

HIGHLIGHTS

- The recent results from the VACS and CFSAMS indicate that southern Africa is entering an acute phase of a chronic situation. Stakeholders advised that non-food interventions should also be considered to address chronic food insecurity.

- The **Lesotho VAC** estimates that 549,000 people will face food shortages between June 2005 –March 2006. Government priorities include addressing market inefficiencies which are expected to reduce prices, thereby making food commodities more accessible to the poor.

- The **Malawi VAC** estimates that 4.2 million or 34% of the population will be food insecure. Part of the Government's response includes tax exemptions and subsidies for poor farmers.

- **Mozambique** – The VAC reported that 580,000 people are expected to be food insecure this year. In addition, access to clean water and health care remain a problem. Government priorities include increasing potable water treatment and strengthening the non-agricultural economy.

- **Swaziland**- 250,000 Swazis are expected to face 4 to 7 month periods of food shortage. The Government will look at reforming the pricing policy which has so far allowed millers to keep prices high, thereby limiting food accessibility for the poor.



Southern African Humanitarian Crisis Update

Monthly update, July 2005



Informal Cross Border Food Trade in Southern Africa

REGIONAL FOOD SECURITY OVERVIEW

The recent surveys from the national vulnerability assessment committees (VACS) and country Crop and Food Supply Assessments Missions (CFSAMS) indicate that southern Africa is entering an acute phase of a chronic situation, affecting large areas of Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Lesotho and Swaziland. A regional stakeholders meeting, convened by SADC and the UN, took place on 7th and 8th July to discuss findings of the VACS and CFSAMS and devise ways to move forward. The meeting, attended by over 100 representatives from Governments, UN, SADC, NGOs and donors from the region, included presentations and discussions on overall food availability in each country, access to food, livelihoods, nutrition, informal cross border trade and plans and actions by the SADC governments to respond to the current situation.

The meeting was unanimous in concluding that the information provided to date highlighted the critical levels of food insecurity in several countries in the region and that urgent support was needed. It was further agreed however that the needs did not translate into food aid alone although it remained essential that resources be provided to WFP to meet the needs of the most vulnerable in the immediate term. Governments, UN, bi-lateral donors and NGOs stated that they would continue to explore alternative approaches to food aid, including voucher systems,

¹ RIACSO is a partnership comprising of the UN Agencies that fall under the Regional Directors Team for southern Africa and key NGOs in the region. RIACSO supports the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for Humanitarian Needs in Southern Africa, Mr. James Morris, in his mandate to raise awareness of the situation in the region and provide recommendations regarding the response.

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HIGHLIGHTS

- The **Zambia** VAC estimates that 185,000 people require immediate assistance, with the figure potentially rising to 1.2 million in January 2006. In addition, malnutrition, high levels of school drop outs and employment of negative coping mechanisms by the poor remain a serious problem. Government priorities include the promotion of drought resistant crops and further development of cash transfers and other safety nets.

- **Zimbabwe**- preliminary VAC results suggest at least 2.9 million people will require assistance over the year ahead. Government priorities include a mix of food and cash transfers to the most food insecure.

It is estimated that the number of people evicted from their homes has increased to 375,000 following the Government's clean up campaign.

The **UN Special Envoy for Human Settlements Issues** has made an assessment of the situation and has produced a report to be presented this week (July 18) to the UN Secretary General.

- **Botswana**- the President issued a Declaration of Drought Relief due to widespread crop failure. The National Relief Program will include implementation of a public works program aimed at assisting the unemployed, improving rural access to water, supplementary feeding for children under 5 and seed packs for farmers. UN agencies have agreed to provide technical assistance to improve the efficiency of national safety net mechanisms.

cash transfers and other safety nets, in order to ensure that those who are food deficit are able to attain their entitlements. They also highlighted the need to promote more multi-sectoral approaches for future vulnerability assessments. The situation as given by each country can be summarised as follows:

Angola's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development recorded a growth of 25% in crop production in 2005 due to favourable rainfall patterns and expansion of cultivated areas. Cereal production for the season reached 880,000 tonnes with maize production nearing a surplus - the first since the end of the war. The government estimates that while the degree of vulnerability of rural families to food insecurity has diminished slightly throughout the country, pockets of vulnerability still persist in the Central Plateau in the provinces of Huambo, Bie and Kuando Kubango. Initial steps have been taken to establish a VAC for Angola.

Lesotho- The LVAC estimates that 549,000 people will face food shortages between June 2005 and March 2006, with the most significant deficits being reported in the Southern Lowlands and Senqu River Valley. The government plans to respond by addressing market inefficiencies that currently keep prices high and strengthen activities that mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS. Lessons learned for future VACS include the need to redefine livelihood profiles to differentiate between 'chronic' and 'transitory' vulnerability.

Malawi- The maize harvest is the lowest since 1994, with production at just 1.25 million tonnes representing 37% of national consumption needs. Presuming that maize prices keep parity with inflation, the MVAC estimates that 4.2 million or 34% of the population will be food insecure during the coming year. This figure is expected to rise if prices increase. The Government is expected to respond by providing tax exemptions for farmers earning less than \$US40 a month and subsidies for fertilisers and other agricultural inputs.

Mozambique – Total cereal production is reported at 1.92 million tonnes, just 5% lower than a year ago. However, the production disparity between the north and south continues to widen resulting in acute food insecurity in the southern and central provinces. According to the VAC, 580,000 people are expected to be food insecure this year. It is also reported that access to clean water and health care services remain a problem. In addition, whilst the nutrition situation appears to be deteriorating, acute malnutrition indicators still remain above the threshold. In response to the VAC results, the government plans to closely monitor malnutrition indicators, increase potable water treatment, provide food assistance, and strengthen the non-agricultural economy to reduce dependence on rain fed agriculture.

Namibia – The recent national crop assessment report indicates widespread decline in cereal output, with the north-eastern Caprivi region being hit the hardest. Total coarse grain production has been estimated at 97,000 tonnes, which is 15.8% below last year's figures and 8.9% below the 8-year average. The government is still yet to conduct a vulnerability assessment to estimate the number of food insecure people.

Swaziland- The CFSAM estimates that almost 250,000 Swazis will face food shortages of between 4 to 7 months. The report indicated that although maize production during the 2004/5 growing season was about 10% higher than last year's official post-harvest figure, it was still below the average of the previous five years. Whilst recurring drought and the impact of HIV/AIDS were stated as the main reasons for the downward trend, the maize pricing policy was cited as further exacerbating the situation by allowing millers to keep prices high, thereby limiting access of poor households. The Government plans to reform the pricing policy,

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organise direct transfers to vulnerable groups in food insecure areas, and provide incentives such as subsidised inputs and micro-credit schemes to improve agricultural productivity.

Zambia- Late availability of seeds and fertilisers, in addition to the dry spell, has led to a decrease in cereal production. As a result, Zambia needs to import 269,000 tonnes compared to a surplus of 280,000 tonnes last year. The VAC estimates that 185,000 people will require immediate assistance, potentially rising to 1.2 million people in January. The VAC results also reported high levels of acute malnutrition in the eastern and western provinces for children under 5, shortages of drinking water in southern provinces, increased school drop outs due to high school fees, and an increase in the employment of negative coping strategies. Government priorities include the promotion of drought resistant crops, improvement of procurement and early delivery of inputs, providing a mix of food relief and cash transfers, enhancing water harvesting techniques, and devising further incentives to reduce school drop outs of the girl child.

Zimbabwe- Preliminary VAC results based on a conservative maize market price assumption suggest 2.9 million people (or an estimated 36% of Zimbabwe's rural population) will require assistance over the year ahead. The government has announced plans to import 1.2 million tonnes of maize to address food shortages. WFP is preparing to assist up to four million people. The VAC also revealed that 1% of rural households were headed by children, 44% of households were headed by chronically ill members, and 18% of households contained at least one school drop out. The government's primary responses include provision of a mix of food assistance and cash transfers to the most vulnerable and food insecure, strengthening home based care programmes to the chronically ill and promoting livestock restocking programmes to address shortage of draught power.

OTHER COUNTRY SPECIFIC HIGHLIGHTS

■ **Botswana-** On 7th July, President Festus Mogae issued a Declaration of Drought Relief due to widespread crop failure resulting from poor rainfall. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, only 19,000 tonnes, about 10% of the national requirement and less than half of the 46,000 tonnes in 2003/4 has been produced. The National Relief Program will include implementation of a public works program aimed at assisting the unemployed and improving school and health infrastructure, improving rural access to water, increasing supplementary feeding schemes for children under 5 and providing seed packs for farmers.

WFP recently conducted a mission to Botswana to determine how it could best assist. It met with the Government and other stakeholders to decide on a coordinated UN response. Whilst it was apparent that food aid was not needed, the UN, including WFP, agreed to provide technical assistance to review and improve the efficiency of national social safety net mechanisms currently operated by the Government.

■ **Zimbabwe-** The number of people evicted from their homes following the Government's 'clean up operation' has increased to approximately 375,000.

The UN Special Envoy for Human Settlements Issues in Zimbabwe, Ms Anna Tibaijuka, completed a fact-finding mission to assess the scope and extent of the evictions, the humanitarian needs and the impact on the affected populations. She made an assessment of the adequacy of the Government's arrangements for the displaced and its capacity to address the basic needs of the affected populations and the ability of the UN and its partners to respond to the humanitarian needs. Her



report is to be submitted to the Secretary General this week (18th July) and will be shared with the Government of Zimbabwe before being made public.

Current efforts by the humanitarian community to respond to the crisis include the provision of basic shelter, food rations, blankets, clean water, soaps and sanitation facilities to those who have been displaced. UN sectoral theme and working groups, which also include other stakeholders, have been meeting regularly to exchange information and coordinate responses. As part of this initiative, consultative meetings were organised to enable stakeholders to integrate HIV/AIDS interventions in their responses using the IASC guidelines on HIV/AIDS interventions in emergency settings.

■ **Malawi** - The Government recently launched its National Plan of Action for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) which expects to increase access by OVCs to essential services such as education, health, nutrition, water and sanitation and birth registration. The plan is further geared to strengthen the capacity of families caring for OVCs by providing support to improve their economic and social security.

Further, as part of its efforts to improve good governance, the government plans to introduce new legislation on land reform. The legislation instructs the formation of *elected* land administration institutions in order to increase transparency and improve equity in land allocation and distribution. Provisions for land inheritance have also been included to protect widows and orphans.

■ **Angola** – The Marburg epidemic in the northern province of Uige is reportedly under control. However, partners in the response to the outbreak prefer to remain only cautiously positive, as the 42-days-without-new-cases test has not been achieved.

To Feed or To Pay?- Food Aid versus Cash Transfers

At the recent SADC VAC Regional Stakeholder Meeting, participants stated that repeated food aid interventions alone were inadequate to lift the *chronically* food insecure out of a state of poverty. Whilst it was acknowledged that food aid had a clear role in emergencies to assist the acute or transiently vulnerable from starvation, it was argued that chronic vulnerability was primarily due to structural factors unrelated to bad weather conditions. The chronically vulnerable often lack a significant asset base such as land and oxen (to plough) to meet their immediate needs, even when the weather has been favourable and economic conditions are reasonably good. Given these conditions, food aid can at best keep this group alive, but does little to enhance their asset base or increase their productive capacity to feed themselves in the long run.

It is against this background that some stakeholders argue for the implementation of cash transfers under national safety nets. They argue that if cash transfers can be predictable and guaranteed for a number of years, people may be able to build assets and reduce persistent vulnerability to shocks such as drought. Predictable cash transfers may allow some households to take initiatives that incur some risks, but bring potentially higher returns, such as growing higher yield varieties of crop and using modern farming methods, investing in education rather than working in separate informal activities to make ends meet, holding assets that are more productive and perhaps less liquid than cash etc. Positive examples of cash transfers have been cited in Zambia where it was indicated that households made productive investments upward of \$100 for livestock, poultry and bicycles etc, paid



EVENTS CALENDAR

Date	Event
29 July- 2 Aug	Rapid Environmental Impact in Disasters Workshop, Nelspruit, South Africa
9-10 Aug	Regional Symposium on Information Sharing and Communication for Disaster Risk Management, Maseru, Lesotho
11-19 Aug	Ordinary SADC Summit, Gaborone, Botswana
4 th week Sep (TBC)	Meeting on Vulnerability Assessment Methodologies

For most events participation is on the basis of invitations only

Contributions for the next RIACSO Bulletin:

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Contributions can be sent to:
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for school fees and uniforms for children, and accessed essential medicines and drugs. Thus, timely and predictable cash transfers should reduce the need for repetitive emergency appeals for recurrent crisis.

But dispensing cash transfers doesn't come without its challenges. Firstly, the full effects of cash injections in food insecure areas have not fully been studied. With less food in markets, and more demand combined with increased purchasing power via cash transfers, prices for food commodities could probably rise. Secondly, targeting may not have the 'self-selection' quality of food aid because cash is a more highly sought after commodity. Thirdly, since women tend to have more control over food in the household than over cash, food inputs may be more viable than cash in meeting both food needs and supporting livelihood strategies of women.

Some stakeholders argue that food aid should only be provided to respond to shocks and unpredictable emergencies. Therefore the primary goal of food aid would be to save lives in absence of other government protection in a crisis. But studies have shown that it has additional effects of preventing negative coping strategies and preserving assets in the immediate term, thereby preventing long term spiralling into poverty.

Food aid may also potentially play a role in non-emergency settings. Firstly, in remote locations, markets may not be fully developed due to lack of roads, buildings or bridges. In this situation food aid could help to assist households access sufficient food to meet their needs. Secondly, remote areas may lack proper financial infrastructure such as local banks or other financial institutions, thereby making it difficult for the government to transport and distribute large sums of cash. In this situation, food transfers may be easier to monitor and less prone to corruption. Thirdly, if the objective is to increase food consumption or address malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies, fortified food distribution could be a more appropriate intervention. Further research in these areas is currently being undertaken by various organisations. Finally, food aid agencies could play an appropriate role during relief and recovery to transform the emergency response into a long-term productive safety net in collaboration with the government. Food aid could potentially fill the gap whilst governments are building capacity to set up the necessary infrastructure, acquiring adequate resources, reducing possibilities for corruption, and developing structures of accountability and transparency. These are expected to take time to establish and hence food aid could appropriately be used to fill the gap. When such improvements do take place, the comparative advantage of food aid is expected to decrease. Thus, the status of food availability and access and the state's marketing and financial infrastructure could function as key indicators in deciding when the transition from a food-based approach towards a cash based system is most appropriate.

Further Reading:

- Social Risk Management: The World Bank's Approach to Social Protection in a Globalizing World, R Holzmann, L Sherburne-Benz and E Tesliuc, May 2003
- Transitioning from Relief For Predictable Food Insecurity in Malawi, Joanne Raisin, 2005, DFID
- Vulnerability, Social Protection, and Food-Based Safety Nets, WFP, 2004
- Missing the Point, An analysis of Food Security Interventions in the Great Lakes, Humanitarian Practice Network, ODI, July 2004.

