

MOVING FOOD

The World Food Programme's response to the Southern African humanitarian crisis

JULIA STEWART¹

Fifteen million people across Southern Africa have exhausted their coping capacities and are now facing serious and potentially life-threatening shortages of food. Erratic weather, poor infrastructure, inadequate food security and government policies have converged with escalating HIV/AIDS rates, driving the most vulnerable populations in six countries to the brink of starvation. Initial projections found a cereal deficit of 4 million metric tons for the 2002/03 agricultural season, and identified the need for 1.2 million tons of emergency food aid. The UN World Food Programme gave early warnings of this impending food security crisis and expeditiously mobilised a regional response. This paper explores the key facets of the logistics of food aid delivery in the region. It compares the current emergency operation with that of 1992, and notes the devastating impact that HIV/AIDS is having on food security. While food is the critical ingredient to saving lives, programmes in agriculture, economic recovery, education, health, protection and human rights, and water and sanitation must all simultaneously be supported if recovery is to take hold.

Introduction

The raison d'être of the UN World Food Programme (WFP) is to supply food aid to millions of hungry people; but doing this is no easy feat. It is a complex procedure beginning with thorough assessments of crops, food supply and vulnerability. These assessments form the basis of appeals to donors for cash and food contributions. Simultaneously, the WFP establishes an intricate logistical system that will move tons of food from ports, along highways and railways, over mountains and rivers, ultimately to reach families that have tried but failed to produce enough food to feed themselves. Programmes are then set up to

incorporate non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which are the WFP's lifeline to the people.

The WFP Emergency Operation for Southern Africa (EMOP 10200.0) was launched in the middle of 2002. In terms of tonnages it is the biggest humanitarian operation being undertaken in the world today, and it is being implemented by the largest operational agency of the UN. In July 2002, the WFP appealed for a million tons of food to feed 12 million people in six countries—Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Swaziland, Lesotho and Mozambique—over a nine-month period, at a cost of \$500 million. The UN as a whole appealed for \$611 million for Southern Africa, of which

JULIA STEWART is a consultant to the UN World Food Programme based in South Africa.

\$100 million is for purposes other than food aid. While food aid is largely a temporary relief measure, these non-food programmes—agriculture, economic recovery, education, health, human rights, and water and sanitation—can be seen as forming the basis for wider recovery.

The current humanitarian crisis in Southern Africa is one of the most complex emergencies ever faced by the WFP. In response to it, the WFP has set up a regional hub in Johannesburg, re-opened offices in Zimbabwe and Swaziland and upgraded its offices in the other four countries. By July, WFP country offices and 23 sub-offices became operational and more than 500 national and international staff were in place in the six countries. The programme meant dealing with six different recipient governments as well as several other governments for logistical reasons, and identifying more than 50 partner NGOs which could distribute food to the beneficiaries and also help these agencies to build a relief capacity, toward which most were not oriented. This was all done in a very short time. Thereupon Judith Lewis, the WFP regional director who was based in Uganda yet responsible for Southern Africa, realised that an entire region was entering into a crisis which could not be addressed adequately from Kampala. In June 2002 she moved herself and key staff from WFP operations around the world to Johannesburg. Here she set up a functioning logistical and management machine within a matter of weeks, and immediately began a tour of donor capitals to appeal for resources. From the time an appeal is made, it generally takes three months to convert donations into actual food in the hands of needy people. Foresight like Lewis's can mean the difference between a food crisis and a famine.

The backbone of the WFP is logistics, and the organisation is known for moving enormous quantities of food, often to extremely inaccessible areas. In the context of this emergency, through the WFP regional logistics unit based in Johannesburg, the agency contracts

dedicated fleets—companies that set aside a certain number of trucks for the exclusive use of the WFP. This arrangement means that private companies, rather than the WFP, operate and maintain the trucks, while the WFP decides their destination. By special arrangement, the Norwegian Red Cross and the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) sent 200 former military trucks from Norway to be used exclusively to move WFP food along difficult roads to the most distant communities in Lesotho, Malawi and Zambia. This fleet is operated by the IFRC, but again the WFP decides on the distribution of the trucks.

For port activities, the WFP establishes service agreements, most frequently (in this operation) six months in length, with one contractor for each port. The agreement covers a fixed number of tonnages and prevents the need for tendering each time a new vessel arrives. Any tonnages not covered by a service agreement must go out for a new tender and new transporter.

WFP regional logistics arranges and oversees all overland contracts, moving food from ports, silos and mills to affected countries. In each operational country, the WFP country office logistics personnel must prepare for arrivals by obtaining import permits, and assume responsibility when the food arrives at warehouses in the country. They establish contracts with transporters at the national level, and ensure that the food aid is transported to the usually smaller warehouses of implementing NGO partners. NGOs undertake the final delivery to distribution points, and organise the ultimate distribution of maize and other food products to individual beneficiaries.

The WFP also provides transport services for other humanitarian agencies. In January, three US-based NGOs began their own pipeline of US-donated food aid into the three worst hit countries—Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi; this is known as the C-SAFE pipeline. While a parallel logistics structure is being established for moving the bulk of this food, in the case of Malawi, C-SAFE has contracted the WFP to move the food on a full cost-recovery basis.

Implemented by World Vision, CARE and Catholic Relief Services, the C-SAFE programme is valued at \$114 million and will last for three years. C-SAFE aims to provide 160,000 tons of food in the first year, targeting two million people each month, with a special focus on women and children in emergency and supplementary food distributions, agricultural support and development training.

How best to deliver to large numbers and multiple destinations

To ensure timely and sufficient delivery of food aid to people in need in the current Southern African crisis, the WFP approached the logistical operation regionally. Within a few weeks of identification of the crisis, a Regional Logistics Unit was established in South Africa (a country without previous WFP presence), as part of a Regional Management and Logistics Co-ordination Structure. WFP logistics comprises five operational units: Regional Pipeline, Overland Transport, Infrastructure, Information Management, and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Liaison unit.

The main purpose of the WFP Johannesburg logistics unit is to ensure that movements in the region are co-ordinated to avoid bottlenecks. This includes all humanitarian cargo, with the WFP advising other UN and NGO agencies about what is moving and where it is being taken. To facilitate this co-ordination role there are frequent meetings with transporters (sometimes two to three times in a week), a constantly updated logistics website, and other direct and indirect communications.

WFP logistics collaborates closely with local and international counterparts, such as national governments and SADC, to further improve humanitarian deliveries by addressing logistical bottlenecks, such as differences in customs procedures between countries, differences in road tolls, and country-specific import restrictions. By facilitating the streamlining of these

procedures, the WFP maintains and improves the ability of the agency and its partners to reach millions of people in need.

The two main ports for the bulk of WFP tonnages are Durban and Beira, but some food is sent through Nacala, Dar es Salaam, and Maputo as well. Everything is contracted out. While cargo is on a ship, it remains the sole responsibility of the ship owner. For instance, if the shipping company originally told the WFP it would transport 20,000 tons of food, but when the cargo arrives only 19,500 tons are deliverable to the WFP because of improper sealage or damage in offloading, then the ship owner pays for the difference.

A port operator likewise is responsible for cargo in the phase between receipt from the ship and storage. The transporter at the port receiving the cargo then takes over responsibility for the cargo from port to warehouse in the destination country.

WFP port captains monitor the whole process at the ports. They are tasked with regular communication with port authorities, and must make authorities aware of the UN cargo. They inspect cargo upon arrival to ensure that the food is not wet or infested, as it is futile to transport damaged cargo to the country level. The port captain monitors losses during discharge, such as net breaks, dropping by carriers or theft. He or she serves as an agent and a legal witness in cases of loss. For the current crisis, there are four WFP port captains, one each in Durban, Beira and Dar es Salaam, and a fourth who is responsible for both Nacala and Maputo.

By January the WFP logistical capacity in the region had improved greatly. As noted earlier, before the launching of the regional EMOP 10200.0 in July 2002, the WFP was operating in some of the countries and on a small scale; its activities were primarily concerned with development. Swaziland and Zimbabwe had no food assistance programmes before the onset of this crisis. Partner organisations and government counterparts had very limited infrastructure and organisational capacity (institutional skills, knowledge, staff) for relief assistance.

Furthermore, the extent to which the governments in the affected region were concerned about genetically modified (GM) organisms took the WFP and its partners by surprise. Resourcing and logistical and operational strategies had to be adjusted to allow alternative ways to meet distribution requirements.

In this rather unfavourable context, the achievements of WFP's newly established Regional Logistics Unit can be considered significant:

- WFP offices have been established in Nacala, Beira, Maputo and Durban ports; WFP warehouses have been set up in Beira port (17,000 ton capacity), Nacala (15,000 ton capacity) and Maputo (25,000 ton capacity).
- Following transport capacity assessment missions, several Special Operations are under way to upgrade the Nacala rail line and transport in Malawi (this is discussed further below).
- Close working relations have been established with high-level government officials and there are continual intense interactions to reduce delays caused by import regulations (phytosanitary requirements in particular can cause delays)
- Service agreements have been concluded with suppliers and regular meetings held.

A total of 298,000 tons of food was procured for the emergency operation. The WFP also managed to effect a change in delivery terms. Prior to August 2002, suppliers were in charge of the delivery of food to extended delivery points and WFP logistics arranged deliveries to final delivery points. Food is now exclusively purchased on FCA (free carrier) terms. This means that ODJ logistics is now taking care of the transport of food from the suppliers' warehouses to final delivery points. The obvious advantage is that the WFP has greater control over the movement of goods. Furthermore, the fact that the WFP is now transporting larger volumes results in improved leverage over transport companies and a better bargaining position over transport rates.

Initially, the most apparent logistic challenge in the region was the poor condition of roads, especially during the rainy season. The WFP planned for pre-positioning of two months' stock before the summer rains. The primary reason for pre-positioning of food stocks is to have food *in situ* in less accessible areas, but it also helps reduce port and road congestion and ensure smoother pipelines. The pre-positioning exercise was hampered by shortfalls in food supply and lack of sufficient transport capacity. By January, however, warehouses were stocked.

A sudden boost to WFP logistics capacity in the region was the donation from the Norwegian Government, through the Norwegian Red Cross and the IFRC and Red Crescent Societies, of a fleet of ex-NATO vehicles in July. A complete transport support pack (TSP) included 200 6 x 6 trucks, support vehicles, spare parts and storage tents. Dispatch of the TSP began in October, and by January 2003 the fleets were almost completely operational in Lesotho (25 trucks plus three escort vehicles), Zambia (116 trucks) and Malawi (59 trucks, four escort vehicles, 10 long-haul trucks and two mobile workshops). The six-wheel-drive vehicles are being used for short haul of food items from regional warehouses to distribution points. The trucks are expected to move 12,000 tons of food aid per month throughout the three countries.

The contentious issue of acceptance of GM food aid by national governments became an unexpected logistical challenge for the WFP. The decision by Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique and Lesotho to accept only milled GM food aid, owing to environmental and trade concerns, led to a need to identify additional milling capacity in the region and urgently put this in action. Zambia rejected GM food aid entirely, citing human health concerns as well. As there were 17,658 tons of GM food stocks in the country, the WFP was required to reroute to Zambia regional purchases (made possible through cash contributions) and to divert badly needed logistics capacity to remove the tonnages from Zambia to Malawi and Mozambique.

Owing to the GM milling stipulations, the WFP converted some 50,000 tons of US GM wholegrain into maize meal. First, the WFP surveyed 35 mills in the region (in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Malawi, Namibia, Zambia, Lesotho, Mozambique and Tanzania) and then contracted two mills in South Africa, one in Lesotho and one in Zimbabwe (two contracts are still under negotiation). Milling not only posed logistical challenges but also gave rise to technical problems. Because of this uncommon additional step in the logistics chain, the WFP consulted an international milling expert for advice on extraction rates, shelf life and other issues. The organisation then retained a local milling expert to supervise milling activities in the region.

In December 2002 alone, 5,000 truck movements and 1,500 rail wagon-loads uplifted from ports, silos, mills, and warehouses conveyed a total of 150,000 tons of WFP food across the region. Also in December, the WFP hired a contingency planning consultant, who is travelling the region to undertake scenario planning and to advise on logistical responses to these scenarios. His first mission was to examine how the WFP can operate in Zimbabwe in spite of growing fuel shortages. Substantial advocacy, training and financial support by all involved as well as the introduction of new players in the emergency field have increased operational capacities enormously over the past six months.

Special operations

As the WFP contracts out most transport services, another major challenge it faces is to utilise commercial transport to move massive tonnages without negatively impacting on commercial traffic in the region. Special Operations (SOs), such as the Nacala railway rehabilitation, are intended to help secure normal commercial activity.

Uniquely within the UN system, the WFP implements SOs as a device for responding to emergency logistical needs through rapid rehabilitation of infrastructure. The definition of an SO is:

an activity to rehabilitate and enhance transport infrastructure, if necessary and in extraordinary circumstances, to permit speedy and efficient delivery of food assistance to meet emergency and protracted relief needs.

SOs are operational intervention measures that are limited in scope and size, short-term in nature, and targeted to overcome specific bottlenecks that hinder the efficient, cost-effective and speedy delivery of food aid and other humanitarian assistance.

The WFP contracts road engineers, architects and other specialists to travel the region and advise on bottlenecks, problems and improvements. SOs always require the agreement of local and national governments. Examples of SO interventions have been: repairs to roads, bridges, railways, airports and port infrastructure and equipment; intermittent airlifts; and increasingly, provision of common logistics services, including joint logistics centres and communication initiatives.

One such SO for the current crisis response involves increasing capacity of the Nacala rail line running from Nacala port in Mozambique into Malawi, thereby facilitating movement of humanitarian cargo. An additional 15,000 tons of WFP food monthly will be able to move into Malawi for four million beneficiaries in that country and eastern Zambia. Through this SO, the WFP is leasing an additional eight locomotives (of which two are shunting locomotives) and 80 wagons, and repairing 77 km of track. Rail assessment and inventories of equipment needed for the repair work have been completed and tenders for equipment awarded. Sheltam CC provided four locomotives, and an agreement for the remaining two locomotives is being discussed. The Mozambique Ports and Railways Administration (CFM) and Central and East Africa Railways (CEAR) have secured 60 wagons for the movement of WFP maize traffic. Additional wagons need to be resourced and WFP is looking into options. The project was rapidly funded through a British/DFID donation \$6.4 million (96% of

the total budget) and a Canadian/CIDA donation of \$256,410 (four per cent of the total budget).

An obstacle for this SO has been extreme weather conditions, in particular cyclone Delfina in early January 2003, which, in addition to killing one railway worker and injuring three, caused locomotives and wagons to overturn and parts of the railway line to wash away. CFM, with the help of some CEAR equipment, conducted emergency repairs and the line was reopened by the end of the month.

The WFP SO doubled the pulling power on the Nacala railway line, increased the off-take capacity from the port of Nacala by 30%, and allowed substantial costs savings for the WFP owing to the use of cheaper rail transport compared to the more expensive road. The costs savings on transport for all humanitarian agencies as a result of the use of rail instead of road is estimated at 50%. From late November 2002 up until 6 January 2003, 7,404 tons of WFP food aid had been transported via the Nacala railway line, using four new locomotives. The total amount of all cargo transported along the line, during the same period (including other humanitarian and local commercial cargo), was 25,899 tons.

The WFP believed that the ability to ensure that the roads remain passable during and after the rainy season was especially problematic in the cases of Malawi and Zambia. The entire road network of Malawi comprises 2,361 km of paved roads, 5,127 km of unpaved roads and 556 bridges. Local transport in Malawi is accomplished by using small- to medium-sized trucks with a payload of between eight to 15 metric tons each; virtually none of these trucks has multiple traction. Because of the poor condition of the roads, transport activities in Malawi are reduced substantially during the rainy season, which starts as early as mid-October in southern Malawi, and many secondary roads are virtually impassable. With the objective to provide food to 3.2 million people in Malawi, the WFP needed to transport between 30 to 40,000 tons per month to over 1,200 final delivery points

countrywide. These roads required minor repairs to ensure continued transit of relief cargo.

In Zambia, the effects of the rainy season are usually flooding of roads and rails, cutting access to pontoon bridges, and washing away roads and airstrips, especially gravel and dirt ones. Generally, inter-territorial and territorial roads in Zambia are usable by 30-ton trucks, as is the case in most districts near to the territorial roads; however, in many districts only smaller trucks of 10 tons can be used. Tarmac roads are of varying quality, with some dirt (graded) roads being of better quality than un-maintained tarmac roads. However, the majority of Zambia's roads are dirt: they become mud during the rainy season and can become impassable after a few weeks of rain. Depending on the severity of the rains, all dirt roads have the potential of becoming impassable. Most districts can be made accessible throughout the year. However, there are some areas that are cut off or pose a specific problem for logistics. These are: Luangwa, Kalabo and the northern shore of Lake Kariba.

In contrast, it is notable that the seasonal effects on transport are minimal in Zimbabwe. The road network is a total of 18,338 km long, of which 8,692 km are paved and 9,646 km are unpaved. The primary roads (trunk roads) are all in excellent condition and free from obstructions or potholes, and trucks can maintain an average speed on such roads. The secondary roads (gravel roads) are mostly in reasonable condition. All are passable, though some stretches may be waterlogged and difficult to negotiate after heavy rains. During heavy downpours secondary roads can become locally impracticable for a short period of time, and when they are in the path of a cyclone or a tropical storm (January/February), transport can be temporarily disrupted. Some bridges have been devastated in Manicaland as a result of the 1998 El Niño and the Eline cyclone in 2000. But otherwise, transport operations inside Zimbabwe are not necessarily affected by the seasons.

The urgent need to identify potential constraints and bottlenecks on the Malawi and Zambian roads led the WFP to hire an engineer, who performed a road survey in the two countries during August 2002. This assessment turned into a WFP SO for the emergency rehabilitation of roads and the pre-positioning of five Baily Bridges in Malawi. A WFP road-and-bridge engineer, who is currently deployed as project manager, works in close corporation with the National Roads Authority (NRA) of Malawi, the actual implementing agent of this WFP project.

This activity not only improves accessibility, but also reduces turnaround time, ensures better utilisation of trucking capacities, minimises the opening of additional secondary and tertiary warehouses (thereby reducing the need to rent additional warehouses and staff), reduces the risks of losses associated with food deterioration by minimising storage periods in small warehouses (especially for maize flour and other milled produce), and minimises the hiring of expensive multiple-traction trucks.

Emergency repairs to rail, road, and other corridors through SOs—planned, financed and implemented by the WFP—not only facilitate humanitarian deliveries in any immediate crisis that might arise, but also have a long-lasting impact on transport capacity to the benefit of both governments and the private sector.

How the WFP knows where to move the food

What guides the WFP logistics to the people most in need is a process of vulnerability assessments. The now 15 million needy people in the region have been identified through an unprecedented series of rolling regional assessments. The rolling assessments are highly sophisticated and involve analysis of a variety of issues, using both food-related and non-food-related criteria. This unique process has involved hundreds of researchers, interviewing thousands of people.

The WFP and its partner organisations work hard to get assessments right. Three were carried out across the region last year, and a fourth is planned for April and May. The last assessment, in December, was carried out by team members from seven internationally respected organisations—SADC, WFP, FAO, UNICEF, Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNET), IFRC and Save the Children. Governments and local NGOs are fully involved at the country level, and international NGOs such as CARE, World Vision International, OXFAM and Medecins sans Frontieres have also participated in national assessment teams. All must agree upon methodology and come to consensus on the results. To further ensure transparency, not all assessment partners are involved in the implementing process, and therefore have no self-interest in the outcome. The WFP and other agencies base their humanitarian response and programming on assessment findings.

It takes an assessment to understand the scope and depth of this crisis, which, to a casual observer, might not be so apparent. There are no images of starving adults or of toddlers unable to hold themselves up, like those from Ethiopia in 1984 or Sudan in 1998. There are no hordes of people fleeing across borders or moving entire households to relief distribution points. While there are coping mechanisms and other factors unique to Southern Africa, this may largely be attributed to the fact that early warning systems and early humanitarian intervention work. From July to the end of December 2002 the WFP had pumped 271,000 tons of food aid into the region, and this aid reached over six million people. This represents nearly 1.2 billion meals.²

On several occasions it has been noted that Southern Africans, unlike many populations further north on the continent, have extensive and complex coping strategies, derived from an often benevolent environment. Zambian farmers cultivate a wild cucumber that sustains them during planting season. The termites that emerge in the rainy season keep many in protein for a

week or so. Nuts and marula fruit provide some sustenance for people with AIDS who are too weak to work in the fields. Reports from WFP food aid monitors tell of villagers eating maize husks, and occasionally of deaths due to desperate meals of poisonous wild foods. High rates of school drop-outs and rising levels of prostitution and migration reflect other coping strategies, some bearing high risks in terms of HIV/AIDS.

In Zimbabwe in particular, even the better-off are not immune from food shortages. Zimbabwe accounts for nearly half of all those now suffering food shortages. A Zimbabwean intellectual resident in South Africa returned from Christmas holidays at home, and recounted how his mother rejected a cash gift, because she could not buy anything with the money. A long-standing coping mechanism for Zimbabweans has been remittances from family members working abroad—now that mechanism is being undermined.

The difference a decade makes

It was only one decade ago that Southern Africa found itself in a similar predicament. A massive region-wide drought caused by effects of the El Niño phenomenon led to severe water shortages for humans and livestock and ruined pasture conditions, feeding drought-induced diseases and causing livestock deaths. Eighteen million people were affected.

Just over one million tons of food were delivered to nine countries through targeted free distribution, representing 79% of the originally estimated needs. The WFP was the chief actor within the UN community, as it is now, and handled 740,000 tons of this food. The negative effects of drought were detected early and were resolved early, after normal summer rains doubled the harvest of the previous year. As there were no confirmed deaths from starvation, nor reports of increased severe malnutrition, this operation was considered a success.

During the 1991–92 drought emergency, South Africa was one of the most affected

countries, suffering a 5.5 million ton food deficit of its own, and precluding the nation from being a local procurement source. By contrast, in the current emergency South Africa enjoyed a 1.2 million ton surplus in 2002, allowing it to be a major source for regional purchase of WFP food. By January, the WFP had procured 298,000 tons of food from Tanzania, Mozambique and South Africa, the great majority from South Africa. Conversely, the operation ten years ago was concentrated in South Africa and intended for that country.³

While greater tonnages of food were moved in the earlier crisis and there were nine targeted countries rather than the six, several WFP staff have characterised the earlier task as ‘easier’ because of better regional logistical capacity. At the onset of the 1992 operation, Southern Africa had just undergone major infrastructure rehabilitation under SADC/South African Transport and Communication Commission programmes. Equipment and facilities were brand-new and fully functional, and port and rail operations were heavily subsidised. Since then, some port and rail infrastructure has been privatised or commercialised, resulting in higher emphasis on profit and no government subsidies. The consequence is that today investments in maintenance and spare parts have been limited, leading to a slow decline in regional logistical infrastructure, and there is no spare capacity on railway lines. In the 1992 crisis, 70% of the food aid was transported via rail (a cheaper and easier option), whereas this time only 50% is moved by rail. Furthermore, SADC was more operational in 1992, whereas today it is a policy-focused regulatory body, and Zimbabwe was a major player providing food aid rather than representing nearly half of the regional need as it does today.

Whereas the 1992 crisis was seen as brought about purely by drought, the factors leading to this year’s crisis have been dubbed a ‘deadly cocktail’ and a ‘perfect storm’. Extreme weather conditions (drought, flooding, erratic rainfall and hail), socio-economic decline, and a lack of carry-over

food stocks caused by successive years of low production and agricultural sector mismanagement at the national level (in some cases), have all combined to create the conditions for a humanitarian disaster. Governmental mismanagement is central to the crisis, and has been discussed in the media and elsewhere. Malawi has been criticised for the imprudent liquidation of national grain reserves, Zimbabwe for the collapse of large-scale commercial farming due to a badly implemented land redistribution scheme and for government keeping too tight a control over food marketing and import, and many governments for generally misplaced priorities; for example, the King of Swaziland used national development funds to purchase a \$45 million private luxury jet, although many of his people face starvation and are dying of HIV/AIDS. The cost of the jet was more than twice the cost of all UN agency relief programmes for the quarter million most vulnerable Swazis.

At the same time there are many instances of positive government facilitation in the current humanitarian crisis. Most of the governments have assisted with streamlining procedures for import permits and have set up committees to help manage and facilitate movement of humanitarian cargo in their countries and across borders. Being a major point of entry, Mozambique in particular has facilitated the movement of humanitarian cargo to neighbouring countries. Governments have loaned or provided maize to facilitate the WFP operations (Malawi, Zambia, Swaziland), deployed government staff to districts as emergency monitors (Malawi), funded or assisted with the milling of GM maize grain (Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Lesotho), and provided warehouse space for storage of food, or office space, or both (Swaziland, Lesotho).

Several governments have shown a proactive attitude toward disaster management and mitigation, for example, Mozambique through its 2003 Contingency Plan, and many have stepped up support for agricultural input programmes

(Mozambique, Swaziland, Lesotho and Zambia).

It is important to note here that the South African government has been hugely supportive of WFP activities, ranging from assisting with the establishment of a regional Management and Co-ordination Office (now a WFP regional cargo bureau) to facilitation of humanitarian cargo movements and the milling of maize in South Africa for distribution in the region. At the end of January 2003, the government of South Africa made a donation valued at almost \$20 million for the purchase of 100,000 tons of maize in South Africa for distribution in affected countries. With this significant donation, South Africa became the fifth largest contributor to the crisis response.

HIV/AIDS: cause or consequence?

It is worth noting here that over the past decade, human development index (HDI) indicators have declined for all six of the currently affected countries. All six fall in the bottom third of the HDI, measured by life expectancy, educational attainment and adjusted real income. In four of these countries (Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique), life expectancy is being considerably reduced. This has been attributed to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and high HIV/AIDS prevalence rates threaten to reverse any positive gains in Lesotho and Swaziland.

In many villages in Southern African countries, grandparents and children seem to be the only inhabitants. It is the stark rareness of healthy adults that leads field workers to claim that HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa is wiping out the 15- to 40-year-old age group. Seven countries in Southern Africa, including four of the EMOP countries, have prevalence rates of over 20%. The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) estimates that seven million agricultural workers have been lost to AIDS in Africa since 1985 and that another 16 million will die over the next 20 years.

The current food crisis in this region is

undoubtedly made worse, more malignant, and infinitely more difficult to resolve than the 1992 drought, by a full-fledged HIV/AIDS epidemic. The disease leads to competition within a household for its resources—money and productive capacity must compete between care-giving and health-care costs on the one hand, and agricultural inputs and labour on the other.

The implications of HIV/AIDS, while always kept in focus, have over the past several months become central to the response to the current crisis. James Morris, the UN secretary-general's Special Envoy for Humanitarian Needs in Southern Africa, and executive director of the WFP, highlighted this fundamental shift in perspective during his first mission to the region. At a press conference in September 2002, he said: "HIV/AIDS is a fundamental, underlying cause of vulnerability in the region, and represents the single largest threat to its people and societies."

Acknowledging the special nutritional needs of people living with HIV/AIDS and of communities in which many people are unaware of their HIV-positive status has required a new approach to composition of rations and calculations of family size. There is a clear understanding that good nutrition helps slow the progression from HIV to AIDS, and maintenance of health not only improves the quality of life of infected individuals, but has implications for national productive capacity, and for the stability of family and social structures. Increased food rations and greater variety in commodities in turn have logistical implications.

Because all affected countries except Swaziland placed proscriptions on the distribution of GM stocks, the WFP has been forced to mill massive quantities of donated GM food aid. While the large-scale milling exercise made the food aid operation more complex and costly, the WFP also saw it as an opportunity to increase the amount of food that would be fortified with micronutrient pre-mixes, adding vitamins and minerals important to sustain populations with high HIV/AIDS rates. Depending on donor response, 320,000 tons

of WFP food may be fortified for this emergency.

History repeating itself

At the beginning of 2003, attention is focused once again on dry weather conditions in the region. In southern Mozambique, southern Zambia and most of Zimbabwe, rainfall is well below average, with some areas 200 mm below normal. Warnings are out that crops may fail due to these extremely dry circumstances. Meanwhile, people in southern Malawi and central and northern Mozambique are preparing themselves for saturated conditions that could lead to flooding.

Unfortunately for Southern Africa, the combination of this inauspicious entry into the new harvest season, continued economic decline, predictions of instability in Zimbabwe, and the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS across the region, is likely to mean that any improvements made in infrastructure and logistics capacity over the past six months will probably be put to use by the WFP and other UN agencies for relief rather than development activities throughout 2003. Undermining recovery in the region is the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which could partly be reversed by greater emphasis on inputs in agriculture, health-care, education and governance sectors. Yet such programmes are not being well funded by donors. Food aid has received 65% of the required funding, while non-food sectors are only at 20% of requirement.

A World Bank report following the 1992/93 crisis noted:

The sharp contrast between the more-than-generous and spontaneous response by donors to the SADC/UN Joint Appeal for food aid, and the somewhat reluctant and poor commitment for non-food items, brought out yet once again the difference between compassion and development co-operation in the prevailing world order.⁴

The Southern Africa humanitarian crisis now being faced seems to substantiate this

sobering observation. In the new millennium, the prevailing world order does not seem to have changed noticeably.

Notes

- 1 The World Food Programme (WFP) was invited by the ISS to contribute to this publication on food security. We believe that the WFP is exceptionally well positioned to inform the debate in respect to food aid at a practical level given the unparalleled scale of its engagement. This contribution on Southern Africa's current
- 2 270,000,000,000 grams/580 grams per person per day = 465.5 million daily rations * 2.5 = 1165.75 million meals.
- 3 Interview with Pedro Figueiredo, WFP regional logistics co-ordinator in Johannesburg, 23 January 2002.
- 4 Report from the World Bank Southern Africa Drought Review Meeting, Paris, March 1995, p 42.