

# REGIONAL SNAPSHOT

SOUTHERN AFRICA | FISCAL YEAR (FY) 2014



## REGIONAL SUMMARY<sup>1</sup>

Cyclical drought, food insecurity, cyclones, floods, disease and pest outbreaks, and political instability present significant challenges to vulnerable populations throughout the Southern Africa region.<sup>2</sup> Recent USAID Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) disaster response activities in the region have focused on providing emergency relief supplies and supporting humanitarian interventions to address the urgent needs of affected populations. USAID/OFDA also works to reduce the vulnerability of at-risk populations and increase their resilience to future shocks by strengthening agricultural livelihoods, alleviating sanitation and environmental health concerns, and building regional and national capacity for disaster risk management. USAID/OFDA maintains a regional presence in Pretoria, South Africa.

## RECENT HUMANITARIAN EVENTS IN THE REGION

- In FY 2014, extreme weather events, such as drought, cyclones, and floods, remained the primary hazards in Southern Africa, constraining agricultural livelihoods and the availability of natural resources.
- A magnitude 4.8 earthquake struck the Comoros in late March, resulting in landslides that damaged infrastructure and water supplies. The damage affected 10,000 residents and forced the evacuation of 3,000 individuals.
- In Madagascar, a countrywide locust outbreak threatened staple crops and was the focus of an intensive locust control campaign to eradicate 54 identified swarms.
- Food insecurity remains a concern in areas of Angola, Lesotho, Madagascar, and Malawi, with some vulnerable communities likely to experience Stressed—IPC 2—levels of food insecurity during late 2014.<sup>3</sup>
- In Malawi, nearly 1.9 million people—12 percent of the population—required food assistance in FY 2014. Northern and southern regions of Malawi are expected to experience Crisis—IPC 3—levels of food insecurity between August and December 2014 as extended periods of dryness and uneven rainfall distribution affect harvests.
- Namibia continued to face drought conditions during FY 2014 that affected the food security of 780,000 Namibians and created poor grazing conditions for livestock.
- Angola's harvest levels improved during FY 2014, following intermittent and below-normal rainfall during 2012 and 2013, which contributed to reduced agricultural production and a rise in the prevalence of acute malnutrition across the country. Drought response activities included restocking small livestock, providing drought-resistant seeds to vulnerable households, and training community health workers in the screening and treatment of acute malnutrition.
- Despite persistent food insecurity in localized parts of southern Africa, overall food security improved in FY 2014. National vulnerability assessments conducted across the region in 2014 documented significant reductions in food insecurity, with the number of food-insecure households declining by 52 percent from one year ago, according to the USAID-funded Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET).

<sup>1</sup> For additional information on Southern Africa, please see USAID/OFDA fact sheets, available at: <http://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/working-crises-and-conflict/responding-times-crisis/where-we-work>

<sup>2</sup> The Southern Africa region includes Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

<sup>3</sup> The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) is a standardized tool that aims to classify the severity and magnitude of food insecurity. The IPC scale, which is comparable across countries, ranges from Minimal—IPC 1—to Famine—IPC 5.

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## **USAID/OFDA PRIORITIES FOR 2015**

- Support efforts that advocate disaster risk reduction (DRR) and strengthen relevant institutions to ensure that DRR is a priority at regional, national, and local levels with a strong institutional basis for implementation.
- Invest in systems and services that identify, assess, and monitor disaster risks, enhance early warning, and improve access and analysis of disaster-related data.
- Support development of DRR curricula and training materials to encourage the use of knowledge, innovation, and education to foster a culture of safety and resilience, particularly in countries with a high-risk profile.
- Support interventions that reduce the exposure of vulnerable populations to hazards and build their resilience through investment in integrated food security programs that target households most vulnerable to recurrent natural disasters in the region.
- Invest in community-based disaster risk management to strengthen disaster preparedness for effective responses at all levels.
- Support the integration of existing DRR institutions and activities to eliminate gaps and strengthen response networks.

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## **CHALLENGES**

- Climate shocks in the region often lead to migration, increased reliance on external food aid, and negative coping strategies. Repeated shocks also erode communities' ability to fully recover, resulting in increased fragility and vulnerability to subsequent disasters.
- Unfavorable global economic conditions continue to affect countries in southern Africa, resulting in a higher cost of living and lower economic growth. As a result, national governments may face challenges maintaining social safety nets and other subsidies targeted at the region's poor and disaster-prone populations.
- Ongoing political tensions in Lesotho, Zimbabwe, and Swaziland have heightened risks for disaster-prone communities as government response capacities may be reduced in the medium term.
- Madagascar recently emerged from five years of political turmoil and international sanctions that contributed to rising poverty and vulnerability while eroding local capacity in disaster risk management and limiting humanitarian access. Recent democratic elections led to a lifting of sanctions but the country remains politically fragile and highly vulnerable to cyclical hazards such as cyclones, drought, and locust infestations. Such challenges could limit the Government of Madagascar's capacity to fully implement assistance, particularly when responding to multiple, simultaneous disaster events.

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## **KEY LESSONS LEARNED IN 2014**

- In Southern Africa, a region which experiences cyclical drought and floods, DRR initiatives based on conservation agriculture that utilize climate-adapted techniques have generated some successes at the local level in helping farmers cope with drier conditions. Farmer field training uses both hands-on experience and demonstrations to engage participants in sessions focused on crop diversity, appropriate seed selection, fodder management, irrigation techniques, and grain storage systems.
- Resilience-building efforts through the Zambezi River Basin initiative have introduced community-based early warning systems that are people-centered and engage entire communities in disaster preparedness activities.