

# Alert

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## Central America

# Response to El Niño and La Niña caused hunger in Central America

Geneva, 13 May 2016

### 1. Brief description of the emergency and impact

Central America is experiencing the worst drought in decades. Drought is affecting food security for a second consecutive year. More than 4.2 million people are food insecure, severe acute malnutrition in some areas is reported to be as high as 8% and need humanitarian assistance after suffering major losses due to prolonged drought conditions. Predictive models show that El Niño intensity is diminishing in Central America and the Caribbean. It will probably reach neutral conditions (neither El Niño or La Niña) by mid-2016. However, this transition increases the risk of a late and irregular start of the first rainy season and higher temperatures in Central America. The combined effects may lead to delays in sowing staple crops (first) and lack of water for human and animal consumption. It is expected that along the dry corridor in Central America, poor households most affected by drought last year will be in Crisis Phase 3 (CIF), if they do not receive humanitarian assistance. In Guatemala, serious food insecurity has been reported in the lowest areas of the Temperate Western “Altiplano”, where heavy losses in staple crops throughout 2015 have caused the poorest households to be totally dependent on food purchases.

All models predict the weakening of El Niño by early summer 2016. The chance of La Niña increases during the late summer or early fall. This forecast is consistent with the historical tendency for La Niña to follow strong El Niño events.

### 2. Why is an ACT response needed?

Urgent International support is required to support national government efforts. Only 25% of the humanitarian response plan developed by humanitarian country teams has been financed so far. Food insecurity is an important push factor for migration. The international community must intervene now to avoid any worsening of the situation and to protect the remaining livelihoods of the population.

### 3. National and international response

The Humanitarian Country Teams, with financing from CERF, are providing assistance for food, water and sanitation; early recovery; and basic health care to 51,743 families. They are also giving attention to severe malnutrition cases in children. In order to respond to this situation, the governments are promoting

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extraordinary measures, such as the rationing of water, delivery of food aid and nutritional assessment of children suffering malnutrition. However, this effort is still insufficient.

#### **4. ACT Alliance response**

The ACT member organizations and forums have carried out rapid damage and needs assessments in the affected areas, which has allowed to verify the different degrees of impact on livelihoods of families, as well as the little or no food reserves. Christian Aid managed support for food aid to 1239 families for one month in Honduras in October 2015. In Nicaragua, CIEETS, with support from Tearfund, is implementing a cash transfer program for 178 families for a three-month period (April-June 2016). In each country, the forums participate in coordination meetings with local authorities and similar organizations with the purpose of preventing duplication of efforts and to identify gaps in the response.

#### **5. Planned activities**

The member organizations of the ACT Central America Regional Forum will support affected families in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua with: food aid (either with food kits delivery or cash transfers), support to basic grains and vegetables planting. It is planned to attend to approximately 11,000 families.

#### **6. Constraints**

Because this a slow-onset emergency, there is fear of not getting appropriate resources to support the families at risk.

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**Any funding indication or pledge should be communicated to the Head of Finance and Administration, Line Hempel ([Line.Hempel@actalliance.org](mailto:Line.Hempel@actalliance.org)).**

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