

# SOUTHERN AFRICA FOOD EMERGENCY

## *A Christian Aid position paper*

Over 12 million people in the Southern Africa region risk starvation in the coming months, after poor harvests, drought, flood and mismanagement. The U N's World Food Programme (WFP) and the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) confirm that there are already grave food crises in many states in the region, which will continue up to the next major harvest in April 2003.

*Christian Aid is launching an appeal to raise funds to enable our partners to respond effectively and to help prevent this crisis becoming a catastrophe.*

Christian Aid believes:

- ***Adequate food and other help must be sent to the people of the Southern African region urgently.***
- ***Governments must be allowed to protect rural livelihoods. Donors must support them to help vulnerable farmers access agricultural inputs, such as seeds and fertiliser, and markets to sell their produce.***
- ***Support for civil society organisations in the region must be strengthened to help to stamp out corruption and develop good governance.***
- ***Greater action must be taken to combat the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and to reduce its transmission in the region.***

## **In the Southern Africa region.**

- Floods in 2001 and lack of rain in 2002 have contributed to reduced production levels of maize, particularly in Malawi, Zimbabwe and Zambia (1). Lesotho is also reporting serious food shortages.
- Regional stocks are very low due to them being used last year after low production levels, and not replenished. This has increased the price of maize, the staple food (12).
- “Food deficit countries” - Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho and Swaziland normally fill their food gap through commercial imports from South Africa under preferential trade agreements (12). This year, South Africa is expected to have one million MT maize surplus available for export - of which half is earmarked for these countries. The price and availability of the remaining half million MT can be secured on the South African Futures Exchange (12). This would be insufficient though to cover the shortfall in the region (9). Other maize (white and yellow) is available for import from East Africa, the US and South America (12). To import would require foreign currency.
- There are also delivery problems of food from the region. Flooding has washed away railway lines and roads, and there has been congestion on road and rail routes (1).
- Ports and railways in the region have been partly privatised and there is concern about the capacity of the private sector to move the large volumes required. The system is viable, but needs assistance from donors and international organisations (12).
- In 1991, when there was a similar scale of drought, co-operation amongst affected countries, including South Africa, was good and food aid was distributed effectively. But now, the HIV/AIDS pandemic is more serious, and there are electoral democracy issues in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi. Local institutions of many of the affected states are very weak (6,8).
- There are an estimated three million orphans in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe due to AIDS, and thousands of children headed households. School attendance is falling as children scavenge for food instead (11). Due to AIDS related deaths it is also common for grandparents to be caring for 10 or more children (13). Both groups - the elderly and orphans, are particularly vulnerable in times of food shortages.
- Current coping mechanisms are being stretched or eroded e.g. casual labour, distress sales of household assets (1) and killing of livestock (10). There is now the possibility of the migration of large numbers of people in search of food (14).

## **Malawi.**

Over 3 million people in Malawi are estimated to be in need of food aid (20.)

Mary Convill, Christian Aid's Senior Programme Officer for Malawi, reported from Nasanje and Salima Districts in late May, *"This ought to be the most plentiful time of year for rural people in Malawi. But the eagerly awaited harvests are once again pitifully small, too small for the average family of six or seven people. The harvests are so small because last year there was not enough rain and this year there was not enough. Desperate hunger has driven many people to harvesting and selling the maize before it was fully ready. Now many have no food to eat at all and nothing to sell."*

Aside from climatic factors, both politics and economics have contributed to the crisis. **Conditionalities imposed by International Financial Institutions, like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and alleged mismanagement and corruption by the Malawi government have contributed to this crisis.**

- **The international community has been advising the Malawi government to reduce agricultural subsidies to stimulate competition and a private market.** And at the same time, international donors advised that the government cut by two-thirds a free seeds and fertiliser programme - in 1998 this reached every Malawian household. From 1998 to 2001, maize production fell from 2.4 million to 1.4 million metric tons. ie from 1998 there has been a shortage of affordable seeds and fertiliser, which has got progressively worse. Alongside this, the safety net - The National Strategic Grain Reserves - disappeared. International donors, including the IMF, suggested Malawi cut its reserves from 167 000 metric tonnes to between 30 and 60 - enough for couple of months in times of emergency - long enough to get emergency food in. But, there is none left in the reserve - and the government can't account for it, or the money from its sale. Some financial experts say the sale of this amount of grain deflated maize prices last year, which meant farmers' incomes were reduced, hence making it even more difficult for them to buy seeds and fertilisers. (2,7).
- Under pressure from the international community, the government **privatised** the Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation, ADMARC. Previously, ADMARC had been present in all areas of the country and provided agricultural inputs to farmers as well as buying maize from them. When it was privatised it closed its offices in remote areas and this support has disappeared (16).
- **Liberalisation** of farm inputs, i.e. seeds and fertilisers, under **donor conditionalities**, has meant many small farmers cannot afford them and their yields have decreased, impacting on the food security situation (1, 4, 7, 16).
- Due to shortages of maize, private traders have been charging high prices, unaffordable to most of the population (1).
- The government, in attempting to implement structural adjustment packages to please the donors, is **not allowed to intervene to control the price of maize** or to maintain sufficient strategic reserves (6).
- Aside from lack of accountability and transparency of the government in managing its national grain reserves, the government also lacks capacity in disaster preparedness

and response, and national surveillance systems. This is in part due to cut backs in government spending under donor conditionalities (15).

- **There are accusations that there is essentially a small group of government elite who are running cartels and manipulating the food prices (5).**
- Food security has been identified by the Government of Malawi as a Poverty Priority Expenditure. Funds were first allocated for a targeted inputs programme - including starter packs supported by Britain's Department of international Development (DFID) and for agricultural extension support for farmers. But the money for the extension services was redirected by the government (16).
- **Malawi is in crisis, Coping mechanisms are all but exhausted**
  - HIV/AIDS has impacted on the food situation and is leading to the collapse of traditional social safety nets (7), and vice versa - as protein intake decreases, susceptibility to illness increases (11).
  - Food shortages have impacted on health e.g. cholera outbreaks - the current epidemic is the worst in Malawi's history (6, 11), and malaria (11).
  - High food prices lead people to measures such as diving into crocodile-infested rivers to dig out water-lily bulbs or selling the roof of their home for firewood in order to buy food (7).
  - Theft from maize fields is increasing.
  - Farmers are eating green maize i.e. harvesting the crop prematurely, due to hunger. This reduces the yield of the crop. Current estimates are that 50% of the crop have been consumed in this way (17).
- *Christian Aid partner, the Malawi Economic Justice Network said:*
  - *"The 'cure' from 'the north' should not be implemented unilaterally, but must reflect situation on the ground i.e. not one size fits all - liberalising agricultural inputs may work in some countries, but not Malawi. IMF conditionality, leading to the privatisation of ADMARC and the liberalisation of farm inputs, had a big impact on the food situation in Malawi.*
  - *"There are double standards where the north does not allow Malawi to subsidise agricultural extension, but 'everyone' in Malawi depends on agriculture, and 70% of GDP is from agriculture. If the government isn't allowed to subsidise agriculture people will never grow out of poverty i.e. the north should stop playing double standards when they subsidise their own agriculture so heavily. This is not economic and social justice, and is particularly harsh for HIPC countries."*

## **Elsewhere in the region.**

### **Zimbabwe**

Maize production in **Zimbabwe** is down 67% on last year and more than 6 million people could be at risk over the coming year. In part this can be attributed to the country suffering from one of the worst droughts in the last hundred years. However, a shrinking economy, high inflation rates, and a national adult prevalence rate of over 25% for HIV/AIDS have also been contributory factors. Current food shortages have also been directly and indirectly affected by Zimbabwe government policies including “fast track” land reform and land distribution initiatives, in part related to the activities of different groups which have disrupted economic, including agricultural activities and which the government has not succeeded in preventing. There have also been human rights violations and civil disturbance. The worst affected by these factors have been vulnerable rural populations in chronically food-deficit areas in the south, west and extreme north of the country, the urban poor who are entirely dependent on the market to meet their food needs, and the commercial farm work worker families. (19)

### **Angola.**

In Angola, after the ceasefire between government forces and UNITA rebels in April 2002, renewed access by aid agencies has revealed a hidden humanitarian crisis. Up to half a million people do not have enough to eat. Many are ex-UNITA soldiers and their families, quartered in 34 designated demobilisation areas around Angola. Many others living in previously inaccessible areas are in a critical condition, too weak to move to places where help might be available. Observers estimate many thousands have died of hunger in the first four months of 2002, before the ceasefire, and that intense efforts are needed now to prevent many more deaths.

### **Zambia.**

The Zambian government declared a national emergency on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2002 fearing that 4 million people may need assistance due to food shortages (22). Reduced harvests have been caused by severe dry spells, an increase in the price of fertiliser, and the high cost of credit which in turn reduces the amount of maize farmers are able to plant. Maize imports have been disrupted due to political disruption in Zimbabwe and transport difficulties in the region (23, 24). The prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Zambia affects households' ability to cope with these circumstances (25).

### **Mozambique.**

WFP report that in Mozambique for economic reasons, surplus maize from the north is likely to be exported to neighbouring countries and not transported to the Southern and Central regions which are suffering food shortages. Estimates indicate that there are currently 355 000 people in these regions in need of immediate emergency food assistance, and that this could rise to over half a million in September when the current harvest is exhausted. Drought, the deterioration of infrastructure such as roads and bridges which impact on the flow of food, increases in the price of food and a deterioration of local coping mechanisms, such as the impacts of deforestation and HIV/AIDS, are all contributory factors to the crisis in Mozambique.

### **Lesotho.**

Following the declaration of a state of famine by the Government of Lesotho, WFP carried out an assessment and currently estimate that over 440 000 people will require emergency food assistance. Variable and erratic weather, including frost and tornadoes, has disrupted harvests and reduced domestic food production. Economic factors such

as high unemployment, loss in government revenues from free trade, and currency devaluation make food imports more expensive and less accessible for the poor (21).

## **Conclusions.**

### **Emergency Response.**

1. International donors must increase their response to the current emergency.
2. Improved co-ordination is needed between donors, INGOS, national Governments and local organisations and institutions in order to address the current emergency, and its root causes.
3. Effective co-ordination and co-operation is needed amongst the countries of the region to ensure supplies reach those in need without delay.

### **Poverty Eradication.**

4. Donor governments and the IFIs must give more assistance to achieve poverty eradication, which will reduce people's vulnerability.
5. Debt relief for the poorest countries should be speeded up.
6. Aid conditionality, and related international trade agreements, must not be harmful to the poor or vulnerable.

### **Good Governance.**

7. National Governments need to be transparent and accountable to their electorate.
8. Civil society should be empowered to be active in governance at local, national and regional levels.

### **HIV/AIDS.**

9. Aid is urgently needed to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic.
10. Aid is urgently needed to support people whose livelihoods are affected by HIV/AIDS.