

# Crisis in Southern Africa

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## Summary

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In many places, this is the second or third consecutive year of food shortages and many people's ability to cope has been almost exhausted. At the same time peace in Angola has revealed a hitherto largely invisible humanitarian crisis in the zones previously controlled by UNITA and this also requires a massive international response.

The causes of the food crisis are complex and vary from country to country. But in different proportions they reflect a mixture of poverty and vulnerability, bad weather, poor governance, bad advice from donors and economic collapse. High rates of HIV/AIDS and other diseases have further sapped people's ability to cope.

Donor-driven policies of liberalising African food production have been especially controversial, with evidence that they have made it more difficult for people to grow food or to afford to buy it, while in Zimbabwe drought and land-reform policies have contributed to a collapse in food production.

Oxfam believes that food security is a human right and should be top priority for all governments and the IFIs (World Bank and International Monetary Fund). Food production in Southern Africa is fragile and needs carefully thought-out and carefully implemented policies, not policies driven by dogma, political opportunism or hypocrisy. At the same time as African farmers are told they can no longer have free seeds or fertilisers, US farmers are receiving an average \$20,000 a year in subsidies – which is soon to increase by 70% - and EU farmers \$16,000.

Oxfam calls for action, both immediate and long-term, to get food aid there and distribute it fairly and effectively, and to rebuild people's lives.

## **The regional situation – need, impact, and scale**

Nearly 13 million people in the Southern Africa region face extreme food shortages and the risk of starvation between now and the next main harvest in April/May 2003. There are serious food needs already in some places, which will increase and become more widespread from July onwards, building up to the next pre-harvest hungry period from September.

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) estimates that the regional total shortfall is 4m tonnes of food over the next year. Of that, at least 1.2m tonnes will need to be emergency food aid. They assume that the difference will be met by commercial sources. A massive relief operation therefore needs to be mounted now to ensure that immediate relief needs are met, and that adequate food reaches the region in time for distribution as the crisis gathers momentum later in the year.

The food shortages have particularly struck Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique, Lesotho and Swaziland. Furthermore, this is happening at the same time as the depth of the humanitarian crisis is becoming apparent in neighbouring Angola. There the civil war has ended and large areas of the country have become newly accessible to the UN and aid agencies, exposing famine conditions. Some one million more people than usual in Angola will need food and humanitarian assistance in the coming months and long-term recovery assistance must also be provided.

In many places, this is the second or third consecutive year of food shortages and many people's ability to cope has been exhausted. There are acute signs of stress in parts of Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe with people employing high-risk strategies to survive, such as eating potentially poisonous wild foods, stealing crops and prostitution. Other coping mechanisms include reducing the number of meals consumed per day to two or, often, one; bartering; taking children out of school and travelling huge distances and queuing for days to purchase limited supplies.

An Oxfam assessment in two districts in Zimbabwe in May reported that: 'In essence, the districts experienced crop failure with more than 95% of the households reporting no harvest ... people are taking the minimal for survival, a liquid in the morning and a solid meal in the evening when available'.

In Malawi there were hundreds of famine-related deaths from the beginning of this year onwards. People were reduced to eating their much-reduced maize harvest prematurely, before it had ripened. They often also ate their seed stocks so lack seeds to plant when the next agricultural season begins in October/November. Most people now have some food to get by for a few months, but there will be pockets of severe need developing from July and WFP estimates that 3 million people in Malawi will need emergency food aid before the end of the year.

In Zambia there has been a near-complete crop failure in the south of the country and some 2.3 million people are likely to need emergency food aid this year. In Mozambique, over half a million people in the centre and south will need food aid by September.

Currently the harvest across Southern Africa means that there is some food in most markets. However, prices are considerably higher than usual for this time of year in all countries, and extremely high in some pockets. A recent Oxfam assessment in Shangombo district in Zambia's southern province reported maize prices as 400% higher than the same time last year. A similar Oxfam assessment in Zimbabwe reported a 300% increase in the maize price. Likewise in Malawi, prices are up to 350% higher and this rise has been maintained despite the harvest.

WFP figures show clearly the deterioration that is expected over the next nine months; 7.59 million people will need emergency food aid between now and August; 9.11 million between September and November; and 12.76 million between December and March.

In Zimbabwe, however, there is a simple lack of maize in the country. Latest estimates are that no less than 5.6 million people are immediately in need of emergency food aid, to arrive before September, and that that number will rise to over 6 million from then on – over half the total population. According to USAID's Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS) on 19 June, 'the maize availability is expected to start deteriorating soon, unless huge quantities of imports are moved into the country before August 2002'.

The magnitude and centrality of the crisis in Zimbabwe is therefore particularly worrying. According to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation, cereal production has 'collapsed'. Zimbabwe has produced only a quarter of its maize needs in the past growing season and needs to import 1.7–1.8m tonnes of cereals in total. The FAO blames the country's prolonged drought – the worst for 20 years – but adds that: 'disruptive land reform activities have also contributed significantly to the production shortfall'.

Emergency food aid requirements are estimated to be nearly 850,000 tonnes, more than what is required for the rest of the region put together. This figure is based on the assumption that commercial imports will make up the rest of the deficit. This assumption may be severely tested.

## **Triggers and underlying causes of the crisis**

The triggers and underlying factors behind the current food crisis are complex and interrelated. There are region-wide factors and also country-specific ones.

### **1. Weather**

The whole region has suffered from adverse weather conditions with irregular rainfall, floods and dry spells at critical times in the growth period. Zimbabwe has experienced the longest dry spell in 20 years across almost the entire country, although paradoxically reservoirs are well stocked. During the drought there was rain but it was erratic and irregular and came at the wrong times for cropping. Because last year's harvest across the region was poor, regional food stocks were used up and food prices shot up, particularly for maize, the staple food. This priced the poor out of the market.

Meteorologists warn that the El Nino phenomenon is likely to hit southern Africa next year, which may endanger next year's harvest and impede a swift recovery.

### **2. HIV/AIDS**

An exacerbating factor is the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS. In 1992 Southern Africa faced a harsh drought that affected some 18 million people. However, HIV had not then taken hold as it has now. The most recent antenatal clinic data reveal that in several areas, there are levels of more than 30% in the most productive age group (15-49 years old). People suffering from HIV-related illnesses need more nutritious food and food shortages will accelerate illness.

This long-term scourge is also creating an enormous strain on communities, which are increasingly dependent on smaller numbers of able-bodied and healthy workers. It places a particular burden on

women, as care-taking falls most often to them, losing opportunities to maintain productive activities and earn income outside the home.

In Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe, it is common for grandparents to be caring for ten or more children, due to AIDS-related deaths. There is also an increase in child-headed households, as there are three million AIDS orphans in these countries. As well as a significant loss of labour power, the loss of parents means that agricultural skills are often not passed down from one generation to the next; orphan-headed households try to farm with less than adequate knowledge of agriculture.

High levels of HIV/AIDS infection mean that the coping strategies of communities, already under major stress, are at breaking point.

### 3. The dilemmas of liberalisation

Much has been written about the government of Malawi's decision to sell off its entire grain reserve, so that there is no longer a food safety-net. Where all the money went has still to be explained. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) vehemently denies that it instructed the government to sell the entire reserve. However, it says that it did advise it to reduce it by nearly two-thirds, backed by donors who felt that keeping so much food in-storage was costing the government far too much.

Across the region the IMF and donor countries have pushed economic liberalisation practices which have often been inappropriate. Under the Structural Adjustment Programmes of the last 15 years subsidised state marketing boards, which guaranteed countrywide and cross-seasonal prices for food crops, have been dismantled and privatised. All subsidies for fertiliser and other agricultural inputs have been removed, and this together with exchange rate liberalisation has led to massive increases in the costs of these inputs. In Malawi a highly successful distribution of £20m worth of free seeds and fertilisers to 2.8 million farmers was scaled back over several years on the advice of the donors. This scale-back contributed to a slump in food production.

Numerous studies have shown that these policies have overall had a negative effect on poverty and food security. Market liberalisation in Malawi has led to a widening gap between rich and poor and liberalisation has contributed to a massive increase in food insecurity across the region, as yields have fallen, soil fertility has decreased, and prices have become increasingly volatile. An evaluation commissioned by the IMF itself found that in Zambia, between 1991

and 1994, the liberalisation of state marketing had contributed to a 30% increase in rural poverty.

It is clear that without some form of state intervention as a safety net, poor people have become much more vulnerable to shocks such as erratic weather. Unfortunately, the IMF and other donors are not learning this lesson. In a press release in May, the IMF warned that the government was over-spending on the activities of the food reserve agency – which were aimed to minimise famine mortality. The IMF press release failed to mention the hundreds of deaths from starvation that had occurred in the 2-3 months previously.

The position of the IFIs and donors is hypocritical in the extreme as the US currently subsidises each of its farmers on average \$20,000 a year and in the EU this figure is approximately \$16,000. Not only this, but following the recent farm bill passed in the US subsidies there are set to increase by a massive 70%.

Oxfam would not advocate a wholesale return to state intervention and marketing. The current situation in Zimbabwe indicates the problems which can arise when a parastatal organisation like the Grain Marketing Board has near-monopoly powers. It markets maize at low prices which benefit poor consumers, but it does not have the money to purchase grain on the market in anything like sufficient quantities. At the same time its attempts to enforce a monopoly on trading in maize and wheat and a nationally low price means that private sector traders have difficulties importing food and few incentives to do so, if they cannot then sell it at a price which will cover their costs. In practice a parallel market exists and people who can afford to pay cash can obtain it at four times the Government-controlled price. But the current situation contributes to a general unavailability of maize in the market.

Nevertheless, this famine demonstrates clearly that the market alone cannot ensure food security. Poor people are finding it increasingly difficult to afford the current free market price of maize, which has spiralled out of control. There is an urgent need for donors and governments to discuss solutions to this supply/demand Catch-22, such as consumer subsidies. There is also a clear need for state support to be allowed to the agriculture sector, particularly to maintain national emergency food reserves and to provide subsidised inputs and extension services to rural populations.

Finally, it is also indisputable that corruption and, in places, political violence are likely to delay and complicate both national and international responses to the crisis. The sale of the national grain reserve in Malawi has already been mentioned, but Malawian civil society groups have raised questions less about the wisdom of the

sale than about what happened to the money raised, who benefited, and whether the proceeds could have been reinvested in buying new supplies on the commercial market. In Zimbabwe commercial farm operations have been severely disrupted by the land reform activities and widespread farm invasions.

In relief programmes it is crucial that civil society is involved and strengthened so that people have greater opportunity and power to hold authorities to account for delivery.

#### 4. Poverty

A major underlying cause of the crisis is simply poverty. Poverty takes away people's safety net, without which they are very vulnerable to shocks, and it does not take much to push them over the edge. In a 'normal' year in many parts of the region, 40-50% of households have run out of their own home-produced food by December, four or five months before the next harvest. In Malawi 70% of farms have run out of home-produced stocks by October. But increasingly, people have few other ways to earn enough money to buy food to see them through the hunger gap.

A spiral of economic decline is affecting the whole region, exacerbated in some countries by conflict and political unrest. This reduces the possibility for people to migrate from one country to another to find work and send remittances home. There is a long-term collapse in people's ability to earn a living. This livelihoods crisis is made worse by declining prices for Africa's commodities and the hypocrisy of rich countries in refusing to fully open their markets to Africa's exports.

#### 5. Conflict

Angola is a special case in the Southern Africa crisis. There is a mood of optimism as the decades-long civil war draws to a close. However, the huge humanitarian need in the country is only just becoming visible as the humanitarian community gains access to parts that have been isolated for years.

Many people have been living under near-siege conditions with no outside help. There are health problems caused by extremely unhygienic conditions and clear signs of both acute malnutrition and chronic food deprivation. Agriculture has been almost impossible, as people have been frequently displaced, and fear attacks or banditry. Minefields impede commerce and transportation.

Three million people are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, including food, medical assistance, clean water and sanitation. It is imperative that donors do not overlook this need, either by allowing it to be overshadowed by food needs in other countries of the region, or by emphasising the need for reconstruction at the expense of the critical humanitarian needs.

## **Can the current crisis be solved?**

### **Is food available?**

At a minimum, 1.2m tonnes of emergency food aid and an extra 2.8m tonnes of commercial supplies are needed over the next year according to WFP. This excludes what will be needed for Angola. WFP and FAO have called on donor governments worldwide to respond quickly and generously with food aid donations to 'avoid widespread hunger from developing into a humanitarian disaster'.

Although regional stocks are low, there is food for export within Southern Africa. South Africa has about 855,000 tonnes of maize tonnes for export, according to the South Africa Grain Producers Association. Other countries, such as Mozambique, Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda have exportable surpluses, perhaps as much as 220,000 tonnes in total. Mozambique's surplus - probably 100,000 tonnes - is likely to mostly go to Malawi. Donors should be encouraged to buy food for emergency aid locally as much as possible. There is also food on the world market from heavily subsidised farmers in the USA and from other big grain producing countries, such as Argentina and Brazil. As well as grain there is also a need for large imports of beans, oil and other foods so that diets can be properly balanced.

In theory much of the deficit could be met by commercial imports, if governments and private traders have money to import food. The gap between what can be bought commercially and what is needed will have to be met by food aid. Emergency food aid imports are expected to be up to 208,000 tonnes for Malawi, 174,383 tonnes for Zambia, and 70,000 tonnes for Mozambique. Zimbabwe will need at least 849,000 tonnes, however.

The logistics of moving food across the region will be difficult and will need donor support. WFP is setting up a large-scale operational centre in Johannesburg, which will co-ordinate the transport and logistics of the food distributions to the six key drought-affected countries.

While huge amounts of free food aid are clearly needed, particularly because many people may not have enough money to buy grain on the market, Oxfam experience points to the need to plan carefully and consider alternatives to food aid in certain situations. Large amounts of food aid at the wrong time could depress prices so that poor farmers get little income at the next harvest. Alternatives include cash for work, cash grants, food for work, food vouchers and micro-finance. These are best achieved in connection with ongoing development programmes. Careful monitoring is needed to know when different interventions are most appropriate.

In some parts there is potential for a secondary, winter harvest in November – December. Oxfam has therefore focused immediate work in Malawi and Zambia on ensuring that farmers got seeds and tools to enable them to plant in June, as many farmers had eaten their seed-stocks out of hunger. The seeds have been planted in semi-wetlands, known as dambo, where people have access to a limited supply of water. Watering cans and pumps were also being distributed with the seeds.

In Zimbabwe, Oxfam is supporting a range of activities. These include a feeding programme for primary school children, seed and tool distribution for the next summer planting season in September/October, construction of small dams and targeted food distribution. Such responses by NGOs at a micro-level will help people survive at a local level and will complement the international response.

## Donor response

WFP is already providing food for 2.6 million people across the region and plans to launch a major regional appeal in early July. According to WFP/FAO, the numbers of people needing food between now and August is around 7.5 million – a huge increase. Many of the donors have already committed funds and food:

- DFID has just announced a further £45m package for six countries
- Canadian CIDA has just committed £15m for Angola and drought affected countries
- the EU has committed some food for Malawi (with more to arrive September onwards), £80m for Angola and £4m more for Zimbabwe on top of c.£4.5m committed in May
- the US government has recently announced that it will provide 400,000 of food – one-third of the total amount required. Some of

this has already been pledged and is en route; the new pledge amounts to around 275,000 tonnes

Others are waiting for the appeal in July before committing further funds.

It is currently not possible to get a country-by-country analysis of the quantity of food needed and the current deficit; this will be available from WFP's appeal document in July. However, our analysis of currently available information indicates that there appears to be a lack of donor enthusiasm to fund in Zimbabwe.

Following last year's poor harvest the UN launched a humanitarian appeal for Zimbabwe in September 2001, to run until January 2003. The appeal was for \$86.3m. By the end of April it had raised just \$20.7m, 25% of the required amount. A UN Famine Early Warning Systems Network report noted that 'greater humanitarian effort is required by both the Government and donors to avert a humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe'. Despite the poor response WFP started food distributions in February and these are ongoing to over half a million people and progressing reasonably well.

To meet the new crisis however these will have to be scaled up enormously, and the indications so far this year are that most bilateral donors have not prioritised Zimbabwe, despite the far greater numbers of people needing, or likely to need, food aid there. This may change after the regional appeal is launched in July. Donor reactions to the food crisis are inevitably complicated by the political situation and the practicalities of distribution and by a lack of trust and dialogue. On 19 June USAID's Famine Early Warning Systems Network warned that: 'The response to the current 2002/03 food crisis has not yet started. If like last year, then the response by the donor community could come too late for the severely affected population'. In the longer term Zimbabwe's change from exporter to importer of maize has serious consequences for the whole region if it becomes a regular phenomenon.

## Recommendations

1. Donors must act NOW and mobilize resources to solve immediate food shortages, to avert a major famine from September onwards, and to reverse destruction of livelihoods. Donors should buy food locally within the region as far as possible.
2. This aid must be carefully targeted:
  - Food relief is not appropriate all the time or in all circumstances and may damage food markets - other options such as cash and cash for work etc should be carefully considered. This will need consistent grass-roots household and community monitoring and good communications.
  - This is not just a food deficit - this is a wider public health emergency with key problems relating to HIV/AIDS, sanitation and quality and quantity of water. Programmes should reflect this holistic approach.
  - There is a need to rebuild depleted assets and strengthen livelihoods and local agricultural production now and for the future. Agricultural extension services are key. The 'Starter Pack' programme in Malawi, where seeds and tools were distributed free to vulnerable farmers, should be scaled back up again and piloted elsewhere in the region.
3. In view of the length of time taken to recover from serious food shortages and drought, donors must take a long-term view:
  - Resources need to be committed for several years within the framework of long-term food security needs.
  - Agricultural diversification should be investigated – perhaps starting a shift away from maize production, as has been already achieved in some countries – and support given to livestock programmes.
  - The involvement and strengthening of regional mechanisms within SADC should be considered.
4. UN agencies and NGOs must coordinate closely to achieve quality programming and maximum impact with the resources available
  - WFP, FAO and other agencies as appropriate must carefully monitor commercial imports of food and key indicators such as terms of trade to ensure that donors and agencies have an accurate understanding of the situation at all levels.

- WFP and agencies must work closely together to standardize targeting and distribution and work to ensure that aid is distributed according to need alone.
- Food distribution should work with communities and their organizations. Strong civil society involvement is crucial for proper targeting and accountability.
- NGOs and UN agencies should advocate for and undertake a holistic and tailored programmatic approach, to take into account factors such as long-term livelihoods, HIV/AIDS and public health.

5. The liberalisation of agriculture under structural adjustment has greatly increased chronic food insecurity. Donors should admit previous mistakes in giving poor policy guidance and work with all stakeholders to create an agricultural policy for countries in the region that really works in the interest of the poorest populations and supports the human right to food. This should include support for National Food Reserves, to be run accountably and not forced to recover costs.

6. Donors, the Government of Zimbabwe and neighbouring African countries should urgently address the centrality and magnitude of the current food crisis in Zimbabwe, and the long-term implications.

It is not acceptable for people to starve due to political differences.

a) The Government of Zimbabwe has the primary responsibility to ensure adequate food for its population; it must also facilitate the work of humanitarian agencies, including protection of relief supplies.

b) Donors and the Zimbabwean Government must find creative solutions to get food into Zimbabwe now:

- Aid – if differences with the Zimbabwean Government cannot be resolved, donors must provide resources through WFP and NGOs, and provide extra support for the rapid scaling up of these organizations required to meet the need
- Commercial imports – must be vigorously encouraged by Government policies and donors must look for alternative strategies, such as the provision of incentives

c) Donors, WFP and NGOs must work to ensure

- that food aid will be distributed on the basis of need alone
- capacity for effective monitoring

- strong civil society involvement.

In the longer term, African governments and donors need to deepen their engagement to try to find solutions in the interests of the peace, security and prosperity of all people in Zimbabwe. This should include an in-depth review of cereal production strategy to ensure long-term food security in the region.

7. Concerning Angola, more humanitarian assistance must start arriving now. This assistance must be allocated and distributed according to identified critical needs, and should be done in consultation with the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs strategy and Consolidated Appeal.

- The UN Security Council should increase the numbers of military observers in Angola, mandated to observe and verify the demobilisation process.
- Urgent protection needs must be addressed, ensuring that humanitarian relief and demobilisation move forward in a way that increases the security of civilians, particularly women, children, the elderly and other vulnerable groups.
- De-mining in the quartering areas, in settlements and in resettlement areas is a high priority.
- Civil society must be involved in the peace and reconstruction process, to avoid previous failures of the collapsed 1994 Lusaka peace accords.
- Now that peace has arrived, transparency in the oil industry must improve, and also transparency about government revenues. Publishing details of the government's oil income would act as a confidence building measure and encourage civil society and donor response.

## Country by country analysis

### Zimbabwe

This year Zimbabwe has experienced the worst drought in 20 years. Political upheaval and the land crisis have contributed to a sharp fall of maize production by commercial farmers, who usually produce one-third of the total cereals for the country. Although the total area planted to cereals actually increased last year, with smallholders planting more, maize production is down by 67% in a country that used to be one of Africa's main exporters for neighbouring countries. Production of cash crops for export, such as cotton, soyabeans and groundnuts, which is done largely by commercial farmers, is also considerably reduced, and the government has little foreign exchange to buy food from abroad. Finance Minister Simba Makoni says Zimbabwe's economy has lost a third of its jobs since 2000. Zimbabweans increasingly have no alternative sources of work and income. In addition, the country has the highest rate of HIV/AIDS of all the drought-affected countries.

An Oxfam assessment in May stated: 'Firstly, the 2000/2001 season was a difficult one with uneven and later excessive rain...Secondly, the 2001/2002 season has been declared by the state authorities as a disaster....The inadequate supply of food is further exacerbated by the empty on-farm stocks and unavailability of maize on the market....Thirdly, the health services in the districts have deteriorated and are almost collapsing.'

On June 19 USAID's Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS) released its Zimbabwe Food Security Assessment. This states that 'about 849,000 MT of food aid are required immediately for 6.5 million food insecure people before the critical period in September'. By December over six million people, half the population, will need food aid to survive, according to the FAO. Every district is affected across the country.

Certain groups are particularly vulnerable, including approaching people who were formerly workers or the dependants of workers on commercial farms. An assessment of the impact of the land reform programme on commercial farm workers done in May by the Farm Community Trust of Zimbabwe concluded that: 'The affected farm workers need assistance urgently. The main priority at the moment is food. It is important that interested stakeholders move in swiftly to these areas to avert massive starvation'. The FCTZ estimates numbers of commercial farm workers and their families at risk to be

near one million, with the FEWS report estimating about half that figure.

Zimbabwe is expected to need a minimum of 849,000 tonnes in food aid over the year, according to FEWS, with around 815,000 tonnes to be imported commercially. However, the Government has very little foreign exchange and little prospect of obtaining it, and there is concern that private traders will not come forward to fill the gap because of government restrictions. Local NGOs increasingly concerned about the sheer lack of food are urgently petitioning the Zimbabwean Government for more private commercial imports to be allowed into the country. They say that heavy bureaucracy, government Grain Marketing Board (GMB) monopoly on grain imports, price controls and restrictions on the movement of grain inside the country need to be eased. Even if the food is imported commercially, most people have extremely low purchasing power, due to the lack of employment opportunities.

FEWS notes that: 'If maize prices increase from Z\$17.50 per kg (the current GMB retail price) to Z\$75 per kg, then the income sources would be further stretched, forcing the poorest consumers out of the market and increasing food aid requirements from 849,000 MT to 910,000 MT and the number of people requiring food aid increases to 5.8 million people'.

Donor governments are unwilling to provide emergency food aid to the Government of Zimbabwe for distribution. Instead they are providing it through WFP and NGOs, both local and international. Local groups are also importing food and seeds and distributing them. Food distributions are ongoing although occasionally interrupted in some places by political violence. But the reach and capacity of NGOs are badly stretched already, at a time when they need to gear up. The resilience of civil society is limited and being severely tested. By late 2001, over half of Zimbabwe's 1500 NGOs were no longer operating due to funding problems, exacerbated by political factors. In addition, there are concerns about the politicisation of food aid. Donors and NGOs are looking for guarantees that food can be distributed impartially.

Oxfam has been in Zimbabwe, working both directly and through partners, for 22 years. We are currently planning an expansion of our humanitarian programme, including work with winter cropping methods, water and sanitation, food and nutrition, AIDS awareness, and gender programmes. We will start a food distribution programme at the end of June in one district in Midlands province and aim to expand this to two districts not currently covered by WFP.

## Malawi

Two million people will require food aid by September, rising to over three million before the end of 2002. While the current food shortages were triggered by bad weather, long-term poverty and poor governance also had roles to play.

In 1991/92 there was a severe food shortage in Malawi, with yields much lower than those preceding the current famine. However, the state marketing board, ADMARC, had depots in the most inaccessible rural communities and made food available at subsidised prices. Ten years later no such safety net exists.

Malawi has removed all subsidies to agriculture and has committed to privatising ADMARC by the end of 2002 under its last agreement with the World Bank. In addition the National Food Reserve Agency (NFRA) has been set up as a separate agency to ADMARC and is meant to operate on a full cost-recovery basis without relying on any state subsidy.

Donors have called for a full audit of the sale of the Strategic Grain Reserve in the early part of 2001, which has yet to be forthcoming. Although corruption was strongly suspected, confusion was compounded by the NFRA having no clear mandate, with uncertainty on whether it was working on food security or cost recovery. The Agency had to take a loan even to pay its salaries and start up costs, and had minimal management support or technical expertise. The confusion surrounding the sale of the reserve contributed to hesitation by donors and delays in responding to signs of increasing distress with food assistance.

This situation must change. There should be a reserve which operates transparently, with a clear mandate and which exists both as an emergency stock and to play some role in price stabilisation.

The 'Starter Pack' programme introduced four years ago in Malawi distributed a small packet of free fertiliser and seed to all smallholder farmers. This, among other factors, led to a bumper crop over the next two years. The original intention was to continue the Starter Pack for a number of years until a certain level of food security was reached. However, following disagreements amongst donors it was radically cut back, first to half of all farmers, and then to only a third. This undoubtedly contributed to the shortfall in maize produced last year. On a positive note though, this year the programme is being increased once again and is distributing to nearly all smallholders (c.2.5 million).

## Zambia

Zambia has a population of 10 million, three-quarters of which live below the World Bank poverty threshold of one US dollar a day. Some 2.3 million people will need food assistance up to the next main harvest in March 2003. Zambia has experienced a second year of drought, especially in the south. Currently WFP is feeding some 1.3 million people hit by drought and floods last year but warned that, as of late March, it had received only 40% of the funds it had appealed for.

A recent Oxfam assessment in selected districts in the Southern province found the food security situation close to crisis with some communities expected to run out of maize as early as June, and others expecting to run out in August. This area has experienced particularly low rainfall that has resulted in up to 90% crop failure and led to up to a 400% rise in price of maize. People are eating only one meal a day instead of three. WFP is expanding its areas of food distribution in response.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Plan just endorsed by the boards of the World Bank and the IMF, states very clearly that 'there is little disagreement within Zambia presently that the policy of liberalisation is correct for revitalising agriculture'.

Zambia liberalised its National Agricultural Marketing Board and elaborate system of subsidies and marketing in the late eighties and early nineties, and by 1995 had completely eliminated all consumer subsidies on maize and maize products. This led to a massive increase in the cost of agricultural inputs, and a collapse in market access for rural areas. This has undermined food security in large sections of the country leading to increased poverty, as the IMF admitted in an external evaluation of its Zambian programme.

Following the recent food crisis, the new Zambian Government has decided to reintroduce some state involvement in agriculture and agricultural marketing in Zambia, a policy strongly criticised by the World Bank and IMF. Civil society in fact was very clear in its submission to the Zambian PRSP that there must be a role for the state in agriculture, and particularly 'the maintenance of a national food reserve of maize and other cereals'.

## Angola

Angola's decades-long civil war appears to have drawn to a close. However, the scale of humanitarian need is only just becoming

apparent as the humanitarian community gains access to parts of the country that have been isolated from many years.

An estimated one million people are said to be suddenly within reach of humanitarian assistance, and the needs are dire. This brings the total number of Angolans in need of immediate humanitarian assistance to some three million people.

Assessment missions have revealed widespread suffering with shocking levels of malnutrition. Rapid nutritional screening found rates of severe malnutrition as high as 10, 17 and even 24% in certain areas. Generalisations for the country as a whole are not possible, because of the variations between accessible areas and non-accessible areas. However, new arrivals from UNITA areas display global malnutrition rates as high as 42%, with many cases of oedema, which is an indication of extreme nutritional stress. These malnutrition rates are nearly four times what normally serves as an alarm for the international community.

In addition, every location visited contained people in urgent need of basic health care, sanitation, potable water, food and essential non-food items. Most of the people in these areas have been living in extremely unhygienic conditions. For example, in Candumbo, in Huambo province, every single child seen by the assessment mission was infected with scabies, due to a lack of soap and water. Many of the children had suffered multiple untreated fractures, vitamin A and B deficiencies leading to blindness, and growth retardation. Stunting was apparent in some of the older children, ages 7-10, which is an indication of chronic food shortages.

Most areas have few if any schools and health centres. Even those health centres that exist have few supplies and no food to feed the patients. In addition, agriculture has been next to impossible, as people have been frequently displaced, and still fear attacks or banditry. Major shipping routes have been closed or mined for years. With an estimated eight million mines scattered across Angola, nearly all agriculture and commerce has been affected.

Demobilisation is proceeding relatively smoothly, with some 79,000 soldiers demobilised, and some 230,000 family members now living in the quartering areas.

## Other countries

### **Mozambique**

Mozambique presents a mixed picture, both geographically and in terms of agricultural liberalisation policies. Overall grain production

in Mozambique is 8% up on last year. With reasonable rains farmers produced a good crop in the north of the country, and there is a surplus of c.100, 000 tonnes for export. In the south and central regions, however, drought has led to real shortages. The surplus being produced in the north may be exported to Malawi rather than being shipped to the south of the country, because of transport costs.

The state marketing structure, AGRICOM, and the Public Grain Reserve were dismantled by the Mozambique Government in the late eighties and early nineties under a series of structural adjustment reforms . AGRICOM had been performing badly and had been of little use to small farmers. It has been replaced by the Instituto Nacional de Ceriais, which is trying to build up strategic grain reserves.

In the centre and north of the country farmers have had increased access to competing commercial marketing channels and production has increased. Smallholders do however need much better access to credit and savings facilities and there is still a shortage of private sector buyers. The dismantling of the state marketing system has reduced the ability to market the surplus produced in many rural areas.

To enhance food security helpful policy changes could include greater provision for transporting surpluses to deficit areas, the maintenance of a grain reserve, and provision of credit and savings facilities in rural areas.

### **Lesotho**

Heavy rain during the ploughing and planting season in October and November was followed by severe frost, hailstorms and tornadoes. This led to a harvest 60% below normal. The government declared a state of famine in April. The plight of poor people is very similar to that in Malawi, with low purchasing power and high prices of food more of a problem than a lack of food per se. The situation is made worse by a downturn in Lesotho's economy. The downsizing of mines in neighbouring South Africa also hit people hard, as many rely on remittances from workers abroad.

### **Swaziland**

According to the government, the dry spell between December 2001 and January 2002 caused crop failures in much of the country. The expected maize deficit for the coming year is 134,000 MT; 40,000 MT of this deficit will need to be met by emergency food assistance.

## **Namibia**

Namibia has also had lower crop yields this year and the Government has said that, as a minimum, 70,000 people living in the Caprivi Strip will need food aid.

## **Notes and References**

### **Key Documents**

FEWS Southern Africa Food Security Update 17 May 2002 'Is a Regional Food Security Crisis Looming?' and previous reports, and FEWS Zimbabwe Food security Assessment Report for 2002/03 Consumption Year, 19 June 2002.

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IRIN reports

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- Humanitarian Needs Assessment in 4 districts of Masvingo and Midlands Province of Zimbabwe, May 2002, Oxfam GB
- Humanitarian Needs Assessment in Thyolo and Mulanje districts of southern Malawi, March 2002

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Mozambique: Rehabilitation Credit project 1989, Economic Recovery Credit Project 1992, Second Economic Recovery Project 1997 (all World Bank).

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