health risks and begin mitigation measures through improving access to water, sanitation and hygiene promotion.
- Provide in kind, or activate market access to, non-food items such as soap, jerry cans, etc. to improve hygiene and water storage.
- Begin mass communication and community mobilization to minimize risk of disease outbreaks.
- Select and train community volunteers and hygiene motivators.
- Provide free or subsidized water for immediate domestic uses by 1) rehabilitating water sources (repairing existing hand pumps, tap stands, boreholes, spring catchments); 2) developing new water sources 3) or, if no other option, water tankering.
- Develop relationship with local water department to gain information on water points and access to local technical expertise.
- Distribute pumps and promote water saving, watershed management, soil conservation and new irrigation techniques.
- Provide safe water and sanitation to shelters.
- Provide/promote raised latrines in flood-prone areas.
- Provide drainage to remove stagnant water.

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