

Cyclone Idai - Mozambique

Situation Report #1

***Télécoms Sans Frontières (TSF)** is the leading international NGO specialized in telecommunications and new technologies in response to humanitarian crises. TSF deploys in less than 24 hours on all crisis sites (natural disasters, conflicts, population displacements) to provide means of communication to affected people and to ensure coordination, facilitating communication and access to information humanitarian organizations. The NGO is also involved in development projects using ICT solutions to respond to long-term crises.*

Situation overview

The humanitarian situation is considerable, the affected areas very extensive, and the number of victims is expected to be very high. The first days after the cyclone were very critical due the torrential rains aggravating the situation and causing deadly floods.

While the humanitarian response initially addressed the consequences related to one disaster, namely the cyclone, it is now a response to two disasters: the cyclone and the floods. This resulted in days of confusion, with difficulties in knowing the areas affected by one or the other. Indeed, the victims were not the same: the cyclone affected the most fragile homes in the exposed areas, while the floods affected any structures located in the areas at risk of flooding.

Geography makes the affected areas very difficult to access, and the demographic distribution spread over such a zone of intervention makes the prioritization of needs very difficult: most of the people affected were living in Beira, the main city, but higher mortality rates are affecting less populated areas around Beira.

Humanitarian Needs

The emergency situation resulting from the cyclone Idai is exceptional and intense. Due to the lack of electricity and telecommunications, the humanitarian response is strongly hampered as many areas have not been assessed to identify the humanitarian needs.

In order to increase the response efficiency, telecommunications have to be restored, permanently or temporarily, to be able to facilitate the delivery of supplies.

KEY FACTS

The main coordination centre supported

83 humanitarian organizations supported

297 GB of Internet data

6 calling operations

100% first call since disaster

Context

On the night between 14 and 15 March 2019, Cyclone Idai hit Mozambique's coasts causing very strong gusts of wind and torrential rains in the provinces of Zambezia, Sofala, Manica and Inhambane. The cyclone made landfall on the coast of Beira, the fourth largest city in the country. 1.6 million people could be affected by its impact. Following the landfall of the cyclone, the city of Beira was flooded and telecom networks were seriously damaged. There is still no electricity and while the telephone and internet networks are being restored, telecommunications are still unstable.

Idai hit the coast at Category 3 (Cyclone Tropical Intense), with wind gusts reaching 200 km/h and a storm surge between 3 and 5m. According to several experts, this cyclone would be the most powerful hitting Mozambique since Eline in February 2000.

At the beginning of March, floods caused by the early cyclone Idai had already affected more than 140,000 people, caused 66 deaths, 11 injuries and forced more than 17,000 people to abandon their homes in Zambezia and Tete provinces. The affected area is particularly important for the country. About 40% of Mozambique's population lives on the coast and 25% of the gross national product is generated in this region.

TSF deployment

Deployment date – 15/03/2019

While Cyclone Idai made landfall on the night of Thursday 14th March, TSF deployed a team at the same time from HQ in France to support relief efforts and assist the affected population.

Our team brings satellite equipment to reconnect relief actors to the Internet and provides telephony service for the affected populations to help them contact their loved ones. The team arrived in Maputo on 16th March, being able to access Beira, one of the most affected areas, on 17th of March.

Since the beginning of the mission, coordination is probably the most critical point for organizing humanitarian aid. The centralization of humanitarian aid in Beira is essential to reach the affected areas, but faces logistical challenges: no road access to the city, airport initially closed, damaged electricity network, missing means of communication.

The establishment of the Internet is vital in raising awareness of the humanitarian catastrophe caused by the two meteorological phenomena.

Internet connection has been immediately provided as since then to the hundreds of humanitarian actors that are assisting the populations in this emergency, proving the important need of this service in order for them to carry out their activities.

Furthermore, on 20th March, the team also has started to provide telephony services for the population in different locations of Beira, where people have been relocated from the different affected areas of the city and surroundings.

Assessment

As they carry out their operations, our teams are assessing the status of telecommunication services.

General situation

Mozambique is facing two different important emergencies which have severely damaged the central zone of the country:

- The tremendous effects of Cyclone Idai in the proximities of the city of Beira, where it made landfall on 14th March.
- Massive floodings due to the continuous rains in Zimbabwe and Malawi that over-flooded Buzi and Pungwe rivers in the region of Sofala in Mozambique. This caused the isolation of certain regions in the area, hampering the possibility of providing assistance to the affected population.

Thousands of people have been forced to leave their homes and still many of them wait to be rescued from the non-connected areas.

Telecoms

- Operators: Vodacom and Movinet networks are being re-established in some parts of the city of Beira

Electricity

- Grid is out in Beira. Responders have to rely on generators.

Transportation

- The road from Maputo to Beira has been blocked since 16th March, due to a collapsed bridge, which isolated the area of Beira.
- The airport opened on 17th March

General Overview

Two different operations are being carried out by the TSF team present on the ground:

- Telecoms Center: Internet connectivity is being offered to the humanitarian actors that are working in the coordination centre situated at Beira airport.
- Humanitarian Calling Operations: Ambulant teams are providing free telephony services

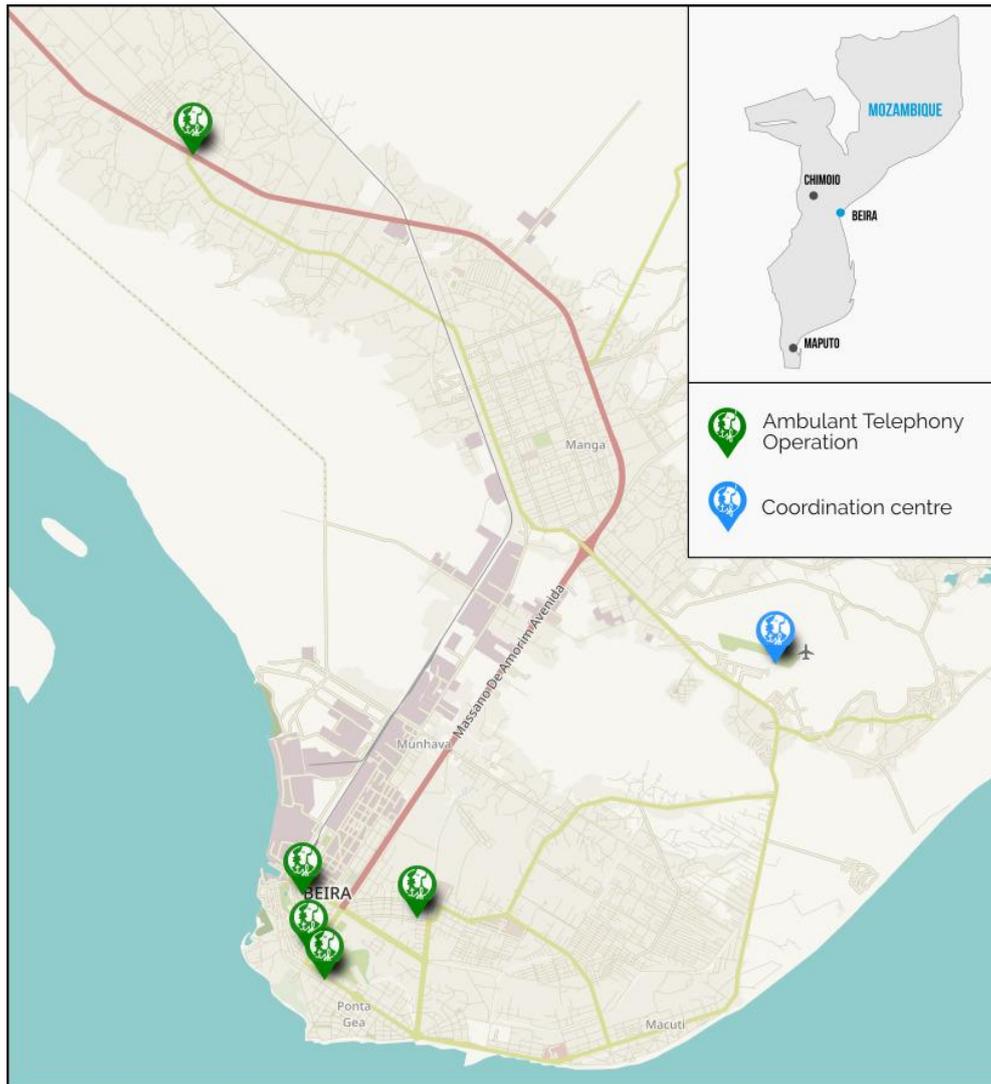


Figure 1 – Beira - Map of operations

Support to relief operations

Since 17th March, TSF is supporting the humanitarian relief operations by providing high speed internet connections to all humanitarian agencies in the coordination centre that has been set up at the airport of Beira.

TSF has prioritised the support to the coordination to facilitate the organization of the relief operations and the sharing of information on the situation. In order to restore logistics facilities for the arrival of humanitarian aid, TSF also reconnected some of the airport information systems.

When TSF team arrived in Beira on Sunday, March 17th, only a few chairs and tables were set up in what would have then become the coordination centre of the INGC (National Crisis Management Institute), where some members of the UN and locally based NGOs were busy trying to find basic equipment in the rubbles to equip the centre.

Therefore, thanks to the internet connection installed by TSF, humanitarian actors could transfer information on the situation on the ground. In addition, the reconnection of airport information systems facilitated the resumption of the flights enabling dozens of humanitarian actors to arrive and start their relief operations

Telecoms Centers (24/03/2019)	
No of organizations	83
No of users	550
No of devices	945
Total GB	297

Since the establishment of this internet connection, more than 83 humanitarian organisations have arrived in Beira and benefited from the service to coordinate their operations.

Cluster Coordination

As member of the Emergency Telecommunication Cluster (ETC); TSF has been coordinating its activities with all the other Cluster teams.

Assistance to affected populations

Humanitarian Calling Operations (HCO)

After focusing our efforts on establishing the internet connection for all humanitarian actors, we started humanitarian calling operations on March 20th in the city of Beira. While telephone networks have been heavily impacted and totally unavailable for the first 3 days following the cyclone, some networks began to recover despite strong instability and total unavailability of internet services.

The prolonged lack of electricity makes it impossible for the affected populations to benefit from the partially degraded mobile network. The first telephony operations revealed a first call rate of 100%, which confirms a strong need for telephony, even in the city of Beira.

The operators are mobilised to restore their network, and although the service has been partially restored for some of them on 23rd March, the instability of the service does not allow the humanitarian community or affected people to use it continuously.

During an initial assessment, different locations where displaced people were being relocated were identified. In view of the high importance for this population to contact their relatives for the first time since the disaster, TSF relief efforts will be concentrating on the most affected areas to provide 3-minute free calls in the shelters and INGC camps. This operation has been conducted in collaboration with the Vodafone Foundation Instant Network teams who provided charging stations (Instant Charge) to allow the beneficiaries to recover priority phone numbers.

Our teams have covered so far:

- Escola Primaria completa Iterois Mocambicanos, INCG shelter
- Escola completa Agostinho Neto shelter
- Escola Primaria completa Eduardo Mondlane shelter
- Escola Secundaria Samora M. Machel shelter
- Escola Secundaria de Mataduro - Inhamizua

Next steps

HCO

TSF teams will remain on the ground until conventional telecommunication networks are restored. The teams continue providing free calls and Internet access to the population with new locations being covered every day.

In Beira:

- Continuation of operations for the population that was living in the affected areas of the city
- Assistance to the people coming from the areas highly impacted by the floodings

Other cities in the affected area (Guara-Guara: more than 10.000 people have almost been isolated: no electricity, food and no telecommunications).

Coordination Centers

Coordination centres are being set up in areas closer to the affected zone. TSF is offering its support to provide Internet access to the humanitarian actors coordinating their operations in these centres.

Considering the emergency of the situation, a minimum of 3 VSAT equipments are expected to be delivered to Beira to reinforce the telecommunications response. Since alternative telecommunications means are now available at the coordination centre, TSF's VSATs will be relocated in more strategic locations to support humanitarian operations and to offer Internet service to the affected population.

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