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DESTRUCTIVE STORMS, DORMANT POLICIES: THE IMPACT OF CYCLONES ON FOOD SECURITY IN MADAGASCAR

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SUMMARY

- The island nation of Madagascar is hit by an average of 3 to 4 cyclones per year — among the highest rates in Africa. These violent storms compromise the country's already-tenuous levels of food security and economic growth.
- The country's 2009 political crisis has stalled the implementation of policies designed to mitigate the impact of cyclones and other natural disasters.
- Until the country's political situation is resolved, foreign aid cuts and economic sanctions are likely to remain in place, hindering the government's ability to fund relief and adaptation efforts.

INTRODUCTION

The island nation of Madagascar is one of the lowest-income countries in the world and, among those in Africa, also one of the most vulnerable to cyclones. Every year, Madagascar is hit by an average of 3 to 4 of the powerful tropical storms — one of the highest rates in the region (World Bank, 2011). These extreme weather events threaten food security as high winds and flooding damage crops and food supplies, as witnessed when cyclone Binzinga hit the country's east coast in 2011.

This backgrounder looks at how cyclones have impacted food security in Madagascar — where up to 83 percent of the island's residents suffer from nutritional vulnerability (World Bank, 2011). It will also examine government

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policies working to mitigate the impact of tropical storms on the country's food security.

CYCLONES IN MADAGASCAR

In the last 35 years, at least 46 national disasters (floods, drought and cyclones) have been reported in Madagascar, affecting more than 11 million people and causing an estimated \$1 billion (all figures USD) in damages (UNHCHR, 2011). In particular, Madagascar is prone to cyclones — since 1900, 45 extreme storms have caused over 2,000 deaths in the country. The reported frequency of these extreme weather events has increased in recent years as 78 percent of all recorded cyclones of have occurred within the last 30 years (OFDA/CRED 2011).

The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) estimates that 14 percent of Madagascar's 22 million people are at risk of being affected by natural disasters, and that 10 percent are specifically vulnerable to cyclones. Up to 11 percent of the country's \$10 billion gross domestic product (GDP) is exposed to the negative impacts of extreme weather (UNISDR, 2009).

IMPACT ON FOOD SECURITY

Due to their adverse impact on agricultural systems and farmers, cyclones in Madagascar are a major threat to food security. Farming, fishing and forestry form the basis of Madagascar's economy, accounting for 23 percent of GDP and 80 percent of employment (UNHCHR, 2011). Agriculture is dominated by small-scale farming that is rain-fed and uses other traditional technologies. Given the country's economic performance is contingent on this mode of production, extreme environmental conditions jeopardize an already precarious economic situation.

Over the years, cyclones have had an adverse affect on food security by reducing Madagascar's agricultural productive capacity and food supply. In March 2010, for example, 61,000 hectares of farmland were destroyed by cyclone Hubert, which reduced agricultural production across the entire north-east of the country. The destruction necessitated the distribution of emergency food aid, as did cyclone Binzinga, which saw the World Food

Programme (WFP) distribute 2,500 tons to affected communities (WFP, 2011).

MADAGASCAR'S POLITICAL CRISIS AND FUNDING SHORTAGES

Since 2009, Madagascar has plunged into an ongoing political crisis as the mayor of the capital city ousted the country's elected president. Given that most donor countries have not recognized Madagascar's current government, development aid has for the most part been frozen and economic sanctions imposed. The European Union — Madagascar's most important donor prior to 2009 — has frozen its development aid, amounting to a \$600 million loss to the country (UNHCHR, 2011). These restrictions have left government bureaus without sufficient funds for programming. The National Bureau for Risk and Catastrophe Management (BNGRC), for example, is still without a central strategic policy and does not have a concrete action plan for preventing food insecurity crisis in the wake of cyclones.

Similar issues face the Ministry of Agriculture's Department of Food Security, which also does not have an up-to-date policy in place. Since the political crisis began, the ministry has referred to the National Action Plan for Food Security (PANSA) and Madagascar's Action Plan (MAP), which have both proved to be ineffective moving forward. PANSA is a 10-year strategy (2005-2015) that aims to improve rice production, agricultural service centers, nutritional education and agricultural techniques, while MAP covered the 2007-2012 time period. Neither have a strong influence in policy making as they were developed by the former government of Madagascar and have yet to be fully adopted by the sitting administration.

A similar situation faces the National Nutrition Office (ONN), which is mandated to coordinate nutritional emergency interventions. Its latest policy is the National Action Plan for Food, which aspires to institute a national surveillance system to monitor food and nutrition, but has yet to be created due to lack of funding. At one time, however, such a robust surveillance system was operated by the Ministry of Agriculture. The Regional Information System on Food Security (SIRSA), implemented it in 2004, provided monthly information on agricultural production, weather

patterns, markets and food access, but the system closed in 2009 due to cuts to foreign development aid.

On top of policy inertia and budget shortfalls, there is also a lack of coordination between the various governmental bureaus and agencies working on disaster prevention. While there is a national platform composed of seven commissions (health, logistics and infrastructure, information, education, communication, agriculture and science), it is merely an informal forum for coordination, without any real policy making power. With so many parts of government working, or at least constructed to work, on issues arising from extreme weather patterns, a more systematic coordination of agendas and decision making powers is needed in order for a national disaster approach to be successful

CONCLUSION

When it comes to mitigating the destructive impacts of cyclones in Madagascar, policy formation and implementation on this file within the national government is at a stand-still. Based on recent records, there has been little progress in combating cyclonic and other environmental disaster-induced food insecurity.

The removal of foreign development assistance in the wake of the 2009 political crisis has worsened the situation, and has been further exacerbated by government's inability to create conditions that win back donor confidence. The future food security situation that Madagascar faces is grim. Authorities are ill-equipped to handle the current impacts on agricultural production as well as long-term planning for future extreme weather events. For Madagascar's XX million people in the country who are vulnerable to the effects of cyclones, relief efforts from the government and its agencies are likely to continue to be inadequate for the near- to medium-term until a more well-funded and collaborative approach is adopted.

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The Africa Portal is an online knowledge resource for policy-related issues on Africa. An undertaking by the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), Makerere University (MAK), and the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), the Africa Portal offers open access to a suite of features including an online library collection; a resource for opinion and analysis; an experts directory; an international events calendar; and a mobile technology component—all aimed to equip users with research and information on Africa's current policy issues.

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