El Niño and health
LESOTHO overview - January 2016

EL NIÑO FORECAST AND HUMANITARIAN CONSEQUENCES

• El Niño-related drought conditions, expected to be the worse in the last 44 years is forecast to last until March 2016. All districts are affected with Leribe, Butha-Buthe, Mokhotlong and Thaba-Tseka being the worst affected. The predicted weather outlook is expected to result in further water scarcity, crop failure, pest infestation, water-borne diseases such as cholera and dysentery, animal diseases and malnutrition.

• There is a specific concern on the closing of health facilities or suspension of certain critical services in health facilities e.g. admission of patients in hospitals, suspension of delivery services due to lack of water.

CURRENT AND PROJECTED HEALTH CONDITIONS

• Close to 300 000 people in 276 communities (15% of the total population) are experiencing acute shortages of water. Outbreaks of acute watery diarrhoea diseases and dysentery are already observed and will likely increase in the coming months.

• People living with HIV and AIDS are at high risk of these illnesses. About 90% of children under the age of five are vulnerable to diarrhoea and pneumonia.

• It is estimated that up to 500 000 people will become food insecure in 2016 (33% of the total population) with associated increased malnutrition.

• In December 2015 the Lesotho Disaster Management Authority issued a Drought Response and Mitigation Plan. It includes a Health and Nutrition Response Plan costed USD 4 million with a current funding shortfall of USD 3.2 million.

• Its implementation will be led by the Ministry of Health and the Food & Nutrition Coordinating Office with the support of WHO and other partners. Priorities for 2016 are:
  1. To strengthen management of malnutrition;
  2. To increase access to other critical health and nutrition services;
  3. To provide drugs and medical supplies for treatment of drought-induced illnesses;
  4. To conduct Health, Nutrition and WASH education to the general public;
  5. To systematically monitor response actions and track impact of the interventions;
  6. To improve partners coordination in the response to avoid duplication and loss of efforts and resources.

• WHO will support the Ministry of Health in:
  1. Coordination of the partners health response efforts;
  2. Management of medical consequences of malnutrition;
  3. Supporting the health systems to ensuring continued access to quality health services;
  4. Disease surveillance and outbreak response;
  5. Water quality surveillance.

• WHO is supporting the Ministry of Health to conduct rapid assessments including assessment of medical supplies stocks to better determine response needs in affected communities.

*INFORM (Index for Risk Management) is a global risk assessment index for humanitarian crises and disasters: http://www.inform-index.org/