European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

Southern Africa and Indian Ocean

Introduction

Cyclones, floods, drought, and disease outbreaks continue to affect millions of people in the Southern Africa and Indian Ocean region. Tropical cyclone Idai battered Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Malawi in March 2019, leaving more than 3 million people in need of humanitarian assistance. It was followed shortly after by tropical cyclone Kenneth, which hit Mozambique and Comoros. A drought in the region is already putting further strains on food availability. Early warning systems and early action can reduce the impact of natural disasters. EU assistance helps to strengthen the capacity of communities and disaster management authorities to deal with recurrent natural disasters.

What are the needs?

Extreme weather events are a regular occurrence in the Southern Africa and Indian Ocean region. They are becoming all the more frequent and intense as a result of climate change. The food and nutrition situation in the region has deteriorated as households are grappling with the impact of recurrent disasters that have severely damaged their harvests and access to food. In March 2019, tropical cyclone Idai made landfall in central Mozambique, bringing devastating rains and floods that left 3 million people in need of emergency assistance in Mozambique, Malawi, and Zimbabwe. More than 650 people died while countless others lost their homes and livelihoods. Swathes of cultivated land were damaged by the floods. Just 6 weeks later, another cyclone struck northern Mozambique and Comoros, creating additional humanitarian needs.

In Mozambique, the cyclones came just before the annual harvest season and exacerbated food availability, as some cyclone-hit areas were already in the grip of drought, crop pests, and low agricultural yields.

In Zimbabwe, the floods that resulted from cyclone Idai put further pressures on food availability, already strained by a spell of drought and a volatile economic situation, affecting almost 3 million people.

In Southern Africa, the 2018/19 rainy season in the central and western countries of the region has been recorded as the driest since 1981. In August 2019, Zimbabwe declared the drought a state of national disaster.
How are we helping?

Since 2014, the EU has provided over €145 million in humanitarian aid for the Southern Africa and Indian Ocean region, where EU funding goes towards disaster preparedness, emergency relief response, and food assistance. In 2019, the EU is supporting humanitarian action in the region with €45 million in funding.

EU humanitarian aid plays a pivotal role in promoting systems that can quickly provide vulnerable people affected by sudden disasters with emergency cash grants. This enables people to avoid having to sell their possessions when food runs out, only to find themselves even less able to cope with the next disaster.

Preparedness and prompt action can reduce the impact of natural disasters and help avert loss of life, livelihoods and property. The EU supports actions that step up communities’, and local and national disaster management authorities’ capacity to prepare for and respond to disasters. Several EU-funded projects use technology and innovative approaches, such as drones – used in the Idai response in Mozambique and Malawi – to map high-risk areas, or mobile text messages to warn communities of impending dangers. Increasing attention is given to disaster preparedness in schools through the promotion of safe learning facilities, training of teachers in early warning, and informing children on how to stay safe.

Following cyclones Idai and Kenneth, more than €17 million in EU funding helped provide people in need in Mozambique, Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Comoros with food, shelter, healthcare, access to clean water (WASH), as well as logistics support to reach isolated and cut-off areas. In the wake of cyclone Idai, civil protection teams from several EU countries were deployed to Mozambique through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. Their emergency response included search and rescue operations, the setting up of emergency field hospitals, water purification systems and telecommunications support for humanitarian workers. The European Commission’s Copernicus Emergency Management Service was activated to provide regular reference maps, showing the extent of the damage and inaccessible areas.

Beyond the immediate response, the EU also allocated an additional €10 million for Mozambique to address increasing food insecurity, health needs and emergency prepositioning to ensure preparedness for similar natural disasters. In Zimbabwe, the EU mobilised an additional €10 million in funding to address humanitarian needs in the country, arising from a combination of weather-related disasters (cyclone Idai and drought) and the deteriorating economic situation.

On 1 June 2019, the EU pledged an additional €200 million at the International Donors Pledging Conference in Mozambique to help the country in its recovery efforts and in strengthening its resilience. Of this amount, €100 million will come from the European Development Fund, while the remaining €100 million will be available in loans through the European Investment Bank.