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SOUTHERN AFRICA: EFFECTS OF THE FOOD CRISIS

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1 General Overview

Nearly 13 million people in southern Africa are affected by severe food shortages. The World Food Programme estimates the regional food shortfall to be some 4 million tonnes, of which 1.2 million tonnes will need to be met from food aid. Six countries are identified as being especially harshly affected: Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique, Lesotho and Swaziland. Already hundreds are thought to have died, mainly in poorer countries such as Malawi.¹

The common cause of the crisis has been a failure of the rains, resulting in poor to non-existent crops across the eastern half of the region. Yet the situation has been greatly exacerbated by a series of political factors, notably the destruction of the commercial farming sector in Zimbabwe.²

It is instructive to compare the present food crisis with a similar drought a decade ago, when more people – some 18 million – were under threat of starvation. By general consensus, the drought and food shortages of the early 1990s were well managed and few people died as a result. But there have been a number of changes since then:

- the continuing impact of HIV-AIDS means that there is a smaller proportion of economically active adults and a larger proportion of households headed by children;
- economic liberalization has increased rural poverty – notably in already poor countries like Malawi, Lesotho and Swaziland;
- political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe has exacerbated food shortages caused by climate, fuelled inflation in the region and created a dramatic shortage of foreign exchange.³

The positive developments over the same period – such as the revival of agriculture in Mozambique – scarcely compensate for these factors.

The crisis in Zimbabwe is at the heart of the potential famine in Southern Africa. Of the six countries primarily affected, Lesotho and Swaziland (along with Botswana and Namibia) are traditionally food deficit countries that require imports from South Africa to make up the shortfall. While the shortfall is larger this year, the problem is manageable. About 20% of the

¹ World Food Programme, *Food Shortages in Lesotho: The Facts; Food Shortages in Malawi: The Facts; Food Shortages in Mozambique: The Facts; Food Shortages in Swaziland: The Facts; Food Shortages in Zambia: The Facts; Food Shortages in Zimbabwe: The Facts* – all published, Rome, 5 July 2002

² Great Britain, Department for International Development, *Southern Africa Food Crisis: Situation Report 09 August 2002*, London, 9 August 2002, <http://www.reliefweb.int> [accessed 22 August 2002]; Food and Agriculture Organization, *Special Report: FAO/WFP Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission to Zimbabwe*, Rome, 29 May 2002, <http://www.reliefweb.int> [accessed 14 July 2002]

³ Reuters, Koch, N., Cruel Nature not the Only Cause of Africa's Hunger, 30 May 2002, <http://www.alertnet.org> [accessed 14 July 2002]; Reuters, Wisner, B., Government Failure Turned Emergency into Famine, 1 June 2002, <http://www.alertnet.org> [accessed 30 August 2002]

population in each of Lesotho and Swaziland is estimated to be in need of food aid (445,000 and 231,000 respectively).⁴

The impact of the Zimbabwe crisis lies not only in the sudden absence of the food that the country is traditionally able to export to its neighbours. The political and economic consequences are equally important. Inflation exported from Zimbabwe has put food prices out of the reach of poor people in Malawi and parts of Zambia, as well as within the country itself. This famine, like most, is primarily a problem of access to food rather than availability. Inevitably it is the poor who are hit hardest.⁵

2 Country by Country Analysis

2.1 Zimbabwe⁶

The crisis in Zimbabwe is of a quite different quality and magnitude from that in the other affected countries. After South Africa, Zimbabwe has the second largest and most diverse economy in the sub-region. The seizure of commercial farm land has had a direct impact on the nation's capacity to produce enough food. But of equal significance has been the disruption of other forms of agriculture, such as tobacco production and horticulture for export, which has severely hit foreign exchange earnings. Industrial production has equally been hit, with an overall shrinkage of 12% in the economy this year. Half of those affected by food shortages are in this, the most fertile and, until recently, the most productive agricultural economy in the region. It is this that transforms serious shortages caused by climatic factors into a potential disaster.⁷

Six million Zimbabweans, nearly half the population and about half the number affected regionally, are in need of food aid. Normally self-sufficient in maize, in the last growing season Zimbabwe produced only 480,000 tonnes of maize – a quarter of its needs. It needs to import 1.7 million tonnes of maize to meet the shortfall.⁸

⁴ Oxfam International, *Crisis in Southern Africa June 2002*, Oxford, 26 June 2002, <http://www.reliefweb.int> [accessed 14 July 2002]; Great Britain, Department for International Development, *Southern Africa Food Crisis...*

⁵ Famine Early Warning Systems Network, *Is a Famine Developing in Southern Africa*, Washington, 15 July 2002, <http://www.reliefweb.int> [accessed 30 August 2002]

⁶ FOSENET, *Community Assessment of the Food Situation in Zimbabwe July 2002*, Harare, 14 August 2002, <http://www.kubatana.net/docs/foodse/fosenet0207.pdf> [accessed August 2002]; World Food Programme, *Food Shortages in Zimbabwe...*; Great Britain, Department for International Development, *Southern Africa Food Crisis...*; Food and Agriculture Organization, *Special Report...Zimbabwe...*; United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network, *Zimbabwe: Food Crisis Forcing People from Homes*, Johannesburg, 3 July 2002; United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network, *Zimbabwe: Thousands of Labourers Face Eviction*, Johannesburg, 22 August 2002; United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network, *Zimbabwe: Rural Households Stretched to the Limit*, Johannesburg, 3 September 2002; Reuters, Sayagues, M., *Zimbabwe's Food Crisis: What Went Wrong*, 1 August 2002, <http://www.alertnet.org> [accessed 30 August 2002]; United Nations Relief and Recovery Unit, *Zimbabwe: Humanitarian Situation Report*, Harare, 20 August 2002, <http://www.reliefweb.int> [accessed 21 August 2002]

⁷ Deutsche Presse-Agentur, *Inflation Reaches All Time High 123.5 Per Cent in Zimbabwe*, 21 August 2002; United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network, *Zimbabwe: Rural Households ...*; Reuters, Sayagues

⁸ World Food Programme, *Food Shortages in Zimbabwe...*

The first manifestations of the food crisis in Zimbabwe had nothing to do with the weather and everything to do with the disruption of agriculture caused by land occupations. The first signs came during 2001 when there were shortages of vegetables supplied from commercial farms. Then the disruption of planting of wheat (a winter crop) in the same year led to shortages of bread. However, wheat is a staple only for a small proportion of the urban population (and a reserve staple for others). It was the collapse of the maize crop that caused disaster.

The argument advanced by the government and its supporters is that communal farmers have been extremely efficient maize producers since independence. An expansion of the small-scale black farming sector is vital to long-term food security, according to this argument. It is a view that has some substance, but one that leaves two important factors out of account. First, the dramatic increase in communal maize production since independence has been based upon the availability of efficient extension services and farming inputs. The “resettlement” of 2001-2002, by contrast, has been chaotic and virtually without any infrastructural support for resettled farmers. In addition, many of those resettled have not been landless peasants, but ruling party and government loyalists rewarded for their support.

The second important factor is that commercial maize production, unlike that in the communal areas, is irrigation-fed. This makes it less vulnerable to short-term fluctuations in rainfall and avoids the situation – which has been prevalent this year – when people are short of food, ostensibly as a result of drought, while the country’s dams are full.

If the 2002 maize crop was disrupted at the time of planting and harvesting, the wheat crop (to be harvested in September) and next year’s maize will be even harder hit. The government has now embarked on the wholesale eviction of commercial farmers, with the probable loss of most crops currently in the ground and a potentially devastating impact on planting for the coming season.

The impact of Zimbabwe’s land resettlement on the food situation goes far beyond the fall in crops planted. One of the most devastating effects of the land occupations – indeed many argue that this was one of the main aims of the exercise – was the displacement of hundreds of thousands of workers employed on the commercial farms, along with their families. Deprived of homes and income, these are the most vulnerable to food shortages.⁹

Equally, the overall effect of land occupations, political violence and disruption over the past two years has been a shrinkage of the economy and a loss of foreign exchange earnings. In the past year GDP has contracted by 12% and inflation is running at more than 120%. This has generated greater poverty at a local level, as well as reducing the country’s capacity to import food.¹⁰

Finally, the crisis has been exacerbated by serious mismanagement of food relief on the part of the government and its agencies. The government has insisted on channelling food imports through the parastatal Grain Marketing Board, an inefficient mechanism, but one that allows the government to control distribution of grain on party political grounds. The same applies

⁹ United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network, *Zimbabwe: Thousands of Labourers...; Migration News* [Southern African Migration Project], July 2002, <http://queensu.ca/samp/news.htm> [accessed 28 August 2002]

¹⁰ Deutsche Presse-Agentur, Inflation...

to food-for-work schemes. The third channel for distribution of food aid is through donor-funded schemes. In most instances external donors have monitored distribution to make sure that opposition supporters are not denied support. Yet there have been instances where this has happened. Human rights groups accuse the government of deliberately inflicting starvation on its political opponents.¹¹

2.2 Malawi¹²

Malawi is the second worst affected country in the region. The maize shortfall this season is estimated at 700,000 tonnes, with approximately 3.2 million people affected.¹³ While much discussion has focused on the government's recent sale of the strategic grain reserve – a move that has undoubtedly had a serious impact on food availability – the underlying problem is again one of access to food on the part of poorer households.¹⁴ Northern Mozambique surrounds Malawi on three sides, and there has always been a flourishing informal trade across the border. There is no obstacle to part of Mozambique's surplus finding its way into Malawi. The problem is whether many Malawian households can afford to buy the food, in view of the extreme poverty of the population.

Under the rule of Kamuzu Banda (1964-1994), massive tracts of countryside were alienated to create agricultural estates and used as a form of political patronage. The vast majority of Malawians belong to rural smallholding families. Yet by the 1990s more than half of these households had less than one hectare of land. Hence most Malawians cannot feed themselves even in a good year. Cash incomes – mainly from labour on the estates – are essential.¹⁵ Yet economic liberalization since the early 1990s has hit the poor hardest. The removal of price subsidies has pushed up prices of both food and fertilizer, hitting production in turn.

2.3 Zambia¹⁶

Zambia, like Mozambique, has been only partially affected by the drought. It is only the south of the country that has experienced low rainfall, but in this region there has been 90% crop failure. It is estimated that Zambia's cereal shortfall is about 620,000 tonnes. Some 2.3 million people, about 20% of the population, are in need of food aid.¹⁷

¹¹ FOSENET, *Community Assessment...*; International Crisis Group, *Zim's Silent, Selective Starvation*, 29 August 2002 [press release]; Mugabe Opponents' Children 'Starving', *Daily Telegraph* [London], 12 July 2002; Itano, N., *Zimbabwe's Political Tool: Food*, *Christian Science Monitor*, 19 August 2002

¹² World Food Programme, *Food Shortages in Malawi...*; Devereux, S., *Making Less Last Longer: Informal Safety Nets in Malawi*, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, 1999; United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network, *Malawi: Coping Strategies Eroded as Poverty Deepens*, Johannesburg, 20 August 2002; United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network, *Malawi: Desperation Setting In*, Johannesburg, 5 September 2002; United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network, *Malawi: Food Crisis Could Worsen*, Johannesburg, 9 September 2002; *Starving Malawi Loses \$40m in Corrupt Maize Sales*, *Mail & Guardian*, 7 September 2002, <http://www.mg.co.za/mg> [accessed 7 September 2002]; Oxfam International, *Crisis...*; Famine Early Warning Systems Network, *Is a Famine Developing...*

¹³ Mugabe Opponents' ...

¹⁴ Reuters, Wisner

¹⁵ Carver, R., *Malawi under Banda: A Lost History*, London: Zed Books, fc 2002

¹⁶ Food and Agriculture Organization, *Special Report: FAO/WFP Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission to Zambia*, Rome, 18 June 2002, <http://www.reliefweb.int> [accessed 14 July 2002]; World Food Programme, *Food Shortages in Zambia...*

¹⁷ World Food Programme, *Food Shortages in Zambia...*

Although substantial, it is estimated that the shortfall could be met by imports from within the region and from donors. However, the issue of access to food on the part of the poor, rather than general availability of food, may turn out to be the crucial one. In the early 1990s, Zambia removed all consumer subsidies on maize and maize products. An IMF external evaluation recently found that this had undermined food security. Maize prices have increased by up to 400%, caused in part by the drought, but also by inflation imported from neighbouring Zimbabwe.

2.4 Mozambique¹⁸

Mozambique, which has been buffeted by civil strife and extreme weather conditions in recent years, has one significant advantage. It extends across such varied climatic and agrarian zones from north to south that unfavourable weather conditions will never have the same effects across the entire country. Hence now, while the south and centre of the country have been badly hit by the drought, the north continues to produce a healthy surplus. The country has also benefited from the economic and infrastructural reconstruction of the past decade. The surplus may also be significant in relation to food shortages in Malawi, with its long border with Mozambique. Some half a million people are estimated to be short of food, although this is only 3% of the total population.¹⁹

Overall grain production in Mozambique increased by 8% in 2001-2002, compared with the previous season, with farmers in the north producing a good crop, with a surplus of about 100,000 tonnes. However, one problem is that the absence of north-south transport corridors means that the grain surplus is mainly being exported to Malawi rather than going to the south of Mozambique.

2.5 Lesotho²⁰

In contrast to the rest of the region, Lesotho's food shortages were caused by heavy rains during the October-November 2001 planting season. This was followed by severe frost, hailstorms and tornadoes, resulting in a harvest 60% below normal.

Lesotho is traditionally a food deficit country that expects to import from South Africa to meet its shortfall. Its main problem is again one of access to food by poor people rather than overall availability, as income from mineworkers' remittances is reducing and there is a downturn in the Lesotho economy.

2.6 Swaziland²¹

Maize production in Swaziland was 18% below the previous year (itself a poor harvest) and 37% below the five-year average. The lowveld area of the country was worst hit by poor rains in December.

¹⁸ World Food Programme, *Food Shortages in Mozambique...*; Famine Early Warning Systems Network, *Is a Famine Developing...*

¹⁹ World Food Programme, *Food Shortages in Mozambique...*

²⁰ World Food Programme, *Food Shortages in Lesotho...*; United Nations Integrated Regional Network, *Lesotho: Still on the Brink*, Johannesburg, 6 September 2002

²¹ World Food Programme, *Food Shortages in Swaziland...*; Food and Agriculture Organization, *Special Report: FAO/WFP Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission to Swaziland*, Rome, 29 May 2002, <http://www.reliefweb.int> [accessed 14 July 2002]

Some 60% of food needs are met from imports in a normal year, mainly from South Africa. Because of increased demand for South African grain, WFP estimates that some of the shortfall may have to be met from outside the region.

Poor families face the problem of high cereal prices. As elsewhere in the region, selling livestock is an important survival strategy in times of food shortage. However, livestock prices are falling from an oversupplied market (again echoing what is happening elsewhere in the region). The high prevalence of HIV-AIDS is a major factor undermining food security, especially since remittances from migrant workers remain the major source of cash for many poorer households.

3 Impact of Food Shortages on Population Movements

To some extent present food shortages result from and are bound up with displacement of people that has already occurred. This is most evident in Zimbabwe. It is also apparent that people who have already been displaced will be less able to resort to traditional coping strategies than if they had remained in their previous homes. This applies particularly to farm workers who would have maintained a small garden to supplement their food needs. The loss of these small plots is both a cause of the crisis and an obstacle in the way of farm workers and their families adopting their usual strategies in periods of hunger.

The question of how far shortages of food might themselves lead to physical displacement depends on a variety of factors:

- how far traditional coping strategies in famine periods will continue to work;
- how far food is seen to be available in other areas;
- how far cash incomes may be available elsewhere.

Survival or coping strategies vary throughout the region, but there are a number of elements that can be found in most places:

Reduction of food consumption: this is an elementary strategy already being practised in many places, often involving reducing meals to one a day. For young children, of course, this is dangerous and accounts for the emergence of malnutrition in children in some parts of the region, including Zimbabwe and Malawi.

Sharing with family and neighbours: this is another basic way of coping, but one that is scarcely effective when the scale of shortages is as great as it is this year.

Working for cash: in practice this is hardly a strategy for famine but a normal way of keeping a household. Even in the least developed parts of the region, such as rural Malawi, most households are permanently dependent on working for cash or for payments in kind. The problem, however, is that shortages generate price inflation, making it difficult for poor households to afford food even when it is available. The crisis in Zimbabwe has had its own inflationary impact, which affects not only the 12-13 million Zimbabweans, half of whom will be among the seriously hungry, but also many people in adjacent areas. The other reason

waged employment has been undermined as a survival strategy is the impact of AIDS, with many households not having an active adult who can go and find a job.

Selling assets: when cash raised from employment is insufficient then households will sell their fixed assets, of which the most important is usually livestock. This is already happening in areas such as Swaziland and parts of Zimbabwe where cattle husbandry is an important part of the economy. Once again the problem is the nature of the market: livestock prices are depressed because so many people are selling at once. This is especially true in Zimbabwe, where a large proportion of the national herd has been sold not because of the famine, but as a result of the seizure of commercial farms.

Eating "bush foods": consuming wild crops or famine-resistant items such as tubers is often a last resort. In a number of parts of the region, especially Zimbabwe, this strategy is already being used. This is one of the reason why it is estimated that the impact of the food shortages will be so serious.²²

One of these strategies – working for cash – clearly entails migration for most southern Africans, often over great distances. The major population displacement caused by food shortages will be of individual family members trying to find work, rather than a mass flight of the starving.

The migratory patterns of this crisis will be influenced in part by its very regional character. Many of the farm workers displaced in Zimbabwe are of Malawian, Zambian or Mozambican origin – especially the first of these. Yet the severity of the food shortages in Malawi make it unlikely that the feared mass return of Zimbabweans of Malawian origin will in fact take place.

In the two worst affected countries, Zimbabwe and Malawi, traditional coping strategies have largely failed for differing reasons.²³ It seems likely that this will be a significant "push" factor. In Zimbabwe, entire families have already been deliberately uprooted. In Malawi, it is more likely families will divide, in the hope that a breadwinner, usually male, can earn a cash income elsewhere in the region.

Historically, southern African economies have been structured around the labour needs of mines, industry and large-scale agriculture in South Africa (and to a lesser extent Zimbabwe and Zambia). Four of the countries affected by the current food shortages – Malawi, Mozambique, Lesotho and Swaziland – have historically functioned as labour reserves, with extensive male migration on either a seasonal or long-term basis. In the case of Lesotho and Swaziland, this has been because they are simply not viable as national economies. In the case of Malawi, even as South Africa's need for migrant labour was declining, the local economy was becoming more dependent upon remittances. The extensive alienation of communal land and development of estate agriculture in the period from the 1960s to the 1980s undermined the viability of subsistence agriculture in Malawi even in good years. Hence individual households are permanently dependent on labour migration and cash earnings, whether on agricultural estates in Malawi itself, or from elsewhere in the region.

²² Devereux, *Making Less Last Longer...*; FOSENET, *Community Assessment...*; United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network, *Zimbabwe: Rural Households...*

²³ United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network, *Malawi: Coping Strategies...*; United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network, *Zimbabwe: Rural Households...*

In the past two decades, South Africa's labour needs have changed and the pattern of migration with it. The system of labour migration overseen by the apartheid administration and the big mining houses has been replaced by a much more varied pattern of seasonal and often informal migration. Some countries, such as Mozambique, have continued to maintain their share of jobs in traditional sectors, such as mining, even as the total number of such jobs available has declined. Other nationalities have also tended to be concentrated in particular sectors, such as Zimbabweans in the construction industry. Also, not surprisingly, there are geographical factors at work. So, for example, many Zimbabweans work seasonally in farms in South Africa's Limpopo Province, which borders Zimbabwe.²⁴

With every further development in the Zimbabwe crisis, the assumption on the part of the South African authorities has been that mass refugee flows are likely. They have established holding camps near the Messina-Beitbridge border crossing to allow for the reception of asylum seekers. The reaction to the growing food shortages north of their border has been the same. Yet this refugee flow has never materialized. It is unlikely that it ever will in the form that is currently anticipated. Of course it is impossible to quantify informal or illegal immigration from Zimbabwe into South Africa. Some estimates in early 2002 put the number of Zimbabweans in South Africa at 2 million – probably an exaggeration, but possibly indicative of a rough order of magnitude. A clearer indication of the increase in the number of Zimbabweans in South Africa, if not the overall numbers present, comes from statistics for deportations. In May 2002, the Zimbabwean press reported that the South African authorities had deported 11,181 Zimbabweans since the beginning of the year. This was a significant increase on the 8,603 deported in the whole of 2001.²⁵

These observations about the informal nature of migration need to be qualified, however. The Zimbabwean crisis is a highly complex one, with food shortages only one element among a number. The government's obstruction of food aid to presumed opposition supporters lends substance to the accusation that the ruling party is engaged in a campaign to exterminate the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Whilst history suggests that starving people are unlikely to rise up in arms, it is not inconceivable in the coming months that sections of opposition supporters might abandon the MDC's policy of non-violent resistance. If this happens, which is most likely in the urban areas, then there may be refugee flows similar to those in the 1980s, when the army was engaged in its counter-insurgency campaign in Matabeleland. Botswana, along with South Africa, would seem the most likely destination for such flows, especially if they emanated mainly from Matabeleland again.

4 Outlook

This paper has cited figures from WFP/FAO on the shortfall of grain that will have to be met out of additional imports or food aid. In some cases, as we have indicated, this merely represents an increase on the scale of imports that take place every year.

Concern up till now has focused on whether the WFP/FAO appeal for food aid will be met (with the additional concern about whether governments in the region will accept the genetically modified grain that makes up much of the food donation from North America).

²⁴ Southern African Migration Project, *Making Up the Numbers: Measuring "Illegal Immigration" to South Africa*, Kingston [Ontario, Canada]: Southern Africa Research Centre, 2001

²⁵ Thousands Deported from South Africa and Botswana, *Daily News* [Harare], 22 May 2002

However, the mobilization of grain from outside the region may not turn out to be the crucial question in addressing the potential famine. Rather there are three local factors that may be more important:

- Can food aid be targeted in such a way that it does not undermine local markets, and thus discourage local grain production?
- How can an assistance programme be designed to increase the “entitlements” of poor people (to use Amartya Sen’s term), rather than simply increasing the volume of food in circulation? This is crucial in a situation where the main problem is not the absolute amount of food available, but its accessibility to poor people.
- How is it possible to make sure that distribution of food is managed fairly and targeted at all those who need it?

None of these three questions is unique to the current situation in southern Africa, but all will have to be addressed. The third is of particular importance. Zimbabwe provides the worst example of local mismanagement, with the government monopoly of grain imports through the Grain Marketing Board (GMB) impeding the rapid distribution of food to the needy. What is of even greater concern is the ample evidence that food is being withheld from areas regarded as favouring the opposition MDC.

An incident occurred during the visit to Zimbabwe of James Morris of the WFP, which illustrates what appears to be a general pattern. Villagers in Gwanda district, who had last bought maize from the GMB in June, awoke in early September to find six trucks of GMB maize alongside the free maize being distributed by the WFP – the aim presumably being to show Morris and his delegation that the government had matters in hand.²⁶

In Malawi, maize is not available because it was disposed of for corrupt monetary gain rather than for political reasons. Officials are believed to have benefited from the sale of the strategic grain reserve. The country’s Poverty Alleviation Minister has been sacked after he was alleged to have resold (and not paid for) 300 tonnes of maize.²⁷

It is this mismanagement of food supplies, rather than food shortages on their own, which could have explosive political consequences. These are most likely to be seen in Zimbabwe, partly because it is there that political polarization is greatest. It is also significant that those worst affected by shortages – and least able to acquire food from other sources – are urban residents and displaced farm workers in camps in Harare. These sectors of society also strongly favour the opposition. Tensions could ignite, whether or not the normally pacific MDC gives a lead.

Even in Malawi, however, political violence arising from the food issue is not ruled out. A recent report by the statutory Malawi Human Rights Commission warned of a rise in political tension, with many incidents of politically-motivated beatings and harassment.²⁸

²⁶ State Allegedly Tricks Famine Envoy, *Daily News* [Harare], 10 September 2002

²⁷ Starving Malawi Loses \$40m...

²⁸ United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network, *Malawi: Fears over Rising Political Violence*, 21 August 2002

The main cropping season in southern Africa involves planting during the period September-November and harvesting in February to April. The normal expectation would be for the worst of the food crisis to be during that six-month period, as household and national stocks are depleted. These shortages would normally be offset by winter crops harvested in about September.

In the two worst affected countries, Zimbabwe and Malawi, the winter harvest will not provide the supplement that might have been expected. In Zimbabwe this is because of the severe disruption of winter cropping resulting from the seizure of commercial farms.²⁹ In Malawi, the lack of residual moisture in the soil has meant that the winter crop will be significantly smaller than projected.³⁰

There are serious indications, however, that the food crisis will be even longer lasting. Despite positive statements from the Zimbabwe authorities about the preparedness of resettled farmers for the planting season, it is apparent from all independent sources that agriculture is in chaos. Even in favourable weather conditions the maize crop cannot remotely approach its normal size. The fear is that the 2002-2003 season will not be a favourable one. The US-based International Research Institute for Climate Prediction reports that there is a 90% probability of an El Niño weather pattern for the remainder of 2002, continuing into 2003. Depending on the type of El Niño, the effect may be primarily upon livestock or crop production.³¹

It seems beyond argument that the spiralling decline of the Zimbabwean economy and agricultural production will continue. If this is accompanied once again by unfavourable rains, then the country will find itself in a similar position, if not worse, as it waits, not just for the 2003 but for the 2004 harvest. This paper has argued that the political situation in Zimbabwe, while hardly the sole cause of the food crisis, has severely exacerbated it and prevented the region from responding as effectively as it did in 1992. Given poor weather in the crucial ploughing and planting months towards the end of this year, it is likely that much of southern Africa will find itself in just as serious a position 18 months from now.

²⁹ FOSENET, *Community Assessment...*

³⁰ United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network, *Malawi: Food Crisis...*

³¹ Katzenellenbogen, J., Terrible Trio of Factors May Fuel Food Crisis, *Business Day* [Johannesburg], 24 July 2002

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