

GCE and Southern African National Education Coalitions' Statement on the effects and destruction caused by Cyclone Freddy in Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Madagascar

Cyclones in the past have wreaked havoc in the Southern and Central parts of Mozambique, Eastern Zimbabwe, Southern Malawi, and Madagascar being the hardest hit in the most recent years.

This is indicative of a recurring pattern which calls for these countries and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to be better prepared.

Four years ago, Cyclone Idai was one of the worst tropical cyclones on record to affect Africa and the Southern Hemisphere.

The long-lived storm, which made its landfall on March 4th and lasted until March 21st in 2019, caused catastrophic damage to infrastructure and a humanitarian crisis in Mozambique (culminating with the decree of the State of Emergency by the President of the Republic), Zimbabwe, and Malawi leaving more than 1 500 people dead and many more missing.

Up to this day, these countries are still recovering, however, yet another devastating storm, Cyclone Freddy, has caused similar damage and left unfathomable damage once again across the three countries, leaving over "600 people dead, and more than 500 000 people affected in the Southern Africa region," the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said in a report, adding that more than 183 100 people had been displaced. The Southern Region of Malawi, and in particular Blantyre, has been badly affected by Cyclone Freddy registering over 500 deaths, 86 in Mozambique and 17 in Madagascar. These figures are expected to rise as search and rescue efforts continue. UNICEF noted that Cyclone Freddy has left more than 280 000 children in Malawi in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. This might be the same case scenario in the other three countries affected.

At the advent of the news of Cyclone Freddy in Zimbabwe in February, schools were closed for some few days, until the threat dissipated. Some roads in the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe were affected by landslides, whilst some parts were flooded by water flowing from Mozambique. In Mozambique, a number of warnings on Cyclone Freddy were issued, which culminated in the closure of some schools and other essential services (public and private), due to the destruction of infrastructure, specifically in the District of Boane in the Province of Cidade de Maputo and the City of Quelimane in the province of Zambezia.

Two weeks later, Cyclone Freddy caused more damage, this time in Madagascar. This is the eight tropical cyclone to hit the island nation in the last 13 months, compounding the climate crisis in this region. More than 3 100 people have been displaced and over 3 300 buildings flooded or destroyed in the south-western coast of Madagascar. As a precautionary measure, schools were closed from 13th of March 2023 in Malawi as the cyclone was at its peak. The period has however now been extended to 17th April 2023 due to the extensive damage caused by Cyclone Freddy. Some schools are also being used as shelters for displaced communities.

Due to incessant rains, flooding and strong winds from the week beginning 6 March 2023 up to this day, a number of people have lost their lives due to mudslides from the mountains and flooding, road infrastructure has been affected, a number of houses and other buildings have been swept away rendering people homeless, whilst learners are, once again, being deprived of their right to education due to closure or destruction of learning facilities.

Since electricity and water supplies constitute an important part of education facilities, most have been destroyed, accompanied by internet cuts off, meaning that digital learning has also been made impossible.

It is within this context that the GCE, Civil Society Education Coalitions of Malawi (CSEC), Coalition Nationale Malgache Pour l'Education Pour Tous (CONAMEPT), Education Coalition of Zimbabwe (ECOZI) and Movimento de Educacao para Todos (MEPT), are raising alarm and concern in relation to the perennial cyclones and climate change-related disasters in Southern Africa which will keep on disrupting learning in the region and also keep students out of school, destroy learning institutions and ICT infrastructure. Undoubtedly, this will, particularly in the hardest hit and low-income regions, cause learners to miss classes and be left behind in learning, adding insult to injury that was caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In Malawi and Mozambique, the cholera outbreak could also worsen due to flooding, the lack of proper water reticulation systems, sewer disposal, among other effects of the cyclone.

GCE and its esteemed members are saddened by the loss of life and suffering of people across the four countries caused by Cyclone Freddy and are in solidarity with people working in these countries who are tirelessly supporting governments to respond to this disaster.

GCE and the Southern African National Educations Coalitions would therefore like to call on the international community and partners to assist Malawi, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Madagascar speedily following the devastating effects of Cyclone Freddy.

There is a high possibility that after Cyclone Freddy, rains will continue at least in the foreseeable future and floods widespread. The storm dumped six months' worth of rainfall in six days in Southern Malawi, leaving a trail of destruction and severely damaged infrastructure, as well as flooding farmland. We cannot dismiss the advent of another devastating cyclone as the region has become prone to vicious storms in the most recent years.

Therefore, the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) calls on:

- All stakeholders to immediately evacuate all people affected to areas least affected by the tropical storm and restore learning for children, complemented with a constant supply of basic public services, including water, health, shelter, food and clothing. This can be done by construction of temporary physical learning infrastructures or through digital learning so that learners are not further left behind in their studies.
- More effort to be directed to the isolated and hard to reach areas such as Phalombe and Mulanje in Malawi, Estevele and Eduardo Mondlane in the province of Maputo



and in Quelimane in Mozambique, where victims and survivors of the cyclone are reportedly completely cut-off and no aid has reached them to date.

- For the governments of Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Malawi and Madagascar to allocate emergency funds towards restoration of livelihoods and improve contingency plans for education in emergencies to ensure that learning does not stop/is disrupted during such crises. Learners should have unrestricted access to digital or distance learning even in the context of climate change-related disasters.
- SADC to improve and step up their disaster response and management by urgently assuming a leadership role and assisting the affected countries with recovery efforts, evacuation of survivors of the floods and restoration of learning infrastructure (either physical or online platforms).
- UN agencies and the international community to activate their rapid recovery and humanitarian assistance mechanisms as it has been recently done in Syria and Türkiye following the devastating earthquake in early February 2023.

Additional information or inquire on support needs can be provided by:

- Embassies and Consulates of the four countries across the world.
- In-country humanitarian agencies, churches, CSOs and NGOs based in the four Southern African countries.
- Government offices, websites, social media handles and news outlets.