

Floods, conflicts and diseases: the triple tragedy

Since July 2019 many parts of South Sudan has experienced heavy downpours that has led to flooding and displacement. Although floods do occur in these areas occasionally, the level it reached this time had never been seen before. The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said that since July almost a million people have been affected by the abnormally heavy seasonal floods across the country.

President Kiir declared a state of emergency in the affected areas of Greater Bahr el Ghazal, Upper Nile, and Equatoria States “to enable the government and other institutions, and other governments of goodwill, to render services.”^[1]

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and partners are ramping up their humanitarian response to affected communities. According to IOM South Sudan Chief of Mission, Jean-Philippe Chauzy, “the level of destruction caused by the floods is unfathomable. People have nowhere to sleep, children are sick, there is no food to eat.”^[2]

The affected communities were already devastated by the conflicts in their regions and were facing hunger, with children already showing signs of extreme malnutrition. In addition to blocking access to health facilities and drugs, the floods come with the fear of communicable diseases.

The World Health Organization (WHO) asserts that floods can potentially increase the transmission of the following communicable diseases: water-borne diseases, such as typhoid fever, cholera, leptospirosis and hepatitis A, and vector-borne diseases, such as malaria, dengue and dengue haemorrhagic fever.^[3] Other health risks posed by flooding include drowning, injuries and trauma.

The needs of the affected communities are huge. In addition to the medical supplies and clean drinking water needed to curb disease outbreaks, these communities, already under severe risk of famine, will need food aid for a long time, as their farms and livelihoods are destroyed by the floods.

The floods have affected not only South Sudan, but other parts of the East and Southern African countries as well. The unprecedented rains can be linked to the effects of climate change, which affects weather patterns across the globe. Some parts of Africa are facing drought. South Sudan may be seeing the first effects of the climate crisis.

Although the floods cannot be prevented, we call on the government to mitigate the risks to communities by establishing an Emergency Response Unit to deal with the effects of floods and to pre-position drugs and supplies for quick delivery to those affected.

References

1. VOA. South Sudan in Focus: South Sudan President Declares State of Emergency for Flood Victims, October 31, 2019 <https://bit.ly/36yhCKD>
2. International Organization for Migration (IOM). Heavy Flooding Causes Extreme Destruction and Ongoing Displacement in South Sudan <https://bit.ly/2FsE0ZP>
3. World Health Organization (WHO). Flooding and communicable diseases fact sheet <https://bit.ly/39KSubM>

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An aerial assessment from Gumuruk to Lekongole, shows people in canoes and their completely submerged tukuls (Credit MSF)