

Briefing Note – 16 January 2015

# Malawi: Floods

Update



Need for international assistance	Not required	Low	Moderate	Significant	Urgent
			X		
Expected impact	Insignificant	Minor	Moderate	Significant	Major
			X		

## Crisis Overview

- Heavy rain since the beginning of January has led to severe flooding across Malawi. The southern districts of Nsanje, Chikwawa, Phalombe, and Zomba are most affected.
- As of 16 January, between 85,000 and 100,000 people have been displaced and 153 people have died.
- Crops, livestock and infrastructure have also suffered extensive damage.

## Key Findings

### Anticipated scope and scale

- The number of people affected and the number of displaced are expected to rise.
- Malawi's Department of Climate Change and Meteorological Services has warned of heavy rainfall and flash floods for the next two to three weeks. The southern part of the country should expect heavy rains, and the northern part will have local thunderstorms and rain showers.

### Priorities for humanitarian intervention

- Search and recovery operations, assessment, food and non-food items, shelter, and WASH.
- Southern districts.

### Humanitarian constraints

- Given the poor condition of roads, access to affected areas will be a major constraint.
- Information management and coordination issues should also be expected.

## Crisis Impact

Fearing further damage, Malawi President Peter Mutharika declared a State of Emergency on 13 January for 15 districts: Nsanje, Chikwawa, Phalombe, Zomba, Blantyre, Chiradzulu, Thyolo, Mulanje, Balaka, Machinga, Mangochi, Ntcheu, Salima, Rumphu and Karonga (OCHA 14/01/2015, GDACS 14/01/2015). During the rainy season the country is prone to flash floods, with rural areas being usually harder to reach (Our Africa 14/01/2015). On 14 January, a total of 1,000 people were rescued from isolated areas (OCHA, 15/01/2015).

### Access to Essential Services

**Food:** Thousands of hectares of crops have been damaged in the south of the country, and livestock has been washed away (International Media 14/01/2015). Long term solutions need to be found for people whose possessions and crops, which are the primary mean of subsistence for 85% of the population, have been completely destroyed in the flood (MSF, 15/01/2015).

**Health:** There is no information of the affected population having access to emergency health services, although there is a growing concern in disease prevention, given the poor sanitary and drainage conditions at relocation sites (OCHA 15/01/2015).

**WASH:** Flooding will increase breeding sites for mosquitos, and increase the risk of waterborne disease (ACT Alliance 13/01/2015). Most wells and boreholes have been contaminated by floods (MSF, 15/01/2015).

**Shelter:** As of 14 January, 70,000 people had been displaced. Reports suggest most of their homes have been destroyed (OCHA 14/01/2015). There are report of people in low-lying areas which are stranded and need to be rescued (International Media 14/01/2015). Evacuation centres have no clean water, food supplies, WASH facilities, security or cooking utensils (ACT Alliance 13/01/2015).

### Critical Infrastructure

- The floods have damaged infrastructure including roads and bridges (International Media 14/01/2015). Roads and rail lines have been cut by flooded rivers (Local Media 13/01/2015).
- The country's power generating company, Escom, has shut down its main hydro plant on the Shire River due to debris accumulating in the turbines. This has led to power blackouts (AFP 15/01/2015).
- A number of government offices and schools have been severely damaged.

## Vulnerable Groups Affected

Pregnant women, children under five, people with disabilities and the chronically ill are particularly vulnerable to waterborne diseases during and after floods.

## Humanitarian and Operational Constraints

- Given the damage, some areas are currently inaccessible, impeding assessments (OCHA 14/01/2015).
- Road transport generally becomes more difficult and unreliable in the rainy season, as routes are unpaved, making access challenging (Friends of Malawi 14/01/2015; GDACS 14/01/2015).
- It has been reported that boats/canoes are not available to carry out rescue operations (ACT Alliance 13/01/2015).

## Aggravating Factors

### Weather

The country has been experiencing heavy rain fall since 2 January. While a decrease in rainfall is forecasted for southern Malawi over the next week, more rains are predicted for the north of the country (OCHA, 15/01/2015). Malawi's population regularly experiences the effects of natural disasters, and are particularly vulnerable to drought and floods. On average, about 26,000 people and 6,000 houses are affected by floods in Malawi every year. On average floods reduce the total GDP by about 1.7% per year (GFDRR). Nearly all of Malawi's rain (over 95%) falls during this hot-wet season. Temperatures range from 14–24°C, with the southern regions experiencing warmer weather (Our Africa 14/01/2015).

### Housing/Infrastructure

13.8% of the population live in urban areas, while 86.2% live in rural areas. 12.2% of the population live in the Northern region, 39.5% in the Central region and 48.3% in the Southern region. If floods have affected the south of the country, this will lead to a greater impact on livelihoods and loss of assets (MICS, 2014).

### Other Factors of Vulnerability

Most agriculture is subsistence farming, and the 2015 crop outlook has deteriorated after a late start to the rains during the October-November planting season (International Media 14/01/2015). Prolonged heavy rains are likely to worsen the situation. Poorly distributed rainfall and early cessation of rains over January–March in Karonga, Mangochi, Balaka, Blantyre and Phalombe (FEWSNET 17/09/2014).

## Key Characteristics of Host Population and Area

**Demographic profile:** Population 16,360,000 (2014). Population density in Malawi was last measured at 134 people per sq. km in 2012 (UN, 2012).

**Food security:** 640,000 people are food insecure. At November, most of the country was facing Minimal (IPC Phase 1) acute food insecurity outcomes and poor households in MSH (Balaka, Neno, Mwanza, and Blantyre districts) and PHA (Mulanje and Phalombe district) were in Crisis (IPC Phase 3). These outcomes were linked to a reduced 2013/14 production due to dryness, along with significant reductions in income generating opportunities and above-average maize prices, leading to constrained food access (FEWSNET, 29/11/2014).

**Nutrition:** 25,313 children aged 6–59 months were suffering from SAM as of July (UNICEF 27/09/2014).

**Health:** Maternal mortality rate is 574 per 100,000 live births (MICS, 2014). Infant mortality is 86.1 per 1,000 live births (UN Data). HIV prevalence is 12% among people aged 15–49 (OCHA UNAIDS 18/08/2014).

**WASH:** 42% of the population lacks access to sanitation facilities (OCHA 01/09/2014). 86.2% of households use improved sources of drinking water (MICS, 2014).

**Lighting and cooking:** 9.5% of households have electricity (MICS, 2014).

**Literacy:** About 13% of Malawians aged 6 to 24 years have never attended school or received formal education. The national literacy rate is 63% for both sexes and 69 and 58% for male and females respectively (Government, 2008).

**Protection:** Up to 55% of girls and more than 70% of boys experienced some form of violence while growing up. Two in five girls and two in three boys experience physical violence, while one in five girls and one in three boys experience emotional and sexual violence.

## Response Capacity

### Local and National Response Capacity

The Ministry of Finance has set aside USD 1.08 million for response and recovery. The President has issued an appeal to the international community for aid, particularly in conducting search and rescue operations and the provision of tents, food and non-food items (OCHA 14/01/2015). The Malawi Defence Force has already been requested to undertake rescue operations by boat. The Government is planning to establish Emergency Operations Centres in Blantyre, Lilongwe and Mzuzu, and the Department of Disaster Management Affairs has established a hotline for the general public to report on disasters (Government 14/01/2015).

### International Response Capacity

The Government of Malawi, through the Department of Disaster Management Affairs, has requested the deployment of an UNDAC team to the assessment coordination and logistics coordination, as well as camp management (GDACS 14/01/2015). As of 15 January, the international community had activated the following clusters: Agriculture and Food Security; Health and Nutrition; Water and Sanitation; Transport, Logistics and Communication; Emergency Shelter and Camp Management; Coordination, Communication and Assessment; Early Recovery and Protection; and Education (Government 15/01/2015). MSF has been setting up tents, distributing non-food items, mosquito nets and water treatment kits, as well as building latrines to prevent the emergence of water-borne diseases (MSF 15/01/2015).

### Information Gaps and Needs

There is no information regarding the health status of the affected and displaced populations.

### Lessons Learned

Because of the scale of this disaster and the varied geography of Malawi, conditions on the ground varied a great deal throughout the flood-affected area. Survey methodologies must be able to adjust to these realities on the ground. The assessment design must be able to accommodate regional differences through stratification and well-documented and understood sampling methodology alternatives. The management of pre-crisis information and the synthesis of information from other sources (including government) also need more emphasis. The building up of a 'baseline' of pre-flood conditions serves to greatly inform the analysis of the joint assessments' results and should be built in to the planning stages (ACAPS).

Lessons learned from floods in other South African countries show that the quality of emergency response is reliable on the level of preparedness; proper understanding, by operational staff, of key concepts of coordination and operational guidelines will increase impact of the intervention; the quality of the emergency response also depends of the types of partnerships forged in the preparedness phase; field supervision is a key factor for satisfactory implementation and; data collection help in assessing the impact of an intervention (UNFPA).

