

Beat: Health

ZIMBABWE RATED AS ONE OF THE WORLD'S TOP GLOBAL FOOD CRISES IN UN REPORT

SITUATION WORSENING OVER COVID-19 OUTBREAK

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USPA NEWS - Zimbabwe remains in the grip of severe food insecurity, with millions of people already requiring humanitarian assistance due to prolonged drought, climate-related shocks, economic deterioration and the situation set to worsen as the COVID-19 pandemic spreads, according to the new Global Food Crisis Report Forecast (GFCRF).

The joint report, released by the European Union, FAO, OCHA, UNICEF, USAID and WFP anticipates a worsening food insecurity situation in 2020 with an estimated 4.3 million rural Zimbabweans, including children, are in need of urgent action. On top of environmental factors, this is mainly due to the current economic crisis including hyperinflation, shortage of currency, fuel and prolonged power shortages; widespread poverty; high levels of HIV/AIDS; and low agricultural output as drivers of the crisis. "Millions of Zimbabweans are already struggling to put food on the table, having faced prolonged drought and economic hardship for some time. It is imperative that we unite, to fight the COVID-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe and provide urgent food assistance safely to prevent an already vulnerable population from slipping deeper into this hunger crisis," said WFP Country

More than half of the children experiencing malnutrition are living in countries affected by the food crisis. The GFCRF estimates that 75 million children worldwide are stunted and 17 million are wasted.

Zimbabwe is also one of 10 countries where fewer than 20% of children between 6-23 months received a minimally adequate diet further compromising their lifelong quality of life, according to the new report. In addition, Zimbabwe's Multi Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019, revealed about 1 in 4 children, under 5 were stunted and at risk of impaired physical and cognitive growth. "Food crises have a major impact on the quality, frequency and diversity of children's diets and this is compounded by the inability for families across the country to provide adequate childcare during these increasingly challenging times," said UNICEF Representative, Laylee Moshiri. "During this COVID-19 pandemic we must act decisively to continue essential nutrition and health services for all children." said FAO Representative Jocelyn Brown Hall said, "Measures to curb the further spread of COVID-19 have the potential to impact negatively on the food system in Zimbabwe, such as through restricted access to markets by both farmers and consumers, and a glut of perishable nutritious foods like fruits and vegetables. Deliberate measures are needed to prevent and mitigate against these."

Globally the report states that in 2019, 135 million people across 55 countries and territories experienced acute food insecurity. These same countries' food systems are highly vulnerable to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic which will result in compromised health due to hunger which can increase the risks of exposure to the virus. The World Food Programme's Executive Director, David Beasley, who interacted with communities throughout Zimbabwe during an August 2019 visit, told the UN Security Council last week that the world was on the verge of a hunger pandemic caused by the Coronavirus. "If we don't act now, we could be facing multiple famines of biblical proportions within a few short months," Beasley said. The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting all countries across the globe, including the OECD countries and other high-income countries. This is making it increasingly difficult to prioritise the needs of populations typically affected by food crises. This has put an increased challenge on the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2, towards the eradication of hunger and malnutrition. The Global Report on Food Crises is the flagship publication of the The Global Network Against Food Crises, an alliance of humanitarian and development actors united by the commitment to tackle the root causes of food crises and promote sustainable solutions through shared analysis and knowledge, strengthened coordination in evidence-based responses and collective efforts across the Humanitarian, Development and Peace (HDP) nexus. Source : World Food Programme (WFP).

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