

Zambia and Namibia have been hit by the worst floods in 40 years

Zambia and Namibia are facing their worst floods in at least 40 years as rains swell the Zambezi River to record levels, destroying crops and swamping whole villages, disaster officials and aid workers have said.

Matthew Cochrane, spokesman for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) drew attention to the risks of “malarial and diarrhoeal diseases, and just the lack of food.” He went on to say that 70 to 80 percent of food stocks had been wiped out in some villages. Cochrane added that the situation is “getting much worse”, predicting that the water level will surpass 26 feet in coming days. In Zambia, water levels in some districts were higher than they had been since 1969, threatening crops ahead of the critical summer growing season. The Red Cross has said that some 400,000 people have been affected on both sides of Namibia's border with Angola alone and this number is likely to rise.

The official death toll in Namibia is 92 but aid workers said it would almost certainly be much higher. The Southern Province of Zambia is the worst hit, with more than 20,000 households affected and 5,000 houses destroyed according to the Swiss branch of relief group Action by Churches Together. Dominic Mulenga, national coordinator of the Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit said that the road linking Zambia and Zimbabwe was damaged, cutting off Shang'ombo district from the rest of the country.

Zambia has put its air force on standby to airlift people to safety and Namibia has declared a state of emergency in flood-hit areas as waterways burst their banks in the narrow Caprivi Strip between Zambia and Botswana.

Peter Rees-Gildea, the IFRC's head of operations in Geneva, said the organisation was keeping a close eye on Tropical Storm Izilda, which was heading for Mozambique's east coast.