**REGIONAL OVERVIEW**

Rainfall across the region has generally been beneficial for agriculture, water supplies and grazing pastures. Crops are maturing in some areas, while elsewhere they are at the vegetative to tasseling stages. Isolated areas in Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe have experienced some crop losses as a result of pest infestation and excessive and/or a lack of recent rainfall. While the overall regional cereal production forecast appears positive, the general sense of optimism will only be realized if rains continue into March.

The availability of early season crops is beginning to take the sharp edge off of the peak hunger season, although food assistance remains necessary until the new harvest is in. Staple food prices remain high, especially where food shortages have been more acute.

The recent mission of the Special Envoy for Humanitarian Needs in southern Africa (31 January to 4 February) however cautioned: "One year of good rains will not counter the humanitarian and development challenges facing southern Africa". The Special Envoy visited Mozambique and Malawi. In Mozambique, discussions pointed to a positive change in the way the international community were cooperating with Government to address their priorities. It was acknowledged that this was instrumental in countering the triple threat. In Malawi, the mission focused on the effectiveness of the current humanitarian response. Discussions with Government highlighted the need for the UN to support Government’s strategic framework for achieving lasting food security and nutrition. The mission also prompted agreement for a “lessons learned” exercise that will reflect on the joint food assistance efforts of WFP, DFID and the government.

Evidence from the rest of the region demonstrates that while there is cautious optimism that the region may be moving out of the acute phase of the emergency, the triple threat remains relevant as ever. Southern Africa remains at the epicentre of the HIV/AIDS pandemic with HIV prevalence amongst pregnant women continuing to escalate. Only evidence from Zimbabwe suggests a decline from 26% in 2002 to 21% in 2004, but these gains could be undone by the current humanitarian crisis confronting the country. In the island states of Madagascar, Comoros and the Seychelles, there is concern that HIV prevalence may increase.

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1 RIACSO is a partnership comprising of regional offices of UN Agencies and key NGOs that are part of the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC). RIACSO supports the UN Secretary General’s Special Envoy for Humanitarian Needs in Southern Africa, Mr. James Morris, in his mandate to raise awareness of the situation in the region and provide recommendations regarding the response.
COUNTRY SPECIFIC HIGHLIGHTS

**Zimbabwe:** Rains have generally been favourable and crops are reported to be at vegetative state. However, the widespread shortage of farming inputs has limited the advantage of the good rains. Outbreaks of army worm, while under control, and damage to crops by excessive rains, have further negatively impacted production. Nonetheless, it is expected that this year’s yield will exceed last year’s drought affected production, which resulted in widespread food insecurity.

Recent assessments show an increase in the influx of mobile and vulnerable people into areas like Chipapa (Karoi), Trenance and Killarney (Bulawayo). They are re-establishing in locations from where they were removed during Operation Restore Order/Murambatsvina. The influx is stretching the current available resources. Concerned humanitarian actors are calling for the registration of these people to deliver humanitarian assistance to them. WFP and IOM are currently providing food assistance to some 48,000 affected people, but efforts are underway to identify further opportunities to support urban programmes.

Three separate cholera outbreaks have been reported in Harare, Chikomba and Buhera since early December 2005, which according to the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare have been brought under control. Cumulative national figures since January 2005 stand, according to the Ministry, at 516 cholera cases and 26 deaths (Case Fatality of 5% which is above the alert threshold of 1%). As a member of the National Multi-sectoral Task Force that was established by the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare, UNICEF facilitated the design and production of flyers and accompanying posters, aimed at informing and educating the general public and members of the hospitality industry regarding identification of the disease, care of the infected and the role of good hygiene and sanitation practices. WHO has been involved in the initial assessment to determine the magnitude of the outbreak and to identify gaps that needed to be filled to control the outbreak. Technical staff was deployed to give support in surveillance, community mobilization, infection control, temporary latrine construction and contact tracing.

On 7 and 8 February 2006, the government’s Civil Protection Unit, in collaboration with OCHA, convened a joint contingency planning workshop to ensure greater coordination between government, the UN and NGOs in case of an emergency. The objective of the meeting was to agree on the outline of a common contingency plan for disasters. The meeting brought together a wide range of people from the Civil Protection Unit, the Ministry of Health, Education and Agriculture, the Office of the President, the Meteorological Department, the department of Roads, City of Harare, Zimbabwe National Army and Air Force, Police, WFP, UNICEF, OCHA, WHO, UNIFEM, UNFPA, IPA, MSF, World Vision, IOM and IFRC. A number of contingencies were identified that would require common planning. These contingencies were: natural disasters; epidemics; technological emergencies; and the domino effects of fuel and electricity shortages. It was agreed that by the end of March the common contingency plan would be ready.

**Mozambique:** Overall, rains have been good for food production except in the far north where cumulative rains remain below normal and those areas in the central and southern regions which have been affected by flooding.

Water levels in the main rivers basins are currently subsiding. A state of alert, however, remains in the Zambezi, Pungue and Buzi basins due to continuing heavy rains. Some 2500 people have been evacuated from islands in the Zambezi River near Caia in Sofala Province beginning of February. Unable to rescue their...
household goods and valuables when they fled, many of these people will need assistance until April or May when the rainy season finishes. Local communities in Nhambala and Daf that are now hosting this displaced population are finding it difficult to assist them because of their own poverty and food insecurity. In response Save the Children (UK) dispatched 200 family kits to the area. Each kit, which assists a family of five people, contains blankets, buckets, plastic sheeting for shelter and cooking and eating utensils. Water purification tablets, water containers and soap have also been included to reduce the risk of water borne disease, including cholera which is now prevalent in the area around Caia. The distribution of kits will be accompanied by health officials who will deliver key messages to the community about the importance of clean water and sanitation in order to minimize the risk of cholera spreading. Save the Children (UK) is planning to distribute an additional 290 kits in the coming week to the remaining displaced families in Caia.

Heavy storms, with high winds and torrential rains, in Nampula, Gaza, Sofala, Inhambane and Tete provinces in the beginning of February destroyed 2,156 houses, 26 schools, and 5,274 hectares of crops. The heavy rains and floods, combined with poor sanitation, created the ideal conditions for the spread of water-borne diseases such as cholera. To date, there have been more than 1,500 confirmed cases of cholera this year and three deaths (CFR 0.19% which is below the alert level of 1%), affecting 16 districts in Sofala, Manica and Zambézia.

UNICEF is providing support to provincial health directorates to treat and contain outbreaks of cholera by supporting recruitment and training of health staff. The organization also procured 101 tents to establish cholera treatment centers in affected areas and medical supplies (Ringers, ORT, catheters, nalidixic acid) have been pre-positioned at central and provincial warehouses. UNICEF is further supporting cholera prevention through the provision of emergency supplies for the treatment of water (chlorine, bladders, water treatment units) and for environmental clean up (gloves, face masks, shovel, rake, wheelbarrow, boots). As part of the drought response, UNICEF continues to support the water and sanitation sector through the rehabilitation of 124 and construction of 18 water points (of which 23% is completed) providing access to safe water for 81,000 people in Maputo, Gaza, Inhambane, Manica, Sofala, Zambézia and Tete provinces and trucking of safe water to the most affected communities reaching around 134,000 people in Maputo, Gaza, Inhambane, Tete and Nampula provinces.

In a bid to improve distribution capacities, WFP is in the process of opening two rail corridors from Maputo and Beira to Zimbabwe.

Malawi: In January, FEWSNET undertook a field trip to assess the crop development conditions across the country, with emphasis on the performance of maize. All districts in the Southern and Northern regions were visited as well as Kasungu, Nkhotakota and Ntchisi in the Central region. The mission concluded that despite late onset of rains, floods in the second half of the season and outbreaks of armyworm, most of the crops are in good condition. A major contributor to this is, according to agricultural experts and farmers, the increased uptake of fertilizer due to the government subsidy programme. However, a lack of rainfall for the past three weeks has led to wilting of maize crops in some areas and may result in permanent damage should a lack of rainfall continue.
WFP reported that February’s food distributions will be negatively affected because of the late arrival of some shipped cereals. Due to the current deficit, WFP’s allocation plan has been revised and priority is given to the most vulnerable areas taking into account the district’s food insecurity and nutritional status.

Since early February, there has been a significant escalation in number of cholera cases. In the week 30 January to February 5, a total of 423 cases of suspected cholera and 5 deaths were reported. This brings the total number of reported cholera cases since 17 October 2005 to 1,649, an increase by 1,084 cases as compared to same time last year. 20 people have died of cholera representing a case fatality rate of 1.2% (which is above the alert threshold of 1%). Of the 20 deaths, five patients died because they refused medication on religious grounds. The Ministry of Health, with technical assistance from WHO, has started conducting refresher workshops on cholera prevention and control for health workers, initially focussing on the districts of Blantyre and Mangochi in the Southern Region; and Ntcheu and Salima in Central Region.

A small health assessment carried out by the Ministry of Health, WHO, UNFPA, UNAIDS and UNICEF in 11 vulnerable southern region districts has revealed a moderate increase in morbidity and mortality. Preliminary results indicate a crude mortality rate of 0.41/10,000/day and a mortality rate among children under 5 years old of 0.56/10,000/day. The crude mortality figure falls below the sub-Saharan average of 0.45/10,000/day and is within what is considered the normal rate for a settled population. Diarrhoea and malaria are reported to be the most prevalent causes of child deaths.

The Government of Malawi with technical support from WHO and FAO have prepared an Avian Influenza Emergency Preparedness Plan for the country, including an implementation plan for this year. The plan which deals with animal health, wild life and human health includes activities such as risk assessment, disease surveillance and investigation, public awareness campaigns, procurement of pharmaceuticals and equipment, and strengthening of local technical capacity. The Department of Animal Health is presently working on a concept note on the animal health response side, which will include a proposal for a compensation plan.

The United Nations Theme Group on HIV/AIDS (UNTG) has revived the campaign undertaken in 2002 aimed at preventing sexual exploitation and abuse of beneficiaries of humanitarian aid. The programme will this time also train humanitarian workers on issues relating to HIV prevention, care and support, the nutritional and food security needs of PLHIV and treatment.

Zambia: Most areas in Zambia report good rains and a good crop stand. Despite the inadequacy of agricultural input support programmes the area planted has increased compared to last year, according to FEWSNET. Factors that may affect the final harvest include heavy rains, flooding and army worm.

Appeals for assistance to the under funded WFP assistance operation to refugees have been answered. The 72,000 refugee beneficiaries have been on half rations since the beginning of the year due to a lack of funding. The United States of America has now confirmed an in-kind contribution of 2,000 tons of sorghum, and DFID has contributed £500,000 in cash. Due to the time lapse between the announcement of the contribution and the arrival of goods, WFP is looking at options to borrow cereals against other projects so that a full cereal ration can be restored to refugees with immediate effect. In order to be able to provide food to refugees through to December 2006, WFP needs an additional US$ 4.6 million.
The Egyptian Ambassador to Zambia announced that his country would provide humanitarian relief food aid worth US$ 100,000, in response to the appeal for humanitarian assistance made in December by the Zambian President Levy Mwanawasa. The Ambassador further announced bilateral assistance for agricultural inputs and support to a cancer clinic at the University Teaching Hospital.

**Madagascar:** Cyclone Boeletse struck the southwestern region of Madagascar on the 5th of February in the coastal area 200km south of Tulear. National authorities reported 6,112 people affected, including 5,138 in the commune of Androka and 300 in the commune of Itampolo. Most of the displaced found shelter with relatives or neighbours. Some 100 people in the villages of Androharano and Befolotse (commune of Itampolo) remained homeless. A total amount of 11 schools, 2 health centres, 1 market, 20 public buildings and 2,491 private houses have been either damaged or destroyed. Destruction of food crops is over 720 hectares. Approximately 700 heads of livestock have disappeared or been killed and around 1,700 heads of poultry. The biggest constraint in responding to the needs is access to the affected areas.

To date, the national Disaster Management Unit (CNS) has distributed 20 bags of rice, 40 jerry cans of 10 litres, 50 mosquito nets, 4 tents and fuel vouchers. In addition, CNS will send five tonnes of rice as well as seeds for replanting to Androka for distribution to the most vulnerable. UNICEF is sending soap bars, chlorine to purify drinking water, jerry cans, mosquito nets and tents for a total of 1,100 households and for normalizing school activities. WFP and CRC will jointly implement food for work activities in the communes of Itampolo and Androka.

Response coordination and implementation is under the leadership and responsibility of the CNS in close partnership with the Ministry of Health and Family Planning and the National Office for Nutrition. Response activities have been clearly defined and put under the responsibility of one lead agency. Governmental structures are in charge of implementation. The chief of Region is coordinating the activities on the ground in close coordination with regional and district level authorities. Partners include WFP and UNICEF.

**Lesotho:** The condition of the maize crop varies significantly across the country. A few areas are reporting that maize is in good condition, while other areas are reporting poor conditions as a result of the dry spells experienced prior to the January rains. Lesotho has received excessive rainfall the past few weeks, causing damage to bridges, houses and fields.

**Swaziland:** The Great Usuthu River, which runs through the Lowveld, is currently flooded as a result of recent heavy rainfall received in the northern part of the country. Due to the previous water shortage affecting the region, Lowveld residents are collecting water directly from the river for household purposes.

**Namibia:** The official joint signing ceremony of the Country Programme Actions Plans (CPAPs) 2006-2010 between the Government of Namibia and the United Nations took place on 15 February. The Action Plans of the three Ex-Com agencies, namely UNICEF, UNFPA and UNDP, are formulated based on the UNDAF Outcomes. The contribution through the CPAP towards National Development for the next 5 years is estimated at US$ 168.96 millions.

**Angola:** It is expected that the total area planted with staple crops will increase further in the 2005/06 planting season owing to a variety of reasons among which
recovery measures such as farm inputs to newly resettled farmers. Humanitarian assistance to the country is expected to decline further this coming year, as government efforts to assist the most vulnerable are being stepped up.

Over the past few months there has been a noticeable increase in the number of spontaneous returns of refugees from Zambia – even before WFP had to cut the food rations of refugees there. Humanitarian actors are worried that the lack of assistance and the remoteness of the areas to which they return may lead to an increase in the number of acutely vulnerable. In Kuando Kubango, for example, the Norwegian Refugee Council reported a new concentration of some 300 refugee returnees in Mavinga that arrived from Zambia in December 2005. These people are completely without assistance. UTCAH reported the same for Kuito-Kuanavale, where some 754 returned refugees are holding up.

In January, WFP and Cooperating Partners distributed 4,000 tons of food to just under 250,000 people, mainly located in the central and south-eastern parts of the country. Of these 58 percent were targeted through General Food Distributions, mainly internal and external returnees, refugees and vulnerable residents. An estimated 28,000 people in Cuando-Cubango Province did not receive food aid in January, due to the unavailability of transporters to carry commodities to Calai and Cuangar, along the border with Namibia. The beneficiaries are mostly former refugees and internally displaced persons who have recently been resettled.

La Reunion: An epidemic of the mosquito-carried Chicungunya virus had struck La Reunion and has reportedly affected 50,000 people (45,000 persons since December) out of a population of 800,000. According to the information recorded in death certificates, as of 3 February, approximately 20 persons would have died from the secondary effects of the disease, primarily elderly people. At least 22 persons, including 13 newborns, were suffering from neurological disorders associated to the disease. WHO has sent an assessment team to the island to investigate. There is also a fear that the epidemic may spread to the surrounding Indian Ocean Islands (Mauritius, Madagascar and Comoros).

COORDINATION

Avian Influenza confirmed in Nigeria

The confirmation of H5N1 avian influenza in poultry in Nigeria is the first reported incidence of the highly pathogenic virus on the African continent and poses a risk to human health and livelihood. FAO and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) have sent veterinary experts to Nigeria to assess the situation and examine how the virus has been introduced. They stressed that it remains unclear if the outbreak has been triggered by migratory birds or by the trade and movement of poultry or poultry products. WHO is offering support to the Government of Nigeria's national public information campaign, which may include delivery of messages to communities during the nationwide house-to-house polio immunization campaign beginning on Saturday 18 February.

The virus has so far affected some 42,000 poultry in Nigeria of which 40,000 died. A number of control measures have been undertaken, including culling, quarantine and disinfection of the infected premises. Nigeria has an important commercial poultry sector and millions of backyard poultry farmers. The poultry population is estimated at 140 million.

Experts have expressed fears that both animal and human disease control systems would not be adequate in many African countries to contain an outbreak of avian influenza. Inadequate surveillance and testing facilities, sparse hospitals and
primary medical services, lack of health education, poor communications and the prevalence of a host of other deadly diseases all mitigate against rapid detection and response. Conflict, porous borders and high prevalence of HIV/AIDS were seen as potential complicating factors with regards to how the virus spreads and possibly mutates into a more human capable form. In terms of preparedness capacity, the OIE and SADC are particularly worried about Tanzania, Angola, DRC, Mozambique and Malawi. South Africa, Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe are considered to have relatively strong capacity.

DEVInfo training workshop held in Gabarone
The UN in Southern Africa hosted a DevInfo Training Workshop in close collaboration with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) from 13-17 February 2006 in Gabarone, Botswana. The objective of the workshop was to further strengthen capacity for DevInfo implementation in the region.

DevInfo is a database system designed for the collation, dissemination and presentation of Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and other Human Development-related statistical indicators. The technology has been specifically designed to support governments in MDG monitoring, but can also be adapted to include additional user-defined indicators linked to key national monitoring frameworks, such as the PRSPs, humanitarian indicators, disaster management data and national development plans. The system is available at no cost to all UN Member States and UN agencies and can be distributed royalty-free.

The UN in southern Africa considers a common information base for evidence-based planning, programming, monitoring and evaluation, and strengthening of capacities in MDG reporting key. Hence its strong support for the role-out of DEVInfo. In the SADC region, several countries have already acquired excellent knowledge and experience in developing national customized versions of DevInfo, including Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia.

The Gaborone DevInfo regional workshop is organised with the technical assistance of SAHIMS. Please follow DEVInfo & MDG monitoring in SADC on: www.sahims.net/mdgsa, where you will find the latest updates on MDG monitoring in SADC countries, best practices, lessons learned, achievements, training needs, as well as related events.

Good humanitarian donorship
In June 2003, 17 donor governments met in Stockholm and endorsed 23 principles for good humanitarian donorship. These principles stated that their work would be guided by the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. They would promote adherence to international humanitarian, refugee and human rights law. They would ensure flexible, timely and predictable funding and reduce earmarking. They would allocate funding in proportion to needs. They would involve beneficiaries in the design and evaluation of humanitarian response. They would strengthen local capacity to prevent, prepare for and mitigate a crisis. They would support the UN, the Red Cross and NGOs and affirm the primary position of civilian organizations in humanitarian action. And they would support learning and accountability initiatives and encourage regular evaluation.

More on the good humanitarian donorship initiative can be found on http://www.goodhumanitarianandonorship.org.