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FROM BAD TO WORSE: DEEPENING IMPACTS OF ZIMBABWE'S DROUGHT

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INTRODUCTION

At present, Zimbabwe's future appears precariously poised on an edge. Two consecutive years of poor rains, compounded by El Niño, have resulted in the worst drought in 35 years. It is estimated that more than four million people will require emergency humanitarian aid to get them through to the end of the lean season in March 2017. Exacerbating the situation is the regional nature of the drought, along with an economic crisis, a shortage of cash, and growing political tensions. With loyalties shifting and both the governing party and the opposition fractured, it is unclear in which direction the situation is headed. One thing that is certain, however, is that funding, capacity, and contingency planning must be scaled up immediately to address current needs and the anticipated worsening of the crisis.

Front cover: A woman in Masvingo Province stands in front of her failed harvest.
This page: Villagers in Zaka District, Masvingo Province, planted several times but failed to grow any crops due to lack of rain.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❐ Donors and UN agencies must immediately scale up funding and capacity to address the worsening of the crisis between now and March 2017.

  • To be effective, international stakeholders must implement a comprehensive, multi-sector approach that not only supports the drought's impacts on food security, but also sufficiently addresses water/sanitation, health, nutrition, and protection.

  • Given the limited stand-by emergency capacity of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) both in Zimbabwe and at the regional level, other UN agencies and international non-government agencies (INGOs) must deploy staff with experience in humanitarian emergencies.

  • The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) should prioritize support to assist drought-affected, HIV-positive Zimbabweans with food assistance to accompany their medication.

- ❐ The Protection Working Group should immediately undertake an assessment of social protection risks to better distill drought impacts on vulnerable groups and should request deployment of a Protection Standby Capacity Project (ProCap) Officer to Zimbabwe.

- ❐ The UN Humanitarian Country Team (UN HCT) must adopt a more unified, coherent strategy for the response by:
  • Revising its current humanitarian response plan not only to incorporate the results of the June rural livelihoods and agriculture assessment but also to better balance urgent humanitarian needs with longer-term resilience building programs.
  • Agreeing to undertake joint market assessments to ensure that cash-based interventions continue to be effective, and requesting the deployment of a cash and markets expert to help develop a contingency plan should greater amounts of in-kind food aid be required.

- ❐ With the support of OCHA, the UN HCT should better manage risks by immediately undertaking contingency planning for both the possible onset of La Niña-related flooding and the potential emergence of a complex emergency.
  • The UN HCT should also establish a logistics working group to support the government, relevant UN agencies, and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) to facilitate grain imports and other cross-border issues.

- ❐ The International Organization for Migration (IOM) should immediately undertake data collection and regularly monitor the impacts of the drought on displacement and migration, both internally and across borders.

- ❐ The SADC Secretariat should work with the Platform on Disaster Displacement to implement the Nansen Protection Agenda to better protect and assist cross-border, drought-displaced persons.

- ❐ Given the need for new tools to more effectively respond to slow-onset and/or recurrent humanitarian emergencies in the context of climate change, it is recommended that:

  • The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) develop new tools and standard operating procedures to ensure timely early action and more robust collaboration between humanitarian and development actors from the start.

  • Donors adopt more flexible funding mechanisms and approaches that allow implementing partners to better balance immediate humanitarian needs with resilience and development objectives.

BACKGROUND

In 2015, El Niño effects emerged globally bringing drier- and hotter-than-normal weather to Eastern and Southern Africa. In Zimbabwe, the effects of El Niño came on the heels of below-average rainfall the previous rainy season resulting in the worst drought in 35 years. Impacts on agriculture, livestock and food security have been severe. As of January 2016, at the height of the 2015/2016 lean season, 30 percent of the rural population was reportedly in need of humanitarian aid and the country's Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) rate for children under five had reached 5.7 percent, its highest in 15 years.[1] More than 23,000 head of livestock perished due to lack of water, pasture, or drought-related disease.[2]

Exacerbating the impact of the El Niño-induced drought in Zimbabwe are decades of underdevelopment and poor governance that have left 72 percent of Zimbabweans living below the poverty line. As a result of the government's failure to maintain irrigation and water management infrastructure and undertake much-needed land reform, the vast majority of the country's farmers are entirely dependent on rain-fed agriculture to survive.

In February 2016, President Robert Mugabe, realizing his government lacked sufficient money and capacity to respond given the severity of the drought, declared a disaster. The government appealed for $1.5 billion in national and international assistance to respond. In addition to meeting immediate food security needs, the appeal includes funding for grain importation, a school feeding program, and livestock destocking, along with more development-focused interventions such as rehabilitation of irrigation and water supply systems. To lead and coordinate the response, the government also established a Cabinet Committee, chaired by the Vice President E.D. Mnangagwa.

In order to align with the government's appeal, UN agencies comprising the UN HCT revised the UN's Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for the drought emergency. Sectoral platforms, led by government ministries and supported by UN agencies and NGOs, were established and sectoral meetings are ongoing in five sectors – food assistance and agriculture, health and nutrition, social protection, education, and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH). An early recovery sectoral working group has also been established.

In June 2016, Refugees International (RI) conducted an assessment of the impacts of, and response to, the drought emergency in Zimbabwe. The team conducted extensive interviews with government officials, donors, UN agencies, and national and local NGOs involved in the response. They also traveled to some of the hardest hit provinces including Matabeleland North and Masvingo. They then traveled to South Africa to conduct interviews with those involved in the regional response including the representatives of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC),[3] UN agencies, donors, and INGOs involved in the response.

A RAPIDLY DETERIORATING SITUATION

At present, Zimbabwe's future appears precariously poised on an edge. The latest assessment by the government and international partners indicates that the impacts of the El Niño were far worse than initially anticipated. Maize production for the 2015-2016 cropping year is 35 to 50 percent below the five year average and food insecurity is expected to reach 42 percent during the peak of the lean season (January to March 2017), 40 percent higher than during the 2015/16 lean season.[4] Most of the southern parts of the country are anticipated to experience acute food insecurity at IPC Phase 3 (crisis).[5] *More than four million people* will require emergency humanitarian assistance to get them through until the end of the next lean season in March 2017.[6]

At the time of RI's visit in June, failed harvests were already having significant impacts on livelihoods, household consumption, access to water, health, and nutrition. Numerous rural communities with whom RI spoke reported that their families had not been able to grow any crops this year, despite having planted three or more times, due to erratic rainfall. In several villages in Masvingo Province, families who were not receiving international assistance reported that they were down to one meal a day. According to a June Rural and Livelihoods Assessment, the national prevalence of Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM)

is 1.9 percent, slightly below the World Health Organization's (WHO) two percent emergency threshold.[7] Both GAM and SAM rates will undoubtedly rise in the coming months as the country heads into the lean season.[8]

In addition to impacts on health and nutrition, food and water insecurity have resulted in increased protection risks for women and children including reports of increased incidences of violence against women, school drop-outs, early marriage, and child labor. Also at heightened risk are those living with HIV/AIDS. Although significant progress has been made over the past decade, Zimbabwe still has one of the highest HIV/AIDS rates in Sub-Saharan Africa with 15 percent HIV prevalence among adults.[9] Those affected require food in order to take their antiretroviral therapy (ART) medication, and are more susceptible to illness, disease, and even death in the absence of sufficient water.

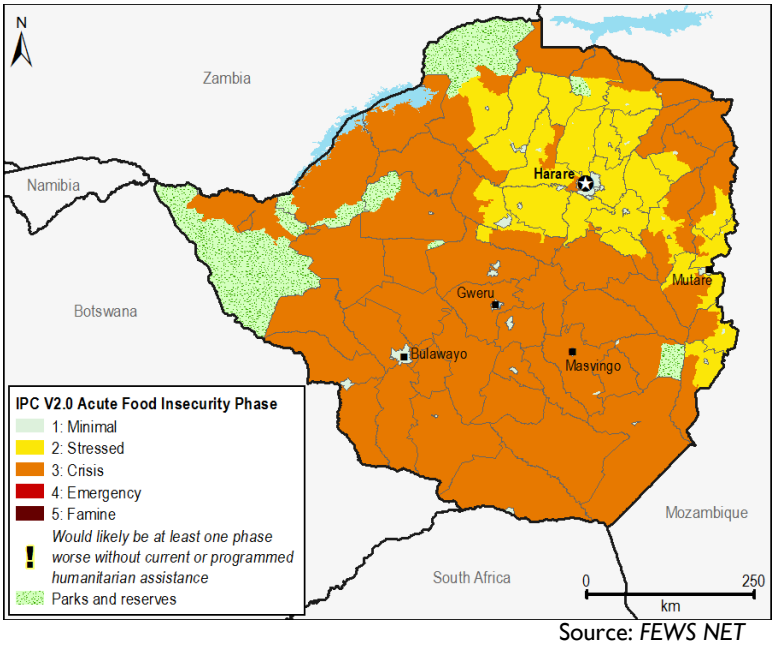
> ***"The worst of the crisis is ahead of us."***
>
> -UN official, Harare

Compounding Factors at Play

While Zimbabwe has experienced drought and food deficits in the past, at present an array of compounding factors are complicating the response and further aggravating the crisis. The economy is in shambles, employment rates are soaring, and corruption is rampant.

Having dumped its hyper-devalued currency in 2009 in favor of the U.S. dollar and South African rand, the country is now facing an acute liquidity crisis. Salaries to civil servants and even the police and military have been delayed in recent months. In late May, the government announced its plan to introduce bond notes valued at US$200 million, along with stringent measures including limiting cash withdrawals without one-day prior notice, restrictions in offshore investments, and measures to tackle illicit money flows and capital flight (after nearly US$2 billion disappeared from the economy through externalization last year).[10] While the strength of the U.S. dollar against the South African rand has mitigated the sharp increases in food prices occurring elsewhere in the region, the ongoing liquidity and cash crises have raised concerns regarding whether people will be able to access cash to buy food, even where it is available. Poor agricultural output and the liquidity crisis have also reduced demand for casual labor for cropping and other self-employment options (*e.g.*, construction) thereby severely limiting livelihood options.[11]

Projected acute food security outcomes, October 2016 – January 2017.



Source: *FEWS NET*

In addition, growing public discontent over salary delays, joblessness, and overall government ineptitude has further resulted in increased tensions and public protests, some of which have turned violent. In early July, a peaceful civic movement known as "This Flag" led by Pastor Evan Mawarire staged a series of public "stay aways" (*i.e.*, strikes) by businesses and civil servants. Unsurprisingly, the movement was met with violent crackdowns, arrests, and attempts to shutdown social media.[12]

This is all occurring at a time when the political dynamics in Zimbabwe have reached a new level of uncertainty. Within the ruling Zanu-PF party, loyalties are divided and even traditional supporters of President Mugabe may no longer be counted on, as the recent statement by the powerful Zimbabwe veterans association exposed.[13] The opposition party leadership is also fractured and disorganized. Tensions are high and the fluidity of the political context needs to be monitored very carefully.

An additional compounding factor is the regional nature of the drought. Following disaster declarations by numerous countries in the region, in April SADC declared a region-wide disaster, and in July released an appeal for $2.4 billion to respond. According to the appeal, an estimated 23 million people across the region will require urgent humanitarian aid in the next eight months.[14]

Whereas Zimbabwe has relied on its neighbors to help prevent annual food deficits and to provide labor migration opportunities in prior droughts, the regional nature of the crisis means that the country may not be able to rely on Southern Africa's more prosperous and stable countries this time around. A March 2016 Regional Supply Chain Assessment prepared by the UN World Food Programme (WFP) indicates that despite surpluses in Tanzania and Zambia, 10 million metric tons of

cereal will need to be imported from outside of the region in order to meet needs.[15] At the same time, South Africa's own economic downturn, a weakening of its currency, the rand, as well as growing xenophobia, have all resulted in decreased labor opportunities for Zimbabweans and thus fewer remittances which in past crises have served as important coping mechanisms for Zimbabwe's poor. In short, the confluence of humanitarian, economic, and political pressures affecting Zimbabwe may be pushing the country to a tipping point at a time when few of the usual safety valves are functioning. At the time of writing this report, it was difficult to predict which way things might go.

> ***"The government is broke. We don't know where to go. We don't know who will help us."***
>
> -Farmer in rural village in Masvingo Province

But there are several things that are for certain. First, numerous assessments and analyses unequivocally indicate that the crisis will worsen in the coming months as the country moves deeper into the lean season. As one senior UN official put it bluntly, "The worst of the crisis is ahead of us."

Second, there is now a 50 percent chance that La Niña (wetter than normal) weather conditions will emerge come October, when the effects of the drought are at their worst.[16] Heavier than normal rains and flooding not only will make it more difficult to reach affected populations in desperate need of food, water, and assistance, but also could result in a third straight year of failed harvests (not to mention collateral damage to already-stretched clean water supplies, health and nutrition) pushing the country even deeper into crisis.

Third, the Zimbabwe government has neither the funds nor the human resources to launch a response on the scale necessary to save lives. According to a farmer in a rural village in Masvingo Province who had been unable to grow crop this season, "the government is bankrupt. We don't know where to go. We don't know who will help us." The government's decision to declare an emergency in February, allow the UN to launch a funding appeal, and invite international agencies to respond are highly welcome developments upon which the international community must act. But these actions are also a sign that the government recognizes that it is without capacity to respond given the severity of the disaster that is unfolding.

URGENT NEED TO SCALE UP THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

Now that it is clear that the impacts of El Niño on Zimbabwe were far more severe than initially anticipated, the first priority

School children in Binga District, Matabeleland North, are coming to school on empty stomachs.

must be to increase humanitarian funding for the response. The UN, U.S., UK, and the European Union have all been generous – including additional funding announced in the last few weeks, a highly welcome development.[17] Nonetheless, the funds received to date are nowhere near sufficient to meet humanitarian needs (*e.g.*, as of August, the UN's appeal was less than 13 percent funded[18] and according to USAID, the SADC appeal for Zimbabwe had received less than $50 million). As such, there is a real risk that the situation could dramatically worsen or secondary emergencies erupt without additional support from a wide array of donors as well as UN agencies, INGOs, and the public.

RI is particularly concerned that so little funding has been invested in WASH, given the high risk of disease outbreak among people and animals, and the impacts of lack of WASH on those living with HIV/AIDS. At a food distribution site in Binga District in Matabeleland North, a young widow and mother of seven who identified herself as HIV-positive shared her heartbreaking story with RI. She described facing enormous challenges to access sufficient food and water for herself and her children. To get by, she is currently relying on lean season assistance, which will end in July, and what little support her neighbors are able to provide. For vulnerable families such as these, especially those with HIV/AIDS, humanitarian aid is not just critical, it is lifesaving.

Given the particular risks that lack of food and water present to drought-affected individuals living with HIV, and the need to ensure that hard-won, lifesaving interventions are not lost, the U.S. President's Emergency Program for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) should prioritize support to assist drought-affected, HIV-positive Zimbabweans with food assistance to accompany their medication as well as access to water, sanitation, and hygiene.

Limited Humanitarian Capacity

RI was also concerned by the limited presence of experienced humanitarian staff at both the national and regional level. In 2014, OCHA closed its offices in Zimbabwe, and while the HCT was reconvened in April 2015, OCHA does not have an office in Zimbabwe. And although a former member of the Zimbabwe OCHA staff has been seconded to the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator (RC) to support the humanitarian response and several OCHA staff deployed from time-to-time on a temporary basis, many agencies with whom RI spoke felt that a greater OCHA presence in-country was warranted.

There is also limited UN humanitarian coordination and leadership capacity at the regional level. In 2014, OCHA merged its Southern and Eastern Africa regional offices. While it maintains a presence in Johannesburg, it remains dependent on staff from Nairobi for surge support. For example, the head of OCHA's Regional Office for Southern Africa (ROSA) is based in Nairobi although he travels throughout both regions. Clearly, the merger of the two regions by OCHA and other agencies is largely due to stretched resources across the humanitarian sector globally. Despite the enormous increase in demand for OCHA tools and services in Eastern and Southern Africa in 2016, OCHA's operations in the two regions are funded at approximately 29 and 42 percent, respectively.[19] Resource constraints aside, however, expecting individual staff to cover both East Africa and Southern Africa at a time when there are large-scale, complex emergencies affecting tens of millions of people in both regions is unrealistic. The current OCHA humanitarian staff deserve credit for undertaking what is a herculean task. But as the crisis heads into its worst phase, additional experienced, dedicated humanitarian staff is urgently needed.

Since RI's departure, funding has been made available to ramp up OCHA's presence at both the regional and national level. A senior OCHA El Niño coordinator has been deployed to Johannesburg to help coordinate and provide strategic advice to SADC and UN agencies for more coordinated humanitarian and resilience planning at both national and regional levels. In addition, OCHA staff will be deployed to Zimbabwe in the coming weeks to assist in the revision of the HRP. These are highly welcome developments.

However, given the need for greater burden sharing, other UN agencies and INGOs are also encouraged to take steps now to deploy more experienced humanitarian staff. At the time of RI's visit, most agencies were relying on development-focused staff to design and implement humanitarian programs.

Need for Increased Understanding of Protection Risks to Better Inform Programming and Preparedness

RI spoke with numerous government and international agency representatives who expressed concern regarding the drought's impact on vulnerable groups. In the context of Zimbabwe, risks during times of crisis include increased violence against women (VAW), increases in child marriage among families who are unable to feed their children, increased numbers of children dropping out of school due to hunger or lack of household income to pay school fees, and increased incidence of child labor as a result of parents pulling their children from school in order to help support family income or to find food.

RI field visits confirmed that the lack of food, sufficient water, and livelihoods is already having impacts on women and children. Interviews in Matabeleland North and Masvingo confirmed that mothers were often skipping meals in order to provide what little food was available to children. RI was also deeply concerned by the impacts of the drought on children. RI

Although the next rainy season is still months away, river beds like this one in Chivi District, Masvingo Province, have already run dry.

visited several schools where teachers reported that increasing numbers of children were coming to school without having eaten and with nothing to eat during the break. In one school in Binga District, a school teacher told RI that three children had recently collapsed due to hunger. A government-led, primary school lunch program for the youngest students was supposed to have been launched in June. However, RI found no evidence that it was being implemented on the ground. While the government had reportedly purchased maize to provide to schools, schools lacked the utensils, appropriate hygiene measures, and additional ingredients like sugar to prepare and produce it in edible form.

There was also ample evidence of increased instances of children dropping out of school in order to help forage food or to find casual labor. In one village in Masvingo District, RI was told that several girls had left to go to urban areas to engage in survival sex, something that has never happened before in that village.

In light of the obvious protection concerns, RI was surprised to learn that no multi-sectoral, inter-agency assessment aimed at capturing key protection information had been undertaken. Rather, the UN's current HRP for April 2016 to March 2017 is based on the findings of a Rural and Livelihoods Assessment (RLA) undertaken by the Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZimVAC) and as such, contains only general information on protection issues. The ZimVAC is a consortium of government, UN agencies, NGOs, and other international organizations established in 2002 and chaired by the government's Food and Nutrition Council (FNC) to promote a multi-sectoral response to food insecurity and nutrition problems. The ZimVAC prepares a RLA annually to inform the government and its development partners on programming necessary for lifesaving and strengthening rural livelihoods. The most recent ZimVAC RLA was conducted in June and the results released in July. The UN HCT is currently revising the HRP to reflect the results of the June ZimVAC RLA.

While comprehensive, the June ZimVAC RLA does not capture sufficient data to better inform protection risks in an emergency context. For example, despite the high levels of violence against women (VAW), the questions in the June ZimVAC assessment regarding VAW did not link to the actual respondent's demographic information (such as marital status by age, education level), income level, or access to food/cash assistance, which would have provided a stronger evidence base regarding the drought as a driver of VAW.

Moreover, reliance on the results of the ZimVAC appear to be reinforcing what numerous UN agencies and NGOs described as the "food-centric" nature of the emergency, as well as the misconception that in drought situations, food must be prioritized over other impacts rather than taking a comprehensive

approach that includes WASH, health and nutrition, livelihoods, and protection. While the current UN HRP in Zimbabwe remains grossly under-funded, what little funding has been received has been directed to food and agriculture, with a tiny percentage going to health and nutrition, and none at all to protection, WASH, or education.

> ***"The weakest link in the response is the drought's impact on nutrition, WASH, HIV, and protection. That message is very weak."***
>
> -UN official, Harare

The June ZimVAC RLA results are more helpful in terms of linking the drought and food insecurity to increased rates of school drop outs. Over the past three years, there has been an increase in the number of households withdrawing children from school to cope with food challenges; 7.3 percent of households reported having withdrawn children from school at some point during the survey period because of hunger. The need to divert what little money households have to pay for food is resulting in increasing numbers of households using money that usually goes to education or healthcare to pay for food. Among the 15 percent of children nationally who were not in school in May 2016, the primary reason was lack of money to pay school fees.[20] Unfortunately, no corollary data regarding rates of child labor were included in the ZimVAC.

Several agencies working on protection-related issues in Zimbabwe also told RI that there was a need for more protection staff with experience in humanitarian emergencies. As one UN representative working on gender issues put it, "I'm a development officer but am dealing with [gender-based violence] issues in a humanitarian setting. Even the language is different."

RI therefore recommends that the protection working group undertake an inter-agency, multi-sectoral assessment of social protection risks to better distill drought impacts. In addition, given the limited presence of staff with experience working on protection in humanitarian settings, the protection working group should request deployment of a Protection Standby Capacity Project (ProCap) Officer to Zimbabwe to support the UN HCT to develop and implement comprehensive protection strategies and mechanisms. Given the dearth of humanitarian funds available for the response, it is more important than ever to ensure that all programming is better tailored to address protection risks. For example, USAID should hold its implementing partners accountable for implementing the commitments under the U.S. government's "Safe from the Start" initiative which is aimed at preventing and responding to gender-based violence in humanitarian emergencies worldwide.

TOWARD A MORE UNIFIED, COHERENT RESPONSE STRATEGY

Unfortunately, at the time of RI's visit, it appeared that key differences had emerged among UN agencies (as well as donors) regarding the right approach to the emergency given the recurrent nature of drought and in light of Zimbabwe's developmental, economic, and monetary challenges. Internal debates – or lack of cooperation – regarding which types of interventions were appropriate appeared to be not only diverting focus, but also resulting in confused messaging and missed opportunities to attract more outside attention and funding for the crisis.

Balancing Humanitarian Response with Resilience-Building Interventions

The most obvious example of this was divergent views within the UN HCT and among donors on how best to balance the need for immediate humanitarian assistance and longer-term resilience building. While there was general agreement that both are necessary in such contexts (*i.e.*, countries where humanitarian emergencies like droughts or floods are likely to reoccur), it appeared that international aid agencies in Zimbabwe were struggling to find the right balance of programming.

For example, RI spoke with several aid workers who were frustrated that the UN's HRP (April 2016 to March 2017), which seeks $360 million to respond to the drought emergency, did not integrate and mainstream elements of resilience and early recovery or ensure linkages with ongoing development programs in drought-affected areas.[21] Agencies engaged in the food security and agriculture sector were concerned that the shift to a purely humanitarian approach might undermine years of resilience-building interventions in Zimbabwe including by eroding development gains, disrupting markets, and disincentivizing market actors. At the same time, it was unclear how a new, $25 million resilience-building initiative launched in May by the government and UNDP would complement or support the HRP.

In short, several agencies were frustrated by the lack of coherence between the humanitarian response to the drought and longer-term objectives in Zimbabwe. Many felt that the two funding mechanisms – the HRP and the new resilience initiative – needed to be revised to be more complementary. As one UN representative described it "the UN in Zimbabwe is disjointed. Humanitarian agencies want to do humanitarian response; development agencies want to do development. Even

with a strong [UN] Resident Coordinator, it is a struggle to get everyone on board."

This suggests the need for one funding mechanism that combines humanitarian response with resilience-building interventions. For example, the SADC appeal takes a three-pillar approach that includes humanitarian response (for seven countries), resilience programming for 36 months, and addressing macro/fiscal issues. Going forward, there is also a need for development actors in Zimbabwe to take up the resilience agenda, *e.g.*, by incorporating resilience into development planning (including UN Development Assistance Frameworks). The planned revision to Zimbabwe's HRP in the coming weeks provides an opportunity to review the UNDP resilience initiative to ensure that the two appeals better complement one another.

> ***"The UN in Zimbabwe is disjointed. Humanitarian agencies want to do humanitarian response; development agencies want to do development. Even with a strong [UN] Resident Coordinator, it is a struggle to get everyone on board."***
>
> -UN official, South Africa

Moreover, some major donors lacked the flexibility that would have allowed implementing partners to more easily switch between ongoing resilience-focused programs and humanitarian emergency interventions, for example, through crisis modifiers. Numerous implementing partners with whom RI spoke emphasized the need for donors to be flexible to allow them to "pivot" between long-term, resilience-building programs and humanitarian assistance. As discussed below, going forward, there is an urgent need for improved tools and understanding regarding how to best balance resilience-building and development objectives with humanitarian needs in countries at risk of recurrent crises and in the context of climate change.

Cash-Based Versus In-Kind Interventions

There was also a good deal of disagreement within the UN HCT regarding cash-based assistance versus in-kind interventions (*e.g.*, food aid) which appeared to be undermining a more coordinated and unified strategy for responding to the emergency. In the past several years, there has been growing consensus within the global humanitarian community regarding the advantages of cash-based interventions such as cash transfers, cash vouchers, and cash-for-work programs. The efficiencies associated with cash-based interventions have led most donors, UN agencies, and INGOs to presume that in emergencies, assisting affected populations with cash is preferred over in-kind transfers.[22]

In Zimbabwe, however, the liquidity crisis and other factors have called into question many of the assumptions upon which the preference for cash-based assistance is based. At the time of RI's visit in June, there was a shortage of cash in the country and the government's plans to issue bond notes and restrictions on the amount of money people could withdraw from the bank were sparking a run on the banks by citizens who feared that their deposits might disappear. This raised a risk that beneficiaries of direct cash assistance programs (*e.g.*, via mobile credit) may not be able to access the cash upon which they rely to purchase food, especially in rural areas. At the same time, even where implementing partners use cash vouchers that can be exchanged directly for food and other commodities, in light of the regional food deficit, there is a risk that food prices could spike in the months ahead and that beneficiaries may not be able to purchase sufficient amounts of food unless program budgets are increased and the amount of cash per beneficiary scaled up. The regional nature of the grain deficit also raises the risk that, come the worst part of the lean season, there may be limited amounts of food available for purchase, in which case cash transfers become ineffective because there is no food to buy.

Several representatives of aid agencies and donors implementing cash-based programming assured RI that in light of these risks, they are closely monitoring the situation to ensure that markets are functioning normally and that beneficiaries are able to access cash, and that they are developing contingencies should the situation change. However, it was clear that several were nervous – and rightfully so – that should the situation rapidly deteriorate, their programs might be in jeopardy, and the most vulnerable individuals left without assistance at the worst point of the drought. As one representative of an international NGO explained it, "There is nothing in the cash handbook about a liquidity crisis."

Given these risks, USAID and its lead partner, WFP, have begun to supplement cash assistance with in-kind assistance (food). According to one aid worker, "no one knows what's going to happen in three months. Food is safer right now." However, other major donors including the UK and the EU are taking the view that because food is still available on the market, and in light of recent assessments indicating that most of their implementing partners' beneficiaries have been able to access cash, there is no need to switch to in-kind assistance which is far more expensive. In short, while some were calling for increased levels of in-kind food assistance, others were holding firm on their commitment to a cash approach.

With help from international agencies, these farmers in Matabeleland North support a community garden.

Moreover, it did not appear that donors, UN agencies, and INGOs were jointly undertaking market and supply chain analyses but rather relying on their own assessments. There even seemed to be a certain amount of distrust among some agencies and donors given the lack of standardized market assessments among donors and their implementers, with some suggesting that certain donors were "pushing cash without an in-depth analysis" and others pointing to a bias of some agencies toward food aid. As one senior agency representative explained, "there is no transparency on what people are relying on." Another went so far as to say, "I've never worked in a country where there has been such donor disconnect as in Zimbabwe..."

The merits of cash versus food aid aside, what is of utmost concern is the apparent lack of a more unified, national-level strategy or contingency plan at the UN HCT level for how to respond should cash programs become harder to implement. The need for better coordination regarding cash versus in-kind assistance is especially urgent in light of the fact that should the liquidity crisis continue or worsen, or should food prices dramatically spike or food stocks disappear from the shelves, planning for the importation of significant quantities of food from outside of the region to land-locked Zimbabwe will require detailed planning, coordination, and logistical support among all donors and agencies. In addition, experience from the response to the El Niño emergency in Ethiopia indicates that pushing out significant quantities of food to such large numbers of people on a timely basis can prove extremely challenging.

In order to address these challenges, RI recommends that the cash sub-working group established under the Food Assistance Working Group[23] develop a plan to help monitor the situation and manage risks around cash-based programs. Deployment of a cash and markets expert (CashCap) to help the sub-working group to develop the plan as well as advise the various government ministries and international agencies across sectors is also warranted.[24] Finally, given indications that significant quantities of grain will need to be imported into the country in the coming months, RI recommends that a logistics working group also be set up to work with the FNC, other relevant government ministries, WFP, and FAO to help coordinate importation issues and to work with SADC's logistical coordination unit.

> ***"There is nothing in the cash handbook about a liquidity crisis."***
>
> -INGO Representative, Harare

Improved Monitoring and Contingency Planning

Given the seriousness of Zimbabwe's economic crisis, the extremely limited human and financial capacity of its government, and increased political tension in recent weeks, RI was concerned at the time of its visit in June that there were neither sufficient monitoring mechanisms nor comprehensive contingency plans in place.

With the support of OCHA, the UN HCT in Zimbabwe must work with the government to plan not only for a worsening of the drought, but also for the emergence of stronger-than-normal La Niña conditions, flooding that could impede access to food insecure populations, and the possibility of a third year of failed harvests. In addition, given ongoing political tensions, government instability, and the upcoming 2018 election, equally important is the need for the UN HCT to engage in its own contingency planning for a complex emergency. Finally, the UN HCT must put in place monitoring mechanisms to continually monitor food security and market access throughout the 2016-2017 lean season to ensure that cash-based interventions continue to be effective in the face of the country's liquidity crisis.

Impact of Drought on Displacement and Migration

A significant gap in the response is the lack of information regarding levels of displacement and migration stemming from the drought, both internally and across borders. The lack of data was surprising given that approximately 33 percent of household surveyed in the ZimVAC reported that they rely on remittances from both inside Zimbabwe and abroad as the primary means of support. Monitoring migration levels among women and children is also critical for addressing risk of human trafficking, survival sex, and HIV/AIDS risk.

In drought-affected areas that RI visited in Matabeleland North and Masvingo Provinces, several members of affected communities with whom RI spoke speculated that the drought was forcing people to migrate abroad. In one village in Masvingo District, the village chief estimated that approximately 10 percent of families had left for South Africa in the past year, including one case in which both parents left behind their two small children with relatives.

Regular displacement and migration tracking is also needed for contingency planning for either a deepening of the food crisis or the eruption of political violence leading to a complex emergency. For example, it is unclear whether rural populations will move into urban areas, a common coping strategy in the

Beneficiaries wait to receive food assistance in Binga District, Matabeleland North.

times of drought and food insecurity. In fact, members of a community in Binga District who had been especially hard hit by the drought and crop failure told RI that they did not see going to cities as an appealing option since there were no jobs there. When asked whether the drought had forced people to migrate, one man in another village in Masvingo District responded, "where would we go? There is no work in urban areas and things are just as bad in South Africa."

The lack of monitoring both within Zimbabwe and on a regional level regarding impacts of the drought on displacement and migration has left a critical gap in the response that must be addressed immediately. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) should immediately undertake data collection regarding the number of people displaced within Zimbabwe as a result of the drought, and continue to monitor trends as the situation worsens over the next eight months. Such information on levels of drought-related forced migration will ensure a more targeted, coordinated, and needs-based response.

In addition, data on cross-border migration should be collected both between Zimbabwe and its neighbors and within the SADC drought-affected countries in order to identify and address protection risks. In June 2015, the *Nansen Initiative on Disaster-Induced Cross-Border Displacement* (Nansen Initiative) held a regional consultation in Southern Africa on "Disasters, Climate Change and Human Mobility in Southern Africa." Launched in 2012 by the Swiss and Norwegian governments, the Nansen Initiative is a state-led consultative process to build global consensus among countries around the world on how better to protect people compelled to leave their countries due to disasters and the effects of climate change. The Southern Africa consultation was attended by representatives from Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.[25]

During the consultation it was acknowledged that natural hazards, in particular flooding and severe droughts, contribute to both internal and cross-border displacement in Southern Africa. It was further recognized that the impacts of climate change, particularly food insecurity, exacerbate vulnerabilities and undermine resilience, and are likely to increase displacement and migration in the future. Further noted was that disaster displaced persons face numerous protection challenges including insufficient access to basic services, lack of access to humanitarian aid, gender-based violence, tension with host communities, and lack of legal status in the receiving country. Among the recommendations adopted at the consultation were the need for more data and analysis of cross-border disaster displacement in Southern Africa, the need to integrate displacement and migration into disaster preparedness measures and resilience building, and the need for SADC to work with Members States to develop a common approach to provide protection and assistance for cross-border disaster-displaced persons.[26]

Based on the outcome of the regional consultations in Southern Africa and elsewhere around the globe, in October 2015, more than 100 countries signed the *Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda*, wherein they committed to increased regional cooperation to address disaster- and climate-related displacement and migration. To implement the *Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda*, a follow-up program called the Platform on Disaster Displacement was recently launched.[27]

The El Niño disaster in Southern Africa presents an important opportunity for SADC to lead a process, with support of the Platform for Disaster Displacement, to identify measures to implement the *Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda*. Key to that process will be the collection of data regarding how the drought has affected levels of displacement and migration in the region.

> ***"The question of cross-border movements is very sensitive. There have been some attacks on migrants. We anticipate there will be more migration [due to the drought], but the legal frameworks just aren't there."***
>
> -Representative of SADC

NEW TOOLS FOR SLOW-ONSET AND/OR RECURRENT DISASTERS IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

At the UN World Humanitarian Summit earlier this year, donors, UN agencies, and NGOs repeatedly emphasized the need for the international community to take early action on early warnings of humanitarian crises in order to minimize human suffering and humanitarian costs. They further committed to take measures to address the root causes of displacement including weather-related disasters and climate change.[28] However, as the situation in Zimbabwe reveals, putting those statements into action remains a challenge.

This is partly due to the lack of tools for addressing slow-onset emergencies. One person with whom RI spoke put it this way: in slow onset disasters, the UN's usual emergency response plans are a "waste of time" to the extent that in such

Villagers stand in the dam their community built in Hwange District, Matabeleland North. Due to lack of rain, no water collected.

situations, the worst impact is at the back end. In the case of the Zimbabwe drought, the "shock" (two years of drought and failed harvests) has already occurred. Yet the impacts are latent and, in the absence of robust early action, worsen over time and require a scaling up of humanitarian action. This calls into question whether the UN's current tools are well-suited to address slow onset emergencies.

In recurrent crises, what is needed is a credible response strategy that focuses on development and resilience while building in the flexibility (*e.g.*, via crisis modifiers) to allow agencies to "pivot" to humanitarian interventions. There is also a need to manage expectations regarding what resilience-building can achieve. Several international actors with whom RI spoke expressed the sentiment that the UN and international agencies should no longer "bail out" countries like Zimbabwe with emergency humanitarian aid and should stay the resilience course. However, at the same time, climate change is acting as a counter-balance, presenting more frequent and intense shocks, and often setting back development gains. RI visited one village in Hwange District where the community had built an INGO-supported, small-scale dam to use for local irrigation and water for livestock. However, due to the failure of rain, the dam was dry. As one community member told RI, "we're feeling a lot of pain because of the labor we provided, because we won't get anything in return. The project was labor intensive, but no water collected... We hope it will be better during the next rainy season."

Undoubtedly, the long-term goal in Zimbabwe and other poor and/or fragile states should be to build resilience and address underlying vulnerabilities. But donors and aid agencies must also recognize that in the interim, recurrent shocks will continue to push vulnerable communities back into crisis. Failure to prepare and act early in response to these cyclical emergencies will only undermine resilience and development gains. However, it is neither realistic nor effective for humanitarian agencies to fully mobilize and demobilize every time the situation slips back into an emergency. Going forward, especially in context of climate change, there will be a need for other agencies within the UN system to take up a greater share of the burden for preparedness in situations of recurrent crises. This effectively means that development portfolios will need to be adjusted to ensure minimum preparedness is achieved for new threats and to allow for the greater use of crisis modifiers to mitigate short-term impacts while minimizing the loss of development gains.

CONCLUSION

Severe drought, an economic crisis, and an extremely volatile political environment together signal that Zimbabwe may be headed toward a tipping point. Given the volatility of the current situation and as the country heads into the worst phase of the drought, it is critical for donors, UN agencies, and INGOs to immediately step up their game and adopt a more unified, coherent, "no regrets" response and preparedness strategy. Without sufficient funding and attention *now*, the human impacts of the crisis will only worsen in the months ahead. It is likewise critical for national governments, donors, and humanitarian and development agencies to act on the need for new tools and approaches to more effectively and efficiently prepare for and respond to slow-onset and/or recurrent disasters in the face of more extreme and frequent weather events driven by global climate change.

Alice Thomas and Ann Hollingsworth traveled to Zimbabwe in June 2016 to assess the impacts of, and response to, the drought emergency.

ENDNOTES

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2 SADC Regional Humanitarian Appeal, June 2016, at p. 65, https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/appeal_document_final_20160711.pdf.

3 SADC is an inter-governmental organization headquartered in Gaborone, Botswana. Its goal is to further socio-economic cooperation and integration as well as political and security cooperation among 15 southern African states. It complements the role of the African Union.

4"2016 Rural Livelihoods Assessment," Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZimVAC RLA), July 20, 2016, http://reliefweb.int/report/zimbabwe/zimbabwe-vulnerability-assessment-committee-zimvac-2016-rural-livelihoods-assessment.

5 Widely accepted by the international community, the Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) system describes the severity of food emergencies by classifying levels of food security. Based on common standards and language, this five-level scale is intended to help governments and other humanitarian actors quickly understand a crisis (or potential crisis) and take action. IPC Phase 3 (Crisis) indicates that even with humanitarian assistance, households will face food consumption gaps with high or above usual acute malnutrition, or will marginally be able to meet minimum food needs only with accelerated depletion of livelihood assets that will lead to food consumption gaps. For more information, see http://www.fews.net/IPC.

6 ZimVAC RLA, *supra* note 4.

7 *Id.*

8 According to the international NGO Save The Children, the number of children under five who have died of hunger-related causes has tripled in some of the worst-hit areas, and without help, most of the severely malnourished children are likely to die, while around half of these with moderate acute malnutrition could also perish without some form of intervention. See http://www.reuters.com/article/us-zimbabwe-drought-children-idUSKCN10103C.

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14 SADC Regional Humanitarian Appeal, *supra* note 2. https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/appeal_document_final_20160711.pdf.

15 "WFP Southern Africa El Niño Preparedness – Regional Supply Chain Study," World Food Program (WFP), March 31, 2016, http://reliefweb.int/report/world/wfp-southern-africa-el-ni-o-preparedness-regional-supply-chain-assessment-march-2016.

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20 ZimVAC RLA, *supra* note 4.

21 In contrast, the SADC regional El Niño response appeal launched in July includes a three pronged approach that includes both humanitarian needs and resilience building. See SADC Appeal, *supra* note 2.

22 See *e.g.*, Ugo Gentilini, World Bank Group "The Other Side of the Coin: The Comparative Evidence of Cash and In-Kind Transfers in Humanitarian Situations." The report concludes that, while the effectiveness of cash and in-kind assistance is similar when addressing food insecurity, cash is generally more efficient.

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28 "One humanity: shared responsibility," Report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit, February 2, 2016, https://consultations.worldhumanitariansummit.org/bitcache/e49881ca33e3740b5f37162857ced92c7c1e354?vid=569103&disposition=inline&op=view. See also, "Report of the UN Secretary General on the Outcome of the World Humanitarian Summit," pending finalization.

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