

Regional Child Protection Rapid Assessment

Southern Africa El Niño Emergency Response

Although El Niño has ended, it has left a trail of suffering in its wake.

Food insecurity is yet to peak, yet children across the world are needlessly suffering from the effects of the disaster. Widespread food shortages are causing them to skip school, forcing them to work, separating them from their parents and worse.

Southern Africa is the area worst hit by the crisis with an estimated 49 million people at risk. USD3.9 billion has been requested for the 19 countries that have been worst affected, yet the current funding gap is almost USD2.5 billion. The United Nations' Children Fund (UNICEF) estimates that 26 million children across Eastern and Southern Africa are at risk from malnutrition, water shortages and disease.¹ Only 11.7m is needed for Child Protection, but only 6% has been pledged by donors.

In April, World Vision, PLAN International and UNICEF conducted a study across six countries in Southern Africa to determine specifically how children were suffering amidst the disaster. Specifically, the study sought to:

- Determine the scale and trend of the needs and protection risks for children affected by El Niño; and;
- Help prioritize the pressing child protection issues triggered by or exacerbated by El Niño

Methodology

Countries included were South Africa; Lesotho; Swaziland; Angola; Mozambique; Malawi; Zimbabwe; Zambia and Democratic Republic of Congo. The assessment included a secondary data review, an online Practitioner Interview and country and regional validation workshops.

186 respondents were selectively sampled in six of the nine countries (Angola, DRC, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe) for the Practitioner Interviews. Quantitative data from these surveys was triangulated by the secondary data review and the validation workshops to determine thematic trends, priority issues and recommendations.

The limitation of the methodology is the exclusion of primary source information.

¹ <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=54330#.V3uphrh97Zs>

Key Findings

Migration

Just under half of the respondents agreed that children and families were migrating out of communities due to El Niño. Over 70 percent of respondents cited a lack of food as the reason. Drought and the lack of water was the second most common cause of migration.

Child Labour

Just over half of respondents believed that child labour had increased since the start of El Niño and believed that it was more likely to impact boys rather than girls.

Unaccompanied and Separated Children

Results showed a pattern of increased separated and unaccompanied children as a result of El Niño. Over half of the respondents said that children leave their families to seek work. Just under half of the respondents said that parents commonly send their children away due to the lack of food. These children are likely to be between 5-14 years old.

School Drop-out

Nearly eighty per cent of responders agreed that school drop-out had increased since the start of El Niño. In one province in Zimbabwe alone, 6,000 children have dropped out of school due to hunger or the need to help their families with house or farm work.

Key Recommendations

Southern African Development Community

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) needs to review their recent statement on progress and response to the impact of El Niño in the region, recognising that boys and girls under the age of 14 years old are particularly vulnerable to child labour, sexual exploitation and school drop-out. SADC should assess how the El Niño response can better reflect the needs and adapt to fully address the priority child protection concerns identified in the CPRA.

Child Protection Agencies

Collaboration between the education and the child protection sector poses opportunities for all organisations involved in responding to El Niño, specifically:

- Agree on standardised procedures for school drop-outs. When a child is absent for 3 or more days identified ways to bring children back into education
- Share successful programming linking Child Protection and Education that can be scaled-up and seek funding for this.

Agree on multi-sectoral advocacy calls for on school response programs, ensuring that the most vulnerable are addressed through feeding programmes, provision of water and sanitation, and child protection.

Strengthen the child protection system so that mandated protection structures, community-based protection structures and child protection clusters/working groups, identify, refer and respond to cases of unaccompanied children, child engaged in the worst forms of labour (including sexual exploitation), early marriage and violence against children.



Donors

Before providing humanitarian assistance for El Niño response, donors must ensure that proposals submitted by organisations seeking funding clearly define how they have taken into account the risks to children, especially in the distribution of food and the provision of water, sanitation and hygiene.

Governments

Any further declarations of emergencies from governments in Southern Africa need to include reference of how El Niño is impacting children.

Governments who have declared emergencies should include child protection considerations in further assessments and ensure that the protection of children is included in long-term recovery programming with programmes such as skills development and access to justice for sexual violence survivors.

Expand social safety nets such as school feeding programmes. Targeted feeding programmes should include school going children, or select households with school going children, pregnant or lactating mothers and for this should be done by working with INGOs and regional actors.

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