OVERVIEW OF HEALTH RELATED ASPECTS OF THE CURRENT HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

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Background

- Countries in Southern Africa are currently facing a humanitarian crisis
- Climatic changes have impacted negatively on food production
- Total cereal deficit: about 5.4 million tons
- 13 million people at risk of starvation
Objectives of The Experts Meeting

- To undertake a critical analysis of the impact of the current crisis on the health status of people and health systems
- To advocate for increased support for the health component of the humanitarian appeals
- To agree on coordination mechanisms among partners in support to governments and people
Context

- Southern Africa is prone to climate related disasters
- According to forecasts, these climatic conditions will prevail during the current year up to 2003
- Need to anticipate food insecurity, seasonal hunger, malnutrition and increased incidence of certain diseases particularly among the exposed populations.
Challenges

- Use available health and health related information for planning and taking actions to prevent the negative impact of the climatic related disasters.
- Come up with adequate intersectoral coordination
- Attract higher levels of resources for the health component of Consolidated Appeals
Health Component of the Crisis

- Malnutrition is the immediate consequence of food and nutrients shortages

- Major impact:
  - risk of outbreaks of communicable diseases
  - increased morbidity and mortality of the population, particularly vulnerable groups
Health Component of the Crisis (cont’d)

- Commonest diseases: HIV/AIDS, TB, malaria, measles, water borne diseases, and increased complications of pregnancy and delivery
- These conditions are already prevalent in the countries
- Overstretched health systems
- Weak responsiveness, mainly due to inadequate resource allocation, inefficient management and staff migration
Health Sector Response
Organizational Level

- Baseline assessments to define the nature and magnitude of the health situation
- Need to re-allocate national health resources and call for additional resources from governments and external partners
- Adequate management of human resources, equipment and drug supply
- Interventions should be culturally acceptable, gender-sensitive and community-based
Health Sector Response
Core Health Interventions

- Disease surveillance and control
- Nutritional assessment and rehabilitation
- Preventive care
- Safe motherhood interventions.
Health Sector Response
Core health interventions (cont’d)

- Increasing rapid and long term nutritional surveillance
- Use of food aid in food-insecure areas
- Close collaboration between Member States and UN partners
Health Sector Response Coordination

- Many sectors involved, particularly in relation to food security and safety, potable water supply, shelter and sanitation
- This calls for effective coordination of all actors, and clearly defined roles and responsibilities of each sector or institution
- Importance of preparedness
Concerns expressed over:
- accepting GM Food aid
- long-term health and environmental effects
Call for an international system to evaluate these foods
Some countries have accepted GM food during the emergency period
The ultimate responsibility and decision regarding acceptance and distribution of GM foods rests with the government concerned.
Consolidated Recommendations of the Experts Meeting

- Countries should be the first to detect and respond to humanitarian crisis and call upon partners for additional support.
- Countries to make use of climatic data from SADC/DMC for planning
- Use integrative approaches to disease management such as IMCI
- WHO should provide clear guidance on the issue of GM Foods
- Use the crisis as an opportunity to increase the flow of resources and build up/strengthen HMIS.
Conclusion

- Southern Africa faces an unprecedented humanitarian crisis
- Immediate response is needed
- Relevant health interventions have been identified
- Appropriate approaches tools have been developed; some of them could used to deal with this crisis.
Conclusion (Cont’d)

- Challenges
  - enhance political will and commitment
  - mobilize all needed resources
  - Ensure accountability
- Link with sustainable development