

DRAFT CONCEPT NOTE
ECOSOC Special Meeting
Response to Cyclone Idai in Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe
Tuesday, 2 April 2019
10:00 am – 1:00 pm
Trusteeship Council Chamber, UN Headquarters

Introduction

The devastation caused by Cyclone Idai to the countries of Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe calls for an urgent response by the international community and it has been described as one of the worst weather-related disasters in Southern Africa, affecting one of the poorest regions in the world. As the affected countries and communities, the United Nations and the international community are responding to emergency needs, the Economic and Social Council is convening a Special Meeting on 2 April 2019 to bring attention to this crisis and to mobilize urgent support to address humanitarian needs as well as needs related to recovery, “building back better” and resilience building. The Council will also address ways to ensure support for a well-coordinated response and recovery.

Background

Tropical Cyclone Idai made landfall during the night of 14 to 15 March 2019 near Beira City, Sofala Province, in central Mozambique. The cyclone brought torrential rains and winds to Sofala, Zambezia, Manica and Inhambane provinces. The strength of the storm diminished as it crossed land. However, it continued to bring strong winds and heavy rains as it made its way across central Mozambique and into eastern Zimbabwe. Southern Malawi received heavy rains in the days prior to the cyclone’s landfall.

Flooding caused by Tropical Cyclone Idai’s weather system since early March has affected nearly three million people and caused almost 700 deaths in Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. In Malawi, about 870,000 people have been impacted, with 59 deaths and 672 injuries recorded, according to the government. Nearly 87,000 people are estimated to be displaced. While some rapid needs assessments have been conducted, initial estimates are being verified to determine the total number of people in need of immediate humanitarian assistance. In Mozambique, about 1.85 million people have been affected, with at least 468 deaths. Nearly 136,000 people have been accommodated in 159 sites across Sofala, Manica, Zambezia and Tete, as of 26 March. Health and education facilities have suffered significant damage, with more than 3,100 classrooms and 45 health centres impacted. Some 91,000 houses have been destroyed, partially destroyed or flooded, according to government reports. In addition, about half a million hectares of crops have been damaged, which will impact food security in the months ahead, particularly as the losses coincide with the annual harvest period. In Zimbabwe, at least 172 deaths have been reported, more than 186 people have been injured and 327 are missing, according to the government. In Chimanimani and Chipinge districts, at least half of the total population has been impacted, according to the preliminary findings of an inter-sectoral assessment mission which confirmed significant damage.

Humanitarian response is ongoing in Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, led by the respective governments with the support of the United Nations and other humanitarian actors. The United Nations and its humanitarian partners have worked with the governments of the three affected countries to outline the immediate lifesaving needs and how it will respond to these. In Mozambique this response will require US\$282 million to reach 1.72 million people. In Zimbabwe 270,000 people need assistance requiring an estimated US\$59 million. In Malawi, almost 870,000 people have been affected and the government appeal calls for US\$45.2 million.

While the United Nations and the international community focus on saving lives, providing relief and ensuring a coordinated response, it is important to underscore that disaster risk reduction considerations should be at the core of the international community's efforts in recovery in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, in particular Priority Four. Cyclone Idai was an uncommonly fierce and prolonged storm – yet another alarm bell about the dangers of climate change and extreme weather events, especially in vulnerable, at-risk countries. Driven by climate change and increasing disaster risk, such events are becoming more frequent, more severe and more widespread, and may result in security and conflict risks if not mitigated.

The loss of hundreds of thousands of hectares of crops ready to be harvested means that not only have people lost their homes, schools and clinics, but also their livelihoods. This came at a time when food security was already of concern in the region, where recurring droughts and climate-related impacts are further reducing arable land and pasture, adversely affecting agricultural production and livelihoods. Access to basic health services and education has been further compromised and damage caused to the infrastructure is assessed considerable.

Cyclone Idai is yet another reminder that sustainable development cannot be achieved through cycles of recurring disasters and responses, unless disaster risk management and recovery capacities are put in place to reduce underlying vulnerabilities and address the drivers of risk. For countries already far behind in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, this disaster will put them further behind in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The recovery efforts will require significant investment by both the public and private sectors. Reconstruction should be taken as an opportunity to “build back better” and should address the root causes of vulnerability, exposure and inequality. It is a chance to establish a pathway to sustainable development across all sectors that is informed by disaster and climate risk, prevent the creation of new risk, reduce existing risk and strengthen the resilience of the affected countries and people. Innovative financing for resilient and risk-informed reconstruction will be critical.

Objectives of the ECOSOC special meeting

The meeting will be an opportunity to:

- Update participants about the humanitarian impact of Cyclone Idai and promote increased awareness about the urgency, scale, and severity of the impact, and the current response efforts by governments and partners;

- Mobilize immediate support required by the international community – including to the international and national appeals – to save lives, reduce suffering and support livelihoods;
- Discuss the risks of losing gains made towards achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the required medium- to longer-term recovery and resilience investments, and support government efforts to address medium- and longer-term resilience and recovery needs;
- Discuss recovery strategies that strengthen collaboration between development and humanitarian actors through joint analysis to target the most vulnerable and exposed, address their concerns, reduce inequalities, and build resilience to climate and disaster risks;
- Discuss “building back better” and innovative financing instruments needed for resilient reconstruction that prevent the creation of new risk, reduces existing risk, strengthen resilience and supports sustainable development.

Expected Outcome

The outcome of the meeting will be a Presidential Statement highlighting the main conclusions and policy recommendations emanating from the discussions.