

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP
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**Information Note on Developments in Southern Africa and Initiatives to Address the
Triple Threat of Food Insecurity, HIV/AIDS and
Weakened Capacity for Governance**

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Almost exactly two years ago, the IASC Working Group considered for the first time the indications that a crisis was emerging in southern Africa as a result of erratic rainfall and a projected poor harvest. Since then, the IASC has been instrumental in facilitating an effective response to that crisis, by nominating leadership for a regional inter-agency effort, supporting the establishment of the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination and Support Office (RIACSO), and reviewing and supporting the recommendations and reports of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Humanitarian Needs in Southern Africa. It is appropriate at this point for the IASC to receive an update on the current situation in the region.

Weather remains a challenge

While much of the region benefited from a better harvest last year, drought is again threatening a number of countries. Poor rains in south and central Malawi has prompted the Government of Malawi to announce that they would be seeking further international support to provide for food assistance. The Government of Lesotho is in the process of preparing a request for additional international assistance. The Government of Swaziland has officially asked FAO for assistance in an emergency assessment of the agricultural situation.

The food security of the region as a whole is also being impacted by the situation in South Africa, where the Government has declared disaster areas in six of the country's nine provinces. Much of the crop in the maize producing areas in the Free State of South Africa has already been severely affected by insufficient rains.

Regional Coordination

Regional Coordination efforts in southern Africa has largely been regarded as successful in improving the coherence and effectiveness of agency programming and cooperation. The Special Envoy for Humanitarian Needs in Southern Africa has provided leadership and advocacy for the crisis, particularly with regard to the enormous impact of HIV/AIDS on the region. RIACSO has played a crucial role in providing a space to bring together donors and the humanitarian community.

Discussions on the future of coordination in the region continue. In October 2003, the Chief Executives Board endorsed a paper prepared under the leadership of WFP and UNAIDS for the High Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) on the UN's strategy in the region. The significance of this paper to the IASC is that it followed directly from the ideas presented in the "Next Steps to Action in Southern Africa"

report prepared by the Special Envoy and endorsed by the IASC at its meeting in April 2003, and considers how the UN can act to address the 'triple threat' of food insecurity, HIV/AIDS and weakened governance. At a meeting of the UNDG Executive Committee in November 2003, Mr. Mark Sterling, the Regional Director of UNAIDS, in collaboration with Mr. Mike Sackett, Regional Coordinator of the Special Envoy for Humanitarian Needs in Southern Africa, was asked to lead an effort assess the capacity of the Country Teams to implement the 22 Actions identified in the HLCP paper. This activity is proceeding and in a way that is reflective of the joint commitment of the UNDG to work with the IASC by virtue of the involvement of the RIACSO structure.

Consolidated Appeal

The regional CAP presented in July 2003 requested US\$532 million for projects in Malawi, Mozambique, Lesotho, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. At present, around 50% of the requirements have been met, with the majority of resources going to food aid.

A full review of the humanitarian needs in the region as presented in the Consolidated Appeal 2003/2004 has just been completed, the findings of which will be published in the Mid Term Review document scheduled for dissemination on 18 February. This document will be augmented by an updated Appeal for Zimbabwe which covers the period 1 January – 31 December 2004.

The Role of the IASC

Consistent with the analysis in the Special Envoy's "Next Steps" paper, southern Africa remains a region in need of immediate assistance for immediate needs as well as a region in need of immediate assistance for longer-term structural change. In other words, it is a situation that challenges the humanitarian paradigm – it is neither a strictly humanitarian emergency. The 'triple threat' situation witnessed in the past two years is the first large-scale crisis of its kind, but it is unlikely to be the last.

Mindful of the IASC position taken at its meeting in April 2003 with respect to the future leadership of RIACSO, the IASC WG recognizes the important ongoing role of the Special Envoy and supports the continuation of the coordination arrangements at least until the end of the current Appealing period (June 2004).

In recognition of the work being undertaken to determine the capacity to implement the programmatic actions of the HLCP paper, and acknowledging the ongoing urgent needs in southern Africa, the IASC will remain closely associated with the activities in the region through the RIACSO structure and in so doing, ensure the richness of collaboration with all stakeholders.

Prepared by: RIACSO and the Office of the Special Envoy on Southern Africa