People in the Grand Sud of Madagascar are facing the most acute drought the region has seen in forty years, leading to a severe humanitarian crisis. The region has been buffeted by back-to-back droughts during the 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 rainy seasons, compounded by sandstorms and pest infestations. In the hardest-hit areas, over 60 per cent of crops have been lost, forcing people to resort to desperate survival measures, such as eating locusts, raw red cactus fruits or wild leaves.

As we are entering the lean season, at least 1.31 million people—nearly two in every five people in the Grand Sud—will face high levels of acute food insecurity, according to the latest IPC analysis. Of these, some 480,000 people are projected to be in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) food insecurity, while at least 28,000 people will experience Catastrophic food insecurity (IPC Phase 5), and Ambovombe-Androy district will, in a worst-case scenario, be at risk of famine. Global acute malnutrition (GAM) rates have risen sharply in the Grand Sud, with devastating consequences for children. In some regions, malnutrition is almost quadruple the five-year average. 1.1 million people are in urgent need of emergency livelihood assistance to increase the local production of food andvert catastrophe.

The crisis is, however, about more than hunger and malnutrition. The dire humanitarian situation in the Grand Sud is leading to increasing school dropouts, a rise in gender-based violence and child abuse, and displacement from rural to urban areas in a context where access to basic services is extremely limited. Many people have been forced to sell all of their household belongings—including pots and pans—as a result of severe debt, leaving them unable to cook food or feed their families.

Since April, 2021, Madagascar is also facing a major outbreak of the Malagasy Migratory Locust (LMC) exceeding the national response capacities. Of the regions already infested by LMS or potentially affected by locust infestations, five are in an emergency and catastrophe situation (IPC Phases 4 and 5), and two are in a crisis situation (IPC Phase 3). The rural population exposed to the locust risk is estimated at 4.25 million people, or 15 percent of the Malagasy population. Of these, approximately
one million may have their livelihoods, nutrition, and food security diminished as a result of crop and pasture damage caused by the Malagasy Migratory Locust.

The crisis has impacted the health of communities in the Grand Sud, with water shortages—and increases in water prices of about 10 to 15 times the average—forcing families to drink and cook with unsafe water, exposing them to disease outbreaks.

In the first seven months of 2021, humanitarians provided life-saving assistance to more than 879,000 people in the Grand Sud. Over 867,000 people received critical food and livelihoods assistance to help them survive the drought, although humanitarians were forced to cut food aid rations by half to assist more people due to limited funding. Nearly 176,000 children and pregnant and lactating women received nutritional support or treatment and more than 251,100 people had access to safe water.

Partners also reached 35,200 people with prevention of gender-based violence and reproductive health awareness campaigns. Four UN Agencies (WFP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO) have declared the crisis an internal Level 2 emergency, enabling them to ramp-up their responses.

However, more funding is urgently needed to save lives and livelihoods and alleviate suffering in the Grand Sud, especially as the next lean season has already started. Humanitarians have revised their requirements to reflect the failure of the last harvest and the prolongation of the crisis, which is expected to last until at least April 2022. With 1.59 million people in need of assistance out of a total population in the Grand Sud of 2.78 million, humanitarians are seeking nearly $231 million to assist 1.31 million people, of which $106.1 million has been generously provided by donors.

Given the severity of the needs in the Grand Sud, it is critical that aid organizations can deploy additional staff and respond at scale. The commencement of internal UNHAS flights on 9 August was a welcome development and will significantly enhance access by humanitarian partners within Madagascar and the Grand Sud. In addition, the Government’s increased approval for the arrival of humanitarian workers from both the United Nations and non-governmental organizations in recent weeks is a positive trend. However, there are still only a limited number of international inbound flights into Madagascar each week, with seats subject to individual approvals from Government.

We call on States to ensure that additional humanitarian funding is provided to enable the humanitarian community to urgently scale up to address escalating needs and prevent famine. With the lean season beginning now, time is of the essence. We also need additional flights and visas to bring in more aid workers, who are fully committed to respecting COVID-19 containment measures, including the proposed WFP international humanitarian flights from Johannesburg to Antananarivo.