

## ZIMBABWE EL NIÑO HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

*Report Prepared for the Jersey Overseas Aid Commission, September 2016*

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### BACKGROUND

Shortages of rainfall in the 2015/16 planting season have been exacerbated by the excessive heat and dryness brought on by the El Niño effect, destroying crops and grazing pasture for livestock. The drought has also significantly reduced the demand for agriculture-related casual labour opportunities in rural areas. Casual labour is key to sustaining household incomes for the poorest families during drought periods. Without it, families have been going without food or income, and living on just one meal a day.

According to the ZimVAC rapid assessment report February 2016, the number of people experiencing food insecurity had risen from 1.3 million in July 2015 to 2.82 million people by January 2016. This number continues to rise and is now estimated to reach a peak of 4.1 million people by January 2017. **The government declared a national disaster on 9<sup>th</sup> February, 2016 which enabled international aid donors to provide funding.** However the response has been slow and underfunded with agencies (including Oxfam) having to scale back activities.

Zimbabwe is one of four countries across Southern Africa affected by El Niño<sup>1</sup>; the others include Malawi, Ethiopia and Zambia. In total, 28 million people have been affected. The impact of El Niño will gradually start to subside, but it will be followed by the counter weather phenomenon La Niña in the same regions.<sup>2</sup> Heavy rains and subsequent flooding are anticipated.

### OXFAM'S RESPONSE

Oxfam and partners are responding to the crisis by implementing the El Niño Humanitarian Response programme in Matobo and Gutu districts, in Matabeleland South and Masvingo Provinces respectively.

Oxfam is targeting 27,450 people through emergency food assistance; 10,950 people through repairing water sources (boreholes) and 31,805 people by promoting good hygiene practice. The programme is reaching out to marginalised groups - people with disabilities and chronic illness - to support the most at-risk populations during the lean season. Initially we had planned to focus on Mwenezi, Umzingwane and Zvishavane districts; as other NGOs were able to support these areas, we chose to focus on Matobo and Gutu districts as they had very limited support from NGOs.

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<sup>1</sup> El Niño is the term used to describe the warming of the central to eastern tropical Pacific that occurs, on average, every three to seven years. It raises sea surface temperatures and causes erratic weather patterns around the globe; some areas receive more rain while others (like Ethiopia) can receive none at all - often in a reversal of their usual weather pattern.

<sup>2</sup> La Niña is the opposite weather phenomena to El Niño. It lowers sea surface temperature producing a counter impact: bringing heavy rains in areas affected by El Niño and potential for flooding

Both Matobo and Gutu districts are highly dependent on agriculture for subsistence. Following rain failures in October 2015, poor harvests in February and March 2016 have exacerbated shortages of food and income.

**Table One – Total beneficiaries from the Oxfam drought response as of June 2016**

District Name	Activity	Reached HH	Reached individuals	Women	Men	Children
Gutu	<i>Cash transfers - Food Nutrition and Basic Needs Programme</i>	3,663	18,315	4,000	3,692	10,623
	<i>Borehole rehabilitation</i>	2,190	10,950	2,391	2,208	6,351
	<i>Public Health Promotion</i>	6,361	31,805	6,946	6,412	18,447
Matobo	<i>Food Assistance delivery</i>	1,827	9,135	1,995	1,842	5,298
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>14,041</b>	<b>70,205</b>	<b>15,332</b>	<b>14,154</b>	<b>40,719</b>

## FOOD

Oxfam is working through two local partners: the Organisation for Rural Associations for Progress (ORAP) in Matobo, and Christian Care in Gutu, addressing the immediate food needs of vulnerable men, women, boys and girls through the provision of unconditional mobile cash transfers. For the first time Oxfam in Zimbabwe distributed cash using mobile phones working with a private sector provider EcoCash. Each beneficiary receive their money on a mobile phone and a unique code which needs to be entered before money can be spent. The phone with its unique code can be used at local shops to buy good and also cashed in full at local banks and local money agents.



For the first time, Oxfam in Zimbabwe distributed cash using mobile phones working with a private sector provider, EcoCash. Each beneficiary receives a grant via a mobile phone, and a unique code needs to be entered before it can be used. The phone can be used at local shops to buy goods. Women of the household receive a card in their name even if the head of the household is male, as women are responsible for feeding the family.

The grant programme has additional benefits to solely distributing food aid or cash vouchers; specifically it reduces the cost of security in transporting large amounts of cash for distribution, and does not affect the sale prices of food at local markets which are already

functioning. Over 95% of the rural population have a phone or can access one – and coverage is good.

The response to date has distributed grants to 27,450 people (5,490 households) in the two districts. The monthly transfers were set at \$5 per person, with the aim of covering 50% of the household food basket and nutritional needs in May and June.

Beneficiaries were able to redeem cash or make mobile transfers as payment for purchase of basic household needs, mainly food.

Through Following a postdistribution monitoring exercise, it was noted that 87% of the money received was spent on covering immediate food needs such as maize, oil, sugar and is some case school fees. The cash programme helped Anna Hwatchi who lives in Matobo district to feed her family. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-X3DFqFvkE>

## **WATER SUPPLY AND HYGIENE PROMOTION**



**Training for Environmental Health Practitioners (EHPs)**

Communal wells and water sources are now at seriously low levels; villages report that they have to use a pump for over 45 minutes before getting any water out of boreholes. Women have to walk to water points 2-6km away from their homes and many are using water from unprotected sources. In an effort to address water supply challenges, the programme planned to rehabilitate 24 boreholes which have broken down. Findings from an assessment conducted by Oxfam in March 2016 revealed that many of the broken down boreholes have not been functioning for more than a year.

To date 24 boreholes have been rehabilitated with the support of local government technicians. New equipment is being installed at the boreholes to replace non-functional parts such as hand-pumps and cattle troughs, to avoid water contamination. Each borehole now has in place a Water Point Committee (WPC) to manage and maintain the

boreholes. So far 24 WPCs have received refresher training and a toolkit.

A lack of water and poor hygiene practices leads to an increase in water borne disease such as diarrhoea and typhoid. In cases where soap is not available or because it is seen as an avoidable luxury, we encourage people to use ash from their fires instead of soap.

To increase awareness on safe hygiene practices, a refresher training course for Environmental Health Practitioners (EHPs), who are community volunteers, was conducted by the Ministry of Health in May 2016. A total of 25 participants were trained - 5 males and 20 females. The EHPs in turn conducted 72 sessions in their communities reaching 31,805 people. Emphasis was placed on key messages including:

- Hand washing with soap or ash and clean water
- Promoting drinking of safe water; including collecting water from safe sources and storage and water treatment options
- Promoting and raising awareness on safe sanitation practices such as digging pit latrines and hand-washing after use

## **GENDER AND PROTECTION**

Worrying trends have been reported by our staff as people (predominantly women) look for alternative – sometimes negative (transactional sex) – ways to earn an income. We have seen an increase in domestic violence and girls being taken out of school to work or encouraged to marry, as families try to reduce the number of family members they have to feed.

To combat this we created 88 community gender focal points, which held meetings and discussion groups in their communities to create awareness on gender issues such as domestic violence. Activities focused on addressing the vulnerability of women and girls; for example ensuring that grants are given to the women in each family. Classes also put focus on rehabilitating boreholes in remote areas, so that women did not have to make long, dangerous journeys to collect water.

## **LOOKING FORWARD**

The situation is getting more desperate as the number of people facing challenges with access to food in the project areas and across the country continues to rise. In their July 2016 report, the World Food Programme (WFP) indicated that 40% of the Zimbabwe rural population will not have enough food during the lean season between December 2016 to March 2017. This is due to poor harvests in April 2016 and predicted poor harvests in October 2016. Funding remains a major issue; in July 2016 the UN launched an appeal for funds, predicting that 4 million people will be at risk.

Oxfam has scaled up our response in light of the predictions. We have secured funding to continue to provide food assistance and basic services to the communities until December 2016. We hope to find further funding to continue until March 2017, to support people ready for harvest in April 2017. We are continuing to rehabilitate boreholes and provide further fodder for livestock over the summer.

Zimbabwe is not the only country suffering: the El Nino drought has brought the driest season in 35 years and around 27 million people in across Malawi, Ethiopia and Zambia are affected. Oxfam is working in all three countries on drought response programmes, but more needs to be done by the international community to ensure people can survive.

## CASE STUDIES

***Sipho Mnkandla (55 years) of Ndabankulu Village Ward 4 Matobo, Matabeleland South Province, Zimbabwe.***

Sipho Mnkandla heads a household of 10 which includes her six children and four grand children (five boys and five girls). Sipho relies on farming and casual labour and due to the size of her family Sipho Mnkandla was registered for the cash transfer programme and received \$50 from Oxfam with which she bought 50 kg maize meal, oil and salt from a local shop. Sipho mentioned that previously they were surviving on one meal per day and she would spend most of her time trying to find work. Now they are having three meals per day and life is a bit easier. *“I am very grateful to Oxfam because I can now manage to put food on the table for my family”.*



***Reginah Nyathi (50 years) of Sankonjane village Ward 1 Matobo, Matabeleland South Province, Zimbabwe***

Reginah Nyathi is a widow and heads of a family of six children – four boys aged (19), (17), (15) and (12) and one daughter aged nine. She makes her living by farming and casual labour and life has been tough since the drought began with very little casual labour work available. The consequences for the family have been devastating as she has had to take two of her children out of school as she cannot afford the school fees.

Reginah is on anti-retroviral therapy and needs regular healthy food to keep her well. At present the family have reduced their meals from three to one a day.

Reginah was registered as a beneficiary in the Oxfam cash transfer programme conducted by our partner ORAP in Matobo district. She received \$30 a month from Oxfam and managed to buy maize meal and some groceries which has eased the pressure on feeding her family. She said *“I am very happy because of this programme and I am hoping that this cash transfer programme will continue up to beginning of next year and my health condition will perk up again”.*

Considering her health condition, this programme has played a very pivotal role in enabling her to feed her family who are now receiving three meals a day.

