

**Report to the Secretary-General
Mission of the Special Envoy for Humanitarian Needs
in Southern Africa**

7 – 15 December 2006

Despite major achievements in the past five years, the situation in southern Africa is still overwhelming in its scale and seriousness. It seems that the world has not yet understood the magnitude of the crisis that is affecting millions of people across the region.

In the face of this tremendous challenge, we need more than resources and talented staff, important though they are: we need to work together collegially and unselfishly, driven by a sense of common purpose and an emotional engagement in the vital work we do. These are fundamental to our ability to achieve the impact that is needed in this troubled yet potentially productive region.

Good leadership enables this kind of collaboration. People cannot simply be told to work together – they have to be inspired and engaged, and they have to want to work together in a cause that is greater than all of us.

Introduction and Current Humanitarian Situation

My eighth and final visit to southern Africa as Special Envoy for Humanitarian Needs took place on 7–15 December, with stops in Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe and in Johannesburg. The mission was intended to take stock of developments in the region since the crisis emerged in 2002, to reflect on the future need for humanitarian action and to discuss with governments and donors the actions required to tackle underlying causes of acute and chronic vulnerability.

The statistics for this region continue to be frightening: southern Africa is the epicentre of the global HIV epidemic – 32 percent of people with HIV live in this sub-region; it is home to 3 million AIDS orphans¹ – between 20 percent and 25 percent of the population. The impact on women and girls is devastating – young women between 15 and 24 are three times more likely to be living with HIV/AIDS than men of the same age. Life expectancy still hovers in the late thirties.

Fortunately, food security has improved in the past year and food production is significantly higher than in the 2004/05 crop year. The World Food Programme (WFP) has been able to reduce the number of people covered by its regional operation from a

¹ Number refers to Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Source: UNAIDS. 2006. *Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic*. Geneva.

peak of 9 million in early 2006 to a planned 4.3 million at the height of the 2007 lean season.

Capacity for effective delivery of services remains a major problem for governments in the region. Every country in southern Africa is struggling with losses of skilled government workers as a result of a combination of economic migration – skilled workers leaving the public service for better-paid jobs – and early deaths from HIV/AIDS.

This final report is not intended to be an exhaustive review of what has taken place in southern Africa in the past five years, nor is it a definitive list of lessons. Instead, I would like to use this occasion to highlight a few of the changes since 2002, focusing largely on the United Nations system, to offer my views on some of the ongoing challenges in the region and to reflect on the crucial roles of leadership and the team approach in addressing the major issues of the future.

Five Changes in the Past Five Years (2002–2006)

1. Strong response to large scale hunger and humanitarian crises

Southern Africa suffers from endemic food insecurity. The region is acutely vulnerable to the effects of flooding and drought because it relies largely on rain-fed agriculture. The number and impact of natural calamities are increasing as a result of climate change and environmental degradation. In recent years, the region has experienced massive crop failures. In 2002, 14 million people required food assistance; in 2005 the number was close to 10 million.

In collaboration with governments in the region, the United Nations and its partners have risen to this challenge and averted large-scale loss of life. This is a testament to what the United Nations can achieve in partnership with others and with the generous support of donors. More than US\$1.0 billion has been raised over the past five years, providing food assistance for up to 14 million people, nutritional support for 2 million children, measles immunization for 7 million people and agricultural support for 6 million. The success and scale of these operations are extraordinary.

2. Recognition of the “Triple Threat”

The regional crisis that emerged in 2002 highlighted the fact that the United Nations was not properly configured or focused to handle the complexity of the challenges. It was apparent that the United Nations was not well organized to help governments respond to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, nor were governments sufficiently focused on the issue themselves. The addition of a major food crisis to the situation was potentially disastrous.

When we began to realize that a more holistic approach was required to address the triple threat – the combination of food insecurity, HIV/AIDS and weakened capacity for delivery of essential services – the United Nations system rapidly began to adapt. The October 2003 report of the High Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) demanded that the United Nations response be “...entirely new or radically scaled up to make a difference”.

Three years after that report, the United Nations has taken significant steps in responding to the 11 programmatic and 11 institutional actions prescribed by the HLCP, and Governments have moved forward in integrating triple-threat issues into their Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and national development plans, supported by the United Nations family.

3. A deeper understanding of vulnerability in Southern Africa

Major advances have been made in our understanding of the drivers of vulnerability in southern Africa and of ways to assess them. The formation of vulnerability assessment committees (VACs) in several countries, supported by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) at the regional level, has been an important step in assessing the vulnerability of people affected by the triple threat. The credibility of the VAC process has been greatly enhanced by the crucial step of including a variety of stakeholders, including donors. Discussions continue on ways of moving VACs from static assessment to dynamic monitoring; the future of the process looks promising.

The VACs have been complemented by an information-management system led by the United Nations and by the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination and Support Office (RIACSO), which was set up in 2002 in Johannesburg to improve coherence in regional humanitarian response. Both these initiatives now fall under the auspices the Regional Directors' Team (RDT), which will ensure greater cohesion across countries and regional structures.

4. Positive trends in anti-retroviral treatment (ART) rollout

The scale of the AIDS epidemic in southern Africa is almost unimaginable. The impact of the disease on social and economic fabric is impossible to quantify. The number of people dying each day demands the most urgent and comprehensive humanitarian response possible.

In the last five years, governments in the region have realized the challenge and taken steps to scale up the rollout of ART, supported by international funds and mechanisms set up for the purpose. By the end of 2005, most countries had managed to meet only 10–20 percent of their “3 by 5” targets, which constitute about 50 percent of the estimated need for ART, but the rate of scaling up is beginning to increase significantly.

Several urgent needs remain in ART rollout, including implementation of more paediatric programmes and broadening of treatment coverage beyond urban centres.

5. A substantial contribution to United Nations reform

The United Nations can be proud of its hard work and innovation in addressing the challenges of the past five years. From the beginning of the crisis, RIACSO has provided a good forum for exchange, enhanced by the innovative move to co-locate staff of other agencies in the office. In late 2004, the United Nations system also engaged the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) to review its organizational structure in an effort to maximize

effectiveness. Throughout 2005, the process has been carried forward by individual agencies with the support of the United Nations Development Group Office (UNDGO).

One of the main results was the creation in January 2005 of the RDT, which is chaired by UNDP and brings together regional representatives from nine United Nations agencies. Its purpose is to support the work of United Nations country teams (UNCTs) in enhancing national capacities to respond to the triple threat, to help to re-orient United Nations programming to make it more relevant to the context and to mobilize resources for the United Nations system. A major function is to change the behaviour of agency staff in such a way that all focus on contributing as members of one country team.

This process has led to what may be termed “accelerated reform” in southern Africa: in my experience, the United Nations systems works more closely together in this region than anywhere else in the world

Challenges for the Future

Many important challenges remain for southern Africa. A few of the most important – in my opinion – are listed below.

The Burden on Women and Girls. We have not found ways of relieving the burden borne by women and girls in southern Africa. They are impacted disproportionately by HIV/AIDS because of higher infection rates and because of their social responsibilities for care-giving. The evidence of high rates of gender-based violence and of women being forced into prostitution is shocking; the situation is unacceptable and reprehensible. Greater focus on these issues is needed immediately.

Moving from Food Aid to Food Security. The value of food aid in addressing the most acutely vulnerable populations is undeniable. But given southern Africa’s recurrent weather-related crises, it is important to improve food security policies such as price controls and the use of strategic grain reserves and to use a variety of social protection methods to rebuild peoples’ livelihoods and stimulate local markets. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP) have a central role in supporting governments in this effort. These and other agencies need to come together at the country level, much as agencies have come together on the HIV/AIDS issue, to address food security holistically.

The Environment. Environmental concerns have not featured prominently in the discussion of triple threat issues, but the link between environmental degradation and vulnerability is becoming more evident. It will not be possible to improve food security without a complementary effort to prevent land erosion, deforestation and other environment problems. To this end, UNEP should become more engaged with UNCTs in the region.

Capacity Replenishment. Capacity concerns are now high on the agenda of governments in the region, but there is no clear understanding of the best way to replace lost capacity on a large scale. In terms of healthcare, Malawi is using a system of salary top-ups to retain health staff; Zimbabwe has opted to train a new level of less skilled primary healthcare workers who would be less likely to migrate to better paid jobs. More of the United Nations' energy should be focused on helping governments to find strategies to replenish the numbers of ministry staff.

Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC). The magnitude of the OVC problem has been mentioned. There is widespread acknowledgement that the needs of OVC are best met through community support and social-protection measures rather than by institutions, but scaleable solutions are elusive. More than a third of countries have no strategies in place to care for children orphaned by AIDS. Greater effort needs to be devoted to finding ways to scale up support for OVC and address this immense challenge. It is an outrage that so many children are in such dire circumstances. A recent report on childhood poverty in Mozambique, produced by UNICEF and the Ministry of Planning and Development and launched on 14 December, serves as a powerful example of how UN system can fruitfully work in partnership with Government.

Direct Budgetary Support (DBS). The move of donors away from project-based funding to DBS has in many cases left the United Nations unsure of its role. The problem is not new, but we are slow in defining ways in which agencies can provide more technical support for governments. At the same time, donors seem to be unclear as to how governments should be helped to make appropriate allocation decisions. An ongoing concern is whether DBS will provide as much relief and encouragement for the most vulnerable as does traditional support directed through multilateral institutions.

Advocacy. High-level advocacy and support have helped to maintain the momentum of response and change in southern Africa. Several visits by Executive Heads in the United Nations system and by the United Nations Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa have ensured that the world's attention is focused on triple threat issues. This kind of attention needs to continue as the region faces its unique challenges.

The Importance of Leadership and Working Together

Knowing how we can achieve our aims is just as important as defining what needs to be done in southern Africa. I am convinced that the key to responding to a prolonged crisis such as the triple threat is inspirational leadership to create a sense of common purpose that everything we do results in an improvement in the lives of people who need help.

Few things are more rewarding than doing something for someone else; it is a gift to be part of an unselfish group working for the common good. Such collaboration cannot be forced – it must be inspired. In the work of the United Nations in southern Africa, the source of our inspiration should be the sense that we can make peoples' lives better. The United Nations has some of the most talented, intelligent, dedicated and mission-focused

professionals in the world, but the real leverage from those assets comes with true and unselfish collaboration.

Recent United Nations reform proposals seek to bring agencies together to improve coherence, reduce inefficiencies and make it easier for governments to relate to the United Nations system. But United Nations reform would be useless if it were done for its own sake: it must be linked directly to improving the lives of people. We have to want to work together – and that will not happen without an emotional engagement in our work.

Our leaders are crucial in this respect. Resident Coordinators and Regional Directors need to provide inspirational leadership for the common purpose rather than for agency mandates. We have seen examples in southern Africa, but they are far too infrequent. In the long term, we may need to re-examine the competency profiles of our United Nations leaders. In the short term, strong signals need to be sent from Headquarters that country and regional teams should be free to innovate in their collaborations and that they are expected to focus on the common good as well as individual agency performance. We need to minimize the impact of staff rotations on the collaborative effort, either through personnel policies or through a commitment by UNCTs to ensure smooth transitions as team members arrive and depart.

Finding the energy to drive our common purpose will continue to be a challenge. When the humanitarian community was mobilized to respond to the needs of 14 million highly vulnerable people, there was a palpable and urgent interest in collaborating as effectively as possible. As we focus on longer-term solutions, we cannot afford to lose the momentum that we had during the acute crisis phase. Emotional engagement and focusing our work on making a difference in peoples' lives – which will in turn contribute to meeting the Millennium Development Goals – is fundamental to the work of every one of us, from the field worker to the Secretary-General.

ANNEX: Country-Specific Findings

Zambia

The mission visited Zambia on 8 December. Meetings were held with the UNCT, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the Government, including a meeting with the Deputy President. The meetings indicated significant progress in addressing the effects of the triple threat. But considerable challenges remain, and in all meetings the needs of OVC were a particular concern.

The UNCT noted in particular that food security was a concern. The absence of rain since the beginning of the rainy season has resulted in no planting in many areas. If rain does not come soon, there is a very high risk of a poor crop in 2007. The UNCT also highlighted the large number of orphans and the importance of providing for caregivers and finding ways to support incapacitated households.

The NGOs stressed the need for more comprehensive government support for OVC. Several faith-based organizations indicated that there was a strong volunteer base in Zambia that could be called on if the Government could provide funding to help vulnerable households. Many expressed the view that access to food was a major concern, even though the country had a surplus harvest in 2005/06. Food support was seen as critical for people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) and for caregivers providing for OVC. Food to support school attendance was recognized as an essential investment.

During a meeting with senior government officials, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Community Service and Development, the issues of food security and the needs of OVC were discussed. The mission team emphasized the need for the Government to allocate resources to institutionalize the national VAC as part of the government structure. The team urged Government to consider lifting the export ban on commodities that WFP wished to purchase in Zambia for use outside the country – the ban was lifted on 11 December.

The need for good nutritional support for people receiving ART was recognized during the meeting with government representatives. There had been a significant increase in the numbers of people receiving treatment, but only 70,000 people of a total of 200,000 were currently receiving treatment.

Malawi

The mission's visit to Malawi on Saturday 9 December offered limited opportunities for interactions with stakeholders, but a comprehensive briefing was given by the Resident Coordinator and the UNCT. Some donors were met at a luncheon.

Despite a record harvest in 2006, the food security situation in Malawi remains fragile. Access to food remains a critical problem for many people; chronic malnutrition means that 45 percent of children are stunted. The Government continues to prioritize efforts to address food insecurity, with considerable support from donors; the successful harvest is an indication of progress. It was acknowledged, however, that Malawi is significantly

exposed to external shocks, and that longer-term food and agricultural policies and plans were needed. A major issue identified by the UNCT was the need for the Government to embrace the private sector in order to stimulate production, food availability and access.

The need for continued food assistance to support chronically food-insecure households was emphasized. Considerable progress has been made in developing and rolling out social-protection and cash-transfer schemes, but they needed to be implemented on a greater scale with the full engagement and leadership of the Government; it was encouraging that the President had recently requested that a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) pilot scheme be expanded from one district to six. It was also encouraging that the Government has put in place a national plan of action for orphan care that had received funds from the Global Fund (GFAMT). These were positive signals, but the impact on the lives and livelihoods of many vulnerable households and children was not evident. It was estimated that as many as 10 percent of the 1 million orphans in the country remained uncared for.

Government efforts to scale up the availability of ARVs were recognized: the number of adults receiving treatment had increased from 8,000 in 2004 to 46,000 in 2006. The United Nations had consolidated its efforts and was moving forward in accordance with the principles of the "four ones".

Capacity constraints in Malawi are a major impediment to the provision of basic social services. The Government had improved training opportunities for medical staff, but retaining staff remained a challenge. It appeared that a salary top-up scheme for health workers was beginning to work, but the evidence was anecdotal.

An overriding concern that was clearly contributing to vulnerability in the country was the lack of attention to environmental degradation. Without attention to environmental concerns, progress in other areas of the triple threat would be negated.

It was apparent that the UNCT in Malawi had made significant progress in collaboration in the spirit of United Nations reform, as shown by the alignment of the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) with the Government's national development strategy. The Country Team is actively positioning itself to be the partner of choice to the Government.

Zimbabwe

Meetings in Zimbabwe demonstrated that the situation remains uniquely complex and challenging, but that progress is being made to address some of the critical issues facing the most vulnerable population groups. Meetings were held with the UNCT, donors, NGOs, senior government officials and the Head of State.

Achieving food security is a critical issue in Zimbabwe. National production in 2006 was above 2005 levels, but is still well below requirements. FAO estimates that maize production provides between 60 percent and 70 percent of needs. There appear to be no significant imports planned; consequently there are concerns of a major shortage of staple

foods in January–March. Nutrition indicators suggest a deteriorating trend; chronic malnutrition is 29.4 percent. A major concern raised by international stakeholders was the limited availability of reliable information on food production estimates and import plans. The need for a more effective and trusting partnership between assistance actors and the Government was seen as critical to combating food insecurity.

On the positive side, recent surveys indicate that improvements are being registered in terms of mortality among infants and children under 5. HIV prevalence is in decline, from 24.6 percent in 2004 to 18.1 percent in 2006, attributed in part to behaviour change and increased condom use. It is reported that contraception use has increased from 52 percent to 60 percent.

The availability of anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs) is a challenge: only 50,000 of the 300,000 people who need treatment are receiving it. The limited support the country receives from the Global Fund was identified as an impediment to increasing the numbers of people in treatment. It is estimated that 3,200 people die each week in Zimbabwe from AIDS-related causes.

A major concern highlighted in all meetings was the plight of OVC. Zimbabwe has the largest numbers of orphans in the region. Of the 1.6 million orphans in Zimbabwe, 1.1 million have been orphaned as a result of HIV/AIDS. A multi donor programme has been put in place to support OVC, providing for up to 750,000 children – but a further 300,000 to 400,000 still require support.

In all meetings, concern was expressed as to the state of the economy and the importance of stabilizing the exchange rate. A stable currency working to a realistic exchange rate was seen as essential to enable United Nations and NGOs to use available resources effectively. The issue was raised with the President, who acknowledged the need for economic stability.

Mozambique

The visit to Mozambique highlighted ways in which development challenges are being addressed in the context of the new aid environment of DBS. Changes in aid flows in support of the Government and the national budget have challenged the multilateral system, but the United Nations has taken steps to adapt and has aligned its programme of work to address the priorities of the Government more specifically.

Acute and chronic vulnerability caused by food insecurity and HIV/AIDS continue to cause serious problems among communities throughout the country. Meetings with the President, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister highlighted the challenges faced by the Government in its capacity to provide services for the most vulnerable people. It was evident that the Government is committed to ensuring equitable allocation of resources to strengthen capacity at the provincial and district levels.

The team participated in the launch of a report prepared by UNICEF in collaboration with the Government that analyses poverty among children in Mozambique. This impressive

report provides a comprehensive reference for all stakeholders involved in improving the lives of children, and highlights the extent to which the HIV/AIDS pandemic is compromising opportunities for the future.

A meeting with donors highlighted the dilemmas facing Mozambique as funding flows consolidate in the form of DBS. Donors wanted the United Nations to be more active in influencing government funding decisions to address the needs of acutely vulnerable people. This issue was discussed during the meeting with the Prime Minister, who recognized the comparative advantage of the United Nations humanitarian agencies in identifying and delivering critical assistance; he agreed that there is a need to manage a balance of funding flows until the Government has the capacity to address acute needs.

Although progress has been made in ART rollout, there is a pressing need to accelerate support for the 1.6 million Mozambicans who are living with HIV/AIDS. An estimated 20,000 children under 5 died from AIDS-related diseases in 2006; 99,000 children are HIV positive, but only 3 percent receive ART. There are 1.6 million orphans, of whom 510,000 have lost one or both parents to AIDS.

Regional Meetings in Johannesburg

Meetings were held in Johannesburg with donors, the RDT, and the RIACSO group. There is a clear commitment in the assistance community to monitoring the regional situation and providing focused and relevant support to national efforts that respond to regional needs.

RIACSO, which is based on the Inter-Agency Standing Committee model, demonstrated collegial commitment to address the humanitarian challenges caused by the triple threat. The group appreciates the leadership of the United Nations, and expressed a strong interest in continuing to meet, whether or not the situation in southern Africa is regarded as an emergency.

The RDT highlighted the considerable progress in bringing together United Nations regional resources to support UNCTs more coherently and accountably. As the RDT matures, however, it will need to balance the tendency to become bureaucratic and rule-based with the need to maintain a collegial and flexible group of senior managers united by a common purpose.