

Disease fears mount for Africa cyclone survivors

March 24 2019, by Adrien Barbier And Joaquim Nhamirre



Cyclone survivors shelter in a school in Beira, Mozambique

Disease is threatening to aggravate the already dire conditions facing millions of survivors following the powerful tropical cyclone which ravaged southern Africa 10 days ago, officials warned on Sunday.

Cyclone Idai smashed into Mozambique's coast unleashing hurricane-force wind and rain that flooded swathes of the poor country before battering eastern Zimbabwe—killing 705 people across the two nations.

Amid the ongoing crisis, Zimbabwean television ZBC on Sunday reported that a young woman had given birth while sheltering from the floods in a tree.

Speaking at a briefing in Beira, 1,000 kilometres (620 miles) northeast of the Mozambique capital Maputo, Lands Minister Celso Correia said it was now "inevitable that cases of cholera and malaria will arise".

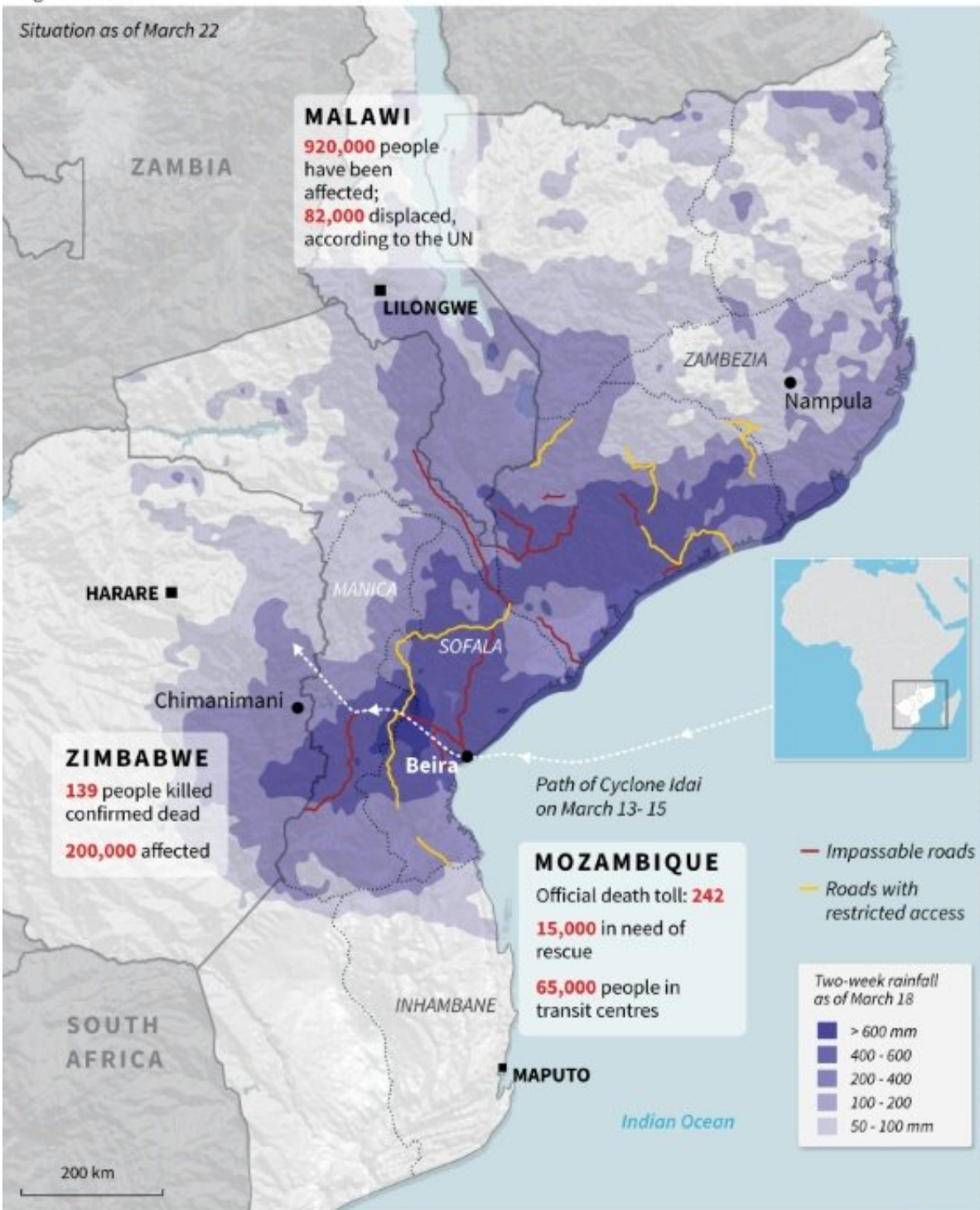
The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' deputy head Sebastian Rhodes Stampa, also at the briefing, warned that disease outbreaks in inaccessible areas could be "really problematic".

The World Food Programme said Friday that the humanitarian disaster unfolding in Mozambique was on a par with the situation in Yemen and Syria which are both in the grip of civil wars.

Aid workers from across the world are continuing to arrive in the region to bring help to hundreds of thousands of affected people across an area of roughly 3,000 square kilometres (around 1,160 square miles).

Flooding in southern Africa

Officials estimate that more than 1.7 million people had been affected by Cyclone Idai that ravaged the region last week



Updated graphic showing the flooding situation in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and

Malawi

'We suffered a lot'

Survivors are struggling in desperate conditions with some still trapped on rooftops and those rescued in urgent need of food and medical supplies.

"The government is already setting up a cholera treatment centre to mitigate cholera. We should not be frightened when cholera issues arise," added Correia, describing efforts to control the emerging humanitarian crisis.

"It is normal. It's almost inevitable. Malaria, we know how it arises. We have lots of wetlands and we're going to have malaria that is sure to come up (there)."

Wilfried Delivai, a 19-year-old resident of Beira which was caught in the eye of the storm, said he felt "sorry for our town, our city, because we suffered a lot to build it".

"Houses are completely destroyed, and some people don't have money to rebuild their businesses—and many businesses are going to fail," he told AFP.



A woman eats at an emergency foodbank in Beira, Mozambique

'People don't know what to do'

More than two million people have been affected in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi where the storm started as a tropical depression causing flooding which killed 60 and displaced nearly a million people. Hundreds are still missing in Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

In its daily update, OCHA said 74,600 women impacted by the cyclone are pregnant and around 60 percent of them are due to give birth within the next six months. At least 7,460 of them are at risk of life threatening complications.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said it had recorded some cases of cholera so far but the UN was unable to confirm the reports.

Stampa described efforts to re-open the main access road to Beira as a "big victory".

"We will be able to bring more help to families living in this affected area," he said.



A priest prays during a service at the Ponta Gea Roman Catholic Cathedral

Those living in affected areas of Mozambique began to trickle back to

church over the weekend.

The Ponta Gea Catholic Cathedral in Beira was miraculously undamaged by the storm while the church next door was levelled.

"The people don't know what to do because they lost their houses, they have no food, they don't know where to sleep—this brings sadness and anxiety," said Father Pedro, who conducted a mass in darkness late on Saturday.

Much of the area hit by the cyclone remains disconnected from electricity supplies, complicating rescue efforts at night-fall.

As many as 109,000 people are living in shelters across central Mozambique, many of them located in and around Beira.

Those shelters also "run the risk of infectious disease such as diarrhoeal disease and measles", James McQuen Patterson, UNICEF's health and nutrition chief told AFP.



Elena Joaquin, 6, sits in a shelter in Buzi, Mozambique

"Further, as many families have lost everything, some sleeping in the open, the risk of pneumonia, particularly among children increases considerably," he said.

One survivor was six-year-old Elena Joaquin, who clutched a coconut as she sat surrounded by pots and pans at a shelter in Buzi, southwest of Beira, where she had sought refuge along with her parents.

He also highlighted the need to helping people living with HIV/AIDS of to resume treatment as soon as possible in the Sofala, which has one of the highest rates of HIV infection in Mozambique.

But life had slowly begun to return to normal in central Beira where traffic was flowing more than in recent days and business were resuming trade.

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