

**INTER – AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE – WORKING GROUP
50TH MEETING**

18-19 September 2002

**Conference Room 9, United Nations Headquarters
New York**

**Update on the response to the Southern Africa humanitarian crisis
with a particular focus on Zimbabwe: Zimbabwe**

Circulated: 19 September 2002

The humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe continues to deepen. The combination of poor policies and inability to deal with structural economic issues has set the stage for this year's drought to have a much larger effect than it normally would have. The continuing economic decline has put a large portion of the population at risk of food shortages, both access and availability. The perception of food distribution as being politicised – and the highly politicised environment it must occur in -- makes responding to the situation more complex. Other significant problems, such as the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS (as high as 34% in both rural and urban areas according to UNAIDS) and increasing poverty levels will make recovery difficult and costly.

Current estimates of vulnerable population are six to seven million. These will be affected by both food deficits (1.9 million MT) and health requirements (including AIDS impacts, sanitation, water, essential drugs). The vulnerable population for water and sanitation requirements are 1.9 million, for nutrition issues 1.6 million and for health one million.

The current food crisis has both food availability and food access dimensions. Zimbabwe, once a cereal-exporting nation, produced less than a quarter of its national cereal requirements this past agricultural season. The FAO/WFP Assessment indicates that the country requires 705,000MT of food aid in the next eight months: WFP is appealing for 450,000MT in its EMOP (and have received pledges of just over 40% of that); NGOs may be able to mobilize about 100,000MT through bilateral pipelines (having already received pledges of around 50% of that amount). Given a cereal deficit of 1.9 million MT, this means that an amount of close to one and a half million MT will be required to be brought into the country through the combined resources of the public and private sectors.

Government has indicated a desire to bring in around a million MT, but seems to be having difficulty finding the requisite foreign exchange; if lucky, they may be able to bring in around 650,000MT. The private sector is unlikely to become involved due to serious foreign exchange constraints, limitations on borrowing (high interest rates), price controls and government restrictions on the role of the private sector. This does not leave the country in a happy state. Serious shortages of major food and non-food commodities already exist, and there is every indication that this situation will worsen.

Zimbabwe's current financial and food crises are certain to continue over the next eight months, and will further erode the purchasing power of households in both the rural and urban areas. Large numbers of commercial farm workers, becoming unemployed, will have no resources to

purchase their food as they have done in the past. Poorer sectors of the communal smallholder population normally buy a significant portion of their food, even in good years. The decrease in productivity in rural areas and the increasing cost of living (food prices on the parallel markets have been increasing between 400 and 1000%) – worsened in the urban areas by high rates of unemployment – are contributing to the rapidly declining purchasing power of households and mounting food access problems.

Food insecurity problems at this level do not come alone. The Nutrition Assessment indicates rising malnutrition levels; the Health Assessments indicates increasing outbreaks of infectious diseases (beyond the already mentioned levels caused by the rapidly spreading HIV/AIDS vector of this crisis). Animal health indicators are also worrying: hoof and mouth disease has spread from the Mozambique border throughout the southern cattle areas of the country, vaccines are insufficient and this has large implications for rural incomes and draft power in agricultural recovery efforts. Programmes have been outlined in the Consolidated Appeal for the appropriate UN agency and government facility to deal with the immediate, emergency aspects of the problems, but there are deeper, more structural aspects to the problems that need further assessment.

The Government of Zimbabwe declared an official state of disaster in April 2002, indicating severe food shortages. Furthermore, it also declared a six-month emergency period to address HIV/AIDS in May 2002. This is an indication that GoZ understands that these two factors are compounding one another and that the situation is grave.

The seriousness of the Zimbabwe situation is seen particularly in the regional context. The six affected countries in the southern Africa region have a gross cereal production shortfall of approximately 3.45 million mt. Zimbabwe, once a grain exporting country, represents over 40% of the regional requirements.

Major Contributing Factors

The Zimbabwe crisis is composed of a number of growing humanitarian challenges stemming from a combination of natural, political, social, and economic factors. Poor households throughout Zimbabwe have been experiencing severe hardship given high inflation, declines in employment and informal sector opportunities, and unprecedented HIV/AIDS infection levels. One in four people aged 15-49 years are HIV positive or living with AIDS, 25% of children are in households affected by HIV/AIDS, and the country currently has an estimated 600,000 orphans and this number is expected to increase significantly. Cholera and malaria cases are increasing while essential drugs to combat the diseases are unavailable. Poverty levels have increased over the past few years and the continuing economic crisis has taken its toll on or is straining the traditional coping strategies of poor households.

Drought was certainly a large factor in creating the worst food security conditions in over two decades for Zimbabwe. Following erratic weather conditions and a poor harvest in 2000/2001, disruptions in the commercial farming sector and overall poor macro-economic performance the grain harvest of the 2001/2002 agricultural season was approximately 73% lower than the historical average of the 1990s, and 40% lower than the production obtained in the drought year of 1994/95.

Another major factor was the unfortunate handling of the land reform programme. The process has had a depressing effect on production, but this does not mean that it is not necessary. As Secretary-General Kofi Annan said in his 27 August statement on Zimbabwe:

“...a successful, sustainable land reform programme that will benefit all the people of Zimbabwe, especially the landless poor, is more important than ever.

There can be no lasting solution to the current problems unless the Government of Zimbabwe implements a phased and fully funded land reform programme. It should be one that is run according to the rule of law, that allows for proper training and adequate support to new small farmers and compensation to displaced farm workers and commercial farmers. Such a land reform programme is urgently needed in order to minimize the negative effects of the current situation on food production and the overall economy in Zimbabwe.”

In the past, healthy strategic grain reserves and robust commercial import capacity were used to help manage production shortfalls due to drought. In contrast, last season’s production shortfalls were exacerbated by the depletion of strategic grain reserves by mid – February 2002. In addition, problems with balance of payments, shortages of foreign currency reserves, stressed relations with the international donor community, logistical constraints, and political polarizations have constrained food import and food aid delivery plans.

Significant Issues

1. The political situation remains extremely sensitive, both internally (commercial farmers, legal appeals against the land reform programme, rural administration elections, etc) and internationally (increased isolation, “siege” mentality, “provocative” remarks by world leaders, etc). The result has been increased reliance by GoZ on “old guard” supporters (nb ex-Finance Minister Makoni’s non-inclusion in the new Cabinet in August). These politicians are traditional supporters of existing Government marketing and economic policies, which have been identified as hindering a quicker response to the humanitarian crisis.
2. Policy issues: there are several major areas of policy concern, which are essential to meeting the current crisis. Agricultural marketing, price controls, food importation and foreign exchange policy all will need to be addressed before the assumptions in the most recent FAO/WFP Food and Crop Assessment regarding private sector food flows will be actualised.
3. Land reform: due to the extreme friction between government and donors on policy issues -- policies which donors view as causing a large part of the present crisis – donors have been extremely reluctant to support any programme that could remotely be construed as supporting the poorly conceived land reform scheme of government.
4. Private Sector involvement: as indicated previously, private sector involvement is essential in order to even start to address the huge food deficit in the country. However, the monopoly of the national Grain Marketing Board, government controlled prices on the major food grains, and the foreign exchange deficit, which stops both government and private direct importation need to be addressed.
5. Delivery Mechanisms: donor suspicions of government involvement in manipulating food aid has led them to increasingly demand a transparent delivery mechanism that has strong elements of accountability built into it. Government refusal to use certain NGOs,

or accredit some NGOs, is hindering attempts to programme and distribute humanitarian assistance in the quantity required by the Consolidated Appeal request.

6. GMO issues are still in process of being resolved. Some progress has been made, and an initial shipment has been allowed as a test case for the negotiated modality of entry. Further, the UN is sponsoring a scientific discussion on the GMO issues, with government participation.
7. Regional Co-ordination: as indicated, Zimbabwe's change of status from a food exporting country to a food importing country has changed the dynamics of the entire region. This is particularly so in light of the size of Zimbabwe's needs; emphasis needs to be put on resolving the economic decline and agricultural recovery of the country.
8. Government has reacted negatively to attempts to catalogue and support IDPs and/or farm workers as separate categories of the country's vulnerable population.
9. HIV/AIDS: the high rates of HIV/AIDS in the country leave large portions of the population increasingly vulnerable to health problems associated with food shortages, including malnutrition and endemic diseases, such as cholera and malaria. The AIDS pandemic and the food crisis are feeding on one another, compounding both problems. GoZ is still trying to address the issues of how it is possible to mitigate the impact on their society.
10. The international community has not responded well to the appeal for non-food assistance, such as vital drugs, vaccines, supplementary feeding for infants and children, etc. Not even 5% of the non-food part of the Consolidated Appeal has been pledged yet.

Proposed Action Points/Decisions by IASC WG:

IASC WG is requested to support the Country Team to:

Co-ordination:

- Develop a timely contingency plans, and collect and disseminate appropriate humanitarian information.
- Establish a Monitoring and Verification Unit in the Humanitarian Co-ordinator's Office.

Relief food:

- Convince government to avoid restrictive agricultural marketing policies and foreign exchange acquisition difficulties thus allowing the private sector to play its role.
- Facilitate NGOs' accreditation procedures to help their relief food distribution programs.
- Integrate GMO in the food basket.

Non-food programs:

- Ensure integration of non-food programs on humanitarian response.
- Mobilise donor commitment through fresh pledges, thereby ensuring provision of cash contributions for seeds distribution, fertilizers and farming implements.
- Ensure availability of resources for animal drugs procurement, vaccines and essential human drugs through the National Health System.
- Support HIV/AIDS preventive programs and antiretroviral drugs availability.

Governance/Economy:

- Advocate for respecting the humanitarian law and human rights.
- Support social reintegration of farm workers.
- Formulate a comprehensive economic recovery program (UNDP-BCPR).