

Aid groups respond to African drought, floods

by [Celeste Kennel-Shank](#) in the [April 27, 2016](#) issue

Millions of people in several eastern and southern African nations are facing malnutrition, disease, and other harm as a result of El Niño-related extreme weather patterns: drought in late 2015 and heavy rains in the past few months.

“We have seen too much water in some places and too little in other places,” said Nagulan Nesiah, a senior officer in Episcopal Relief and Development’s disaster response and risk reduction work.

Episcopal Relief and Development—one of the faith-based groups responding—works with churches of the Anglican Communion and related organizations and, through them, with the most vulnerable in their communities.

“Given that climate change is a global crisis and the effects of this season’s El Niño are much stronger,” Nesiah said, “we have connected our partners with each other so that they can learn from each other.”

Episcopal Relief and Development [created a toolkit, “Pastors and Disasters,”](#) that describes best practices to “assist a church that wanted to address drought conditions,” Nesiah said. “We also find hope in standing in solidarity with others.”

In Ethiopia, the worst drought in 30 years has killed hundreds of thousands of livestock and left 10 million people vulnerable to illness, scarcity, and other harm. In the 1983–1985 famine in Ethiopia, including land that is now Eritrea, hundreds of thousands of people died.

ACT Alliance, an ecumenical network of more than 130 churches and faith-based organizations, began a yearlong response in January, sending aid in the form of food, water, cash, and other support for livestock, sanitation, and agriculture—including fast-maturing seeds. ACT members, including the Lutheran World Federation, are appealing for more than \$5 million as part of the response to the drought, which may require \$1.4 billion for Ethiopia alone.

The Catholic Bishops Conference of Ethiopia told Religion News Service that the effects of climate change and environmental degradation are the worst it has ever seen. Caritas, the Catholic relief organization, is assisting in intervention.

“The severity of the situation is continuously increasing,” said Berhaneyesus D. Souraphiel, a cardinal and archbishop of Addis Ababa.

Other nations affected by drought and floods include Burundi, Kenya, Malawi, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. The weather is exacerbating the vulnerability of people such as Somalis living in camps for displaced people and those living near outbreaks of cholera in Kenya, according to the United Nations.

The effects of the weather patterns have extended longer than expected, said Nesiah of Episcopal Relief and Development, and “2016 looks like it will be a difficult year.”

Episcopal Relief and Development works with farmers in practices such as planting drought-resistant crops, including millet and sorghum.

“At the local parish level there can be some mitigation for the effects that are to come,” Nesiah said.

The strength of the El Niño-related extreme weather decreased in January, but the effects continue, according to the United Nations.

Ryan Lenora Brown, a correspondent for [The Christian Science Monitor](#) based in Johannesburg, wrote: “In South Africa, the continent’s breadbasket, agronomists estimate that 30 to 40 percent of all corn crops will fail this year, and food prices have spiked for consumers across the region.”

While climate change does not cause El Niño patterns directly, scientists are investigating the extent to which it is a factor in these events occurring more often and with greater intensity.

“In a recent paper published in *Nature Climate Change*, a group of researchers wrote that El Niño-linked catastrophic weather events are likely to nearly double in frequency by the end of this century, from once every 28 years to once every 16 years as a result of greenhouse gas emissions,” Brown wrote. “That’s particularly alarming news for Africa’s poor, who reside disproportionately in areas prone to drought, flooding, and other extreme weather.”

Parts of Latin America and Asia are also being affected by drought and other extreme weather. The harm, especially in causing food insecurity, could extend well into 2017, according to the United Nations. —*Christian Century*

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