2005 is being touted as the year that Africa stakes its claim on the international agenda, topping the list of priorities for the Group of Eight, the European Union and increasingly for American foreign policy. Indeed the continent has received better media attention in recent months stimulated by reinvigorated peace processes and the G7’s agenda for poverty eradication in Africa led by Britain. Nevertheless, poverty and hunger still characterise life for a majority of the continent’s inhabitants denied agency over their livelihoods as a result of a complex mix of reinforcing structural, political and environmental factors. Commenting on recent initiatives for debt relief for African countries, the World Bank’s James Wolfensohn said he hopes that “there is a recognition now on behalf of the rich world that they cannot continue to be rich if the world is destabilised by poverty”.2

The following pages identify HIV/AIDS and food insecurity (particularly in the rural areas) as the two most severe and interrelated humanitarian issues currently facing Southern Africa. It is argued that the current situation must be contextualised as an ‘entangling crisis’ of climatic factors, chronic poverty, the failure of economic and political governance, and the impact of HIV/AIDS on the ability of individuals to respond independently.

The foregrounding of human security as a way of ensuring global stability (through preventative action) is gaining momentum particularly by major aid donor countries. But with only ten years left to meet the 2015 deadline for the millennium development goals there is an urgent need to reassess the most pressing issues facing African states and the communities that comprise them. Speaking at the launch of the “Make Poverty History” campaign in London’s Trafalgar Square, Nelson Mandela commented that “like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings... While poverty persists there is no true freedom.”3

Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region in the world where the number of people living in extreme poverty has almost doubled, from 164 million in 1981 to 314 million today. Thirty-two of its forty-seven countries are among the world’s forty-eight poorest nations.4 Placing this in international context illustrates the extent of the challenge facing Africa. According to a 2002 Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) report approximately 842 million people were undernourished between 1999–2001, of this number, 10 million were in industrialized countries, 34 million in countries in transition and 798 million in the developing world.5

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6 The opinions expressed in this Situation Report do not necessarily reflect those of the Institute, its Trustees, members of the Council, or donors. Institute research staff and outside contributors write and comment in their personal capacity and their views do not represent a formal position by the ISS.
While the increasing emphasis on regional cooperation favours a human rather than a military centred view of global security, it also highlights the vast differences in development capacity between individual countries within specific regions. This is particularly true of countries in Southern Africa whose form of governance range from traditional monarchy to constitutional democracies on a continuum from de facto one-party rule, unclear division between legislative, administrative and judicial functions to decentralized functions and popular civil society participation. Indeed this uneven political development has implications for the socio-economic development of the region.

The period between 2002–2003 saw one of the most severe food crises in Southern Africa triggered by the lack of rainfall in key agricultural areas. The resulting acute food shortage affected approximately 15 million people, half of them children in six affected countries, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Four of these countries officially declared the situation a national disaster and sought international aid. With the exception of South Africa, Botswana and Namibia, all Southern African countries are listed by the UN FAO as food-deficit areas. Since agriculture continues to dominate these domestic economies and is the most weather dependent of economic activities, the impact of an environmental disaster extends far beyond individual loss of livelihood but impacts upon overall food accessibility as entrenched lines of supply are disrupted. 2004 was no different in terms of food shortages, but the mix of the spill-over effect from the previous year and new environmental forces limited recovery significantly.

The table below provides a brief overview of events in Southern Africa that occurred over 2004 and are still being monitored. The information has been collated by the United Nations Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Support Office (RIASCO).

11 southern African countries sign off to the 'Kobe Disaster Reduction Declaration'.

Heavy rainfall destroyed crops in Lesotho while extremely hot conditions are now posing a threat to other, humidity prone crops.

A Tsunami hit Seychelles on 26 December 2004, destroying fast areas of coastline and infrastructure. An appeal for 8.9 million has been launched to help the country to recover.

A devastating storm in Swaziland cost 30 people their lives and made more then 200 people homeless.

Cyclone Ernest and tropical storm Felapi killed at least 17 people and left 11,000 people destitute. Response to the affected people is underway.

Malawi experienced flooding and hailstorms in 11 districts and army worm attack in four others. Over 400 people were displaced and a further 4,500 affected. Response is underway.

Zambezi River levels in Mozambique have been alarmingly high causing some flooding. The government has released some of its emergency funds to assist the victims. The situation is currently under control. River levels in other parts are currently not alarming.

Flood alerts have been issued for the Caprivi region in Namibia and some flooding has occurred. The situation is being monitored closely.

Floods have been reported in the northern Province of Zambia, affecting 2,500 households. Alerts have been issued for the lower Zambezi. Assessments are currently being undertaken. The VAC issued a report identifying 176,000 households as extremely food insecure and in need of assistance.

Floods have been reported in Muzarabane district in Zimbabwe. A response is underway. In a separate incident, a train carrying chemicals derailed near Gwanda, spilling some of its content. The situation was responded to immediately and been brought under control.
As the traditional 'lean season' (January to March) gets underway this year, aid agencies are warning that the humanitarian crisis will persist if an integrated approach to food security is not implemented. According to January estimates by the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNET), food security in Zimbabwe is deteriorating to the extent that 5.8 million people are in need of food aid. Twenty years ago this precarious situation would have been considered a contradiction in terms for a country that has a history of being a net exporter of agricultural products. Moreover food security problems are exacerbated by rising staple food prices coupled with the very slow progress in the attainment of planned official imports.\textsuperscript{10} Despite forecasts of normal weather, the FAO have highlighted the following priorities for Southern Africa for 2005:\textsuperscript{11}

- In Zimbabwe, high prices and shortage of maize grain in certain areas are causing serious food security concerns. Continued widespread shortages of key inputs such as seeds, fertilizer, fuel and farm power are expected during this planting season. Some 4.8 million people, about 40 percent of the total population, are in need of emergency food assistance.

- In Swaziland and Lesotho, large sections of the populations lack access to food and require emergency food aid and agricultural inputs, mainly due to the impact of drought in 2004.

- In Angola, food assistance is needed for up to 717,000 returnees and other vulnerable people notwithstanding the good harvests in 2004.

- In Malawi, about 1.3 million vulnerable people, including those affected by crop failures and HIV/AIDS, require emergency food assistance, estimated at 56 000 tonnes of cereals during the 2004/05 (April/March) marketing year.

At this point it would be pertinent to revisit the question of what is food security? And why is a region not historically regarded as ‘disaster prone’ increasingly reliant on international aid to meet the basic needs of its population?

The right to food is unquestionably a fundamental human right. Certainly it has been affirmed as such by numerous international declarations relating to human development not least of which is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However there is no consensus on the causes of challenges to the right to food (for example food shortages), and the question continues to be a burning issue. Early attempts at conceptualizing food insecurity and accompanying impoverishment of communities reduced the problem to a supply-demand imbalance. Therefore it is not surprising that the approach emphasised the need to increase agricultural output through the use of technology in the vein of much early modernization theory.\textsuperscript{12} More recent analyses of the chronic nature of the crisis have begun to shed light on the complex link between immediate food needs and the broader governance crisis on a state level. Food security is not just a matter of immediate availability of food, but “a failure of livelihoods to guarantee access to sufficient food at the household level”.\textsuperscript{13} According to the 1996 World Food Summit Plan of Action, “food security exists when all people at all times have physical access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food for a healthy and active life.”\textsuperscript{14}

Moreover food security entails three levels of activity: production, distribution and consumption and early warning and strategic planning must include all three levels. Thus it is equally important to consider production incentives and parameters for commercial and subsistence farming, together with the accessibility of these products and the nutritional value of consuming them. By acknowledging these connections appropriately we will begin to move from reactive policies to preventative safety nets that have long term capacity building effects. On a regional level the Southern African Development Community (SADC) set up a coordination unit on food security issues based in Harare in 1997. The unit’s overall objectives extend further than the definition set out by the Rome Declaration by including a need to ensure that “households have the capacity to acquire food by means of their own production or through cash purchases”.\textsuperscript{15}
In addition it also aims to ensure that the natural resource base is conserved in the process of acquiring food. The reference to purchasing power of households is a positive acknowledgement of the inextricable link between structural macro-economic factors and chronic poverty. This is particularly pertinent to the discussion of agriculture and HIV/AIDS as will be explored in greater detail further on. More recently in December 2004, the SADC Secretary-General Prega Ramsay said SADC had to come up with a Strategic Action Plan to boost food availability and accessibility, promote food emergency preparedness and trade and improve long term investment in the region.

Judging the severity of food insecurity

A population or livelihood group is considered acutely food insecure if:

- People experience a large reduction in their major source of food and are unable to make up the difference through new strategies;
- The prevalence of malnutrition is abnormally high for the time of year, and this cannot be accounted for by either health or care factors;
- A large proportion of the population or group is using marginal or unsustainable coping strategies;
- People are using ‘coping’ strategies that are damaging their livelihoods in the longer term, or incur some other unacceptable cost, such as acting illegally or immorally.

Source: Overseas Development Institute

The environmental trigger for the Southern African crisis of 2002–2003 included a mix of drought throughout the crop season, flooding in Mozambique and Malawi together with intense frost in Lesotho. Devastating in its impact, it serves as an illustrative example of the extent to which the inability to respond to changing weather patterns can compromise the long-term sustainability of livelihoods. An Oxfam study into the underlying causes of the crisis encapsulates this relationship in describing the impact of the drought on Lesotho saying, ...the tiny mountain kingdom of Lesotho represents some of the key problems that turned a drought – a relatively regular and survivable event into a humanitarian disaster. At the heart of the tragedy is the unrelenting impoverishment of people, who have exhausted coping measures, are marginalised in the economy, and have few opportunities for recovery.

It is maintained that the 2002 case highlights an underlying long-term developmental crisis rather than a classical emergency crisis and that the “key difference between 1992 and 2002 is that the latter crisis can be attributed to a number of factors other than climate, among them structural imbalance, governance, economic and social decline, HIV/AIDS and to a lesser extent drought.” It is therefore important to differentiate between seasonal and chronic shortage of food, where the former may not lead to hunger because of the resilience of the population.

Moreover, the reality that only six percent of arable land in the SADC region is irrigated (and largely in South Africa) with the rest being rain-fed means that appropriate interventions must take place in order to mitigate the impact of poor rainfall. Indeed as research shows that meteorological drought is a phenomenon which does not necessarily lead to a famine or even to a food shortage – rather is it the overall vulnerability of the state in terms of poor governance through bad or non-committal policies that must be seriously considered as part of the food security debate. As The Economist notes in its report on 2002 famine in Somalia, “bad weather is rarely enough on its own, to kill large numbers of people. Famine usually requires bad government too.”
While the African Union’s road map in the form of the New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) calls for the integration of Africa into the global economy, the reality of trade in Africa suggests that it is the unequal economic integration that should be of concern. Economic liberalisation in the SADC region, without the appropriate interventions has contributed to the long term decline in livelihoods. With the exception of South Africa the gap created by the removal of agricultural subsidies (which would otherwise allow farmers to reinvest in the maintenance of their land and equipment) has not been filled by the private sector but has instead led to a contraction of agricultural output. There are some important similarities between countries in the region in the context of the strong push for economic liberalisation and an accompanying decline in social welfare. Livelihood strategies have been eroded over the past two decades. Remittances particularly from mining, that underwrote consumption back in the home (usually rural) areas as well as for providing funds to buy farm inputs, hire farm labour and tractors, and to invest in cattle, dried up as the sector faced increasing economic pressures and restructured.20

The FAO reports that in the 1980’s the area under cultivation in Zambia was about one million hectares, in 1999 this area was reduced to 585,000 hectares representing a decline of 23 percent mainly due to the removal of agricultural subsidies.21 Moreover the liberalisation of maize prices has lead to variability of prices causing the most vulnerable to sell their produce immediately in order to meet cash needs. Thus food security also refers to the ability to purchase food without compromising the individual's resource base. It is a fact that the most economically disadvantaged members of society are the hardest hit by natural disasters.

The contradiction between an agricultural dependent economy (SADC region) that is not supported by governmental intervention and a substantially subsidised but relatively small agro-industry (European Union) adds to the structural barriers to ensuring food security. Agricultural subsidies stimulate overproduction in Europe and export dumping which essentially lowers prices of key commodities, and thereby marginalizes African producers from participating in both the domestic and global market. The case of the Mozambican sugar industry is often used to demonstrate the extent to which EU subsidies and dumping can harm smaller African economies. While Mozambique’s predominantly rural economy has an impressively low production cost for sugar at less than 286 pounds per tonne, subsidies given to the EU as a high-cost producer of sugar have ensured that EU competes as the second largest sugar exporter in the world.22 Needless to say, this gives the EU significant leverage in terms of setting the world price for sugar. Moreover, the possibility of intra-continental trade is obscured by the fact that the EU dominates trade with other African countries. Thus the costs of these subsidies in terms of income and development opportunities lost are huge.23

And while African farmers are increasingly being told to diversify their markets as a way of maintaining competitiveness, it is evident that increased food security for Southern African producers cannot be considered outside of the debate on global agrarian reform. Moreover, countries like Namibia, Swaziland and Lesotho who placed considerable focus on the textile manufacturing as a source of growth are now facing the prospect of deepening mass unemployment and stress as a result of the ending of the multi-fibre agreement which gave them access to key European and American markets. Since the ending of the agreement at the start of this year it is estimated that 15,000 jobs will be lost in Swaziland alone.24 The lack of vertical integration of their textile economies (from yarn to the finished garment) means that they have little to fall back on. This grave situation only adds to the vulnerability of those countries to secure the livelihoods and food security of their people.
The introduction of HIV/AIDS in the development equation presents major challenges to the ideals of a long-term strategy for poverty reduction and food security. This is largely because approximately two-thirds of the population of the 25 most affected African countries depend on agriculture for their food security. An FAO report on the impact of HIV/AIDS on agriculture suggests that if four people for each of the 42 million people living with HIV are impacted upon, the virus is assumed to affect 160 million globally. With the highest prevalence rate in the world, the consequent humanitarian crisis is particularly acute in Southern Africa (seven countries in the region have prevalence rates above 17%). Furthermore the FAO estimates that by 2020 Namibia could lose up to 26 percent of its agricultural labour force to the virus, Zimbabwe 23 percent, Mozambique and South Africa 20 percent and Malawi 14 percent.

The major impacts on agriculture include depletion of human capital, diversion of resources from agriculture, loss of farm and non-farm income together with other forms of psychosocial impacts that affect productivity. When these factors combine both the lack of food and the lack of access to food begins to deteriorate. This view has been ‘formalised’ by activist and writer on humanitarian affairs Alex de Waal who terms the phenomenon ‘the new variant famine’. De Waal argues that HIV/AIDS has altered the demographic profile of conventional famines by targeting young, productive adults, more women than men – which differs from the traditional victims of famines namely the elderly men and children.

The implications for a gender bias towards women in the transmission of HIV are enormous since this means that the care-giving capacity of communities is constantly eroded. The Southern African Regional Poverty Network (SARPN) explains that the cycle of poverty and HIV/AIDS entrench a system of chronic impoverishment: “this weakened social fabric means that families cannot recover previous levels of social functioning, and may even resort to strategies that imperil them further, because the negative consequences of such remedies are not immediately apparent.” It must also be noted that the overextension of community welfare is occurring at the same time as the withdrawal of the state at local level leaving individuals to negotiate their own survival strategies that may undercut their ability to recover in the long term.

While the extent of the loss of labour due to HIV/AIDS infection can largely be predicted, other changes in the agricultural profile of the region are not as obvious. Some examples of these changes are:

- **Shift in the type of food production**
  The steady increase in cassava production as a substitute for labour intensive crops such as maize has compensated for lost labour through HIV/AIDS in Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe over a 5 year period (1999–2000).

- **Increasing movement of people**
  The seasonal nature of agricultural work means that it is highly dependent on migratory labour. This ‘pool of labour’ is often poorly catered for in terms of family conducive accommodation, but on the contrary, provides an environment prone to casual and commercial sex that of course exacerbates vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. Migration in search for food will also increase the risk of HIV/AIDS as mobile populations have little access to health services for preventative education.

- **Loss of transfer of knowledge of agricultural skills**
  The average life expectancy in sub-Saharan Africa is now 47 years, an average of 15 years less that what it would be without HIV/AIDS. But the impact of HIV/AIDS extends further than the costs of treatment or lost labour, and affects the preservation of indigenous knowledge of farming techniques and biodiversity. As more sexually active ‘breadwinners’ fall victim to the virus, children are tasked...
with the responsibility for ensuring the maintenance of agricultural livelihoods. Without the sufficient ‘know how’ child-headed households are ill equipped to meet basic food needs. The Southern African Humanitarian Information Network (SAHIM) emphasise that indigenous knowledge and biodiversity are significant resources within rural communities, and become increasingly important as tangible assets when other resources dwindle.  

- **Weakening of institutional capacity**

The weakening of capacity refers to both the weakening of agricultural capacity and the ability of general institutions to deliver services. As more staff stay away from work due to opportunistic illness, the efficiency of a contracted workforce with expanded work will be tested to the maximum. Furthermore communities with fewer adults have less ‘surplus adult-time’ to help others, undermining the cornerstone of African society – extended community welfare.

- **The exacerbation of gender inequalities**

Numerous studies and analyses of women and gender highlight women’s lack of power to negotiate sexual relationships (or “survival sex”), and inequities in income as some of the fundamental reasons for women’s vulnerability to the virus. As such, women are not only the most vulnerable group to HIV/AIDS infection but also to the economic impact of HIV. Moreover, young girls are also more likely to be on the receiving end of the virus as the burden of care-giving falls to the younger generation. This often means that female children are relatively more compromised in terms of long-term socioeconomic development.

The severity of the crisis is further compounded by the lack of sufficient health professionals in the public sector. On the whole the continent continues to suffer from a shortage of health professionals, losing highly skilled people to more competitive salaries in the developed world. SADC as a region is no different, indeed statistics on Southern Africa provide a shocking portrait of a region under severe strain as a result of these shortages. A recent study by the Joint Learning Initiative found that there are more Malawian doctors in the British city of Manchester than in Malawi itself, while only 50 Zambian doctors have remained in their country out of a total of 600 after independence.  

Certainly this shortage of skills cannot be compared to other sector shortages in that the challenges of the HIV/AIDS pandemic demands that states have an effective healthcare system to mitigate the effects of the virus. But a few countries like Mozambique and Malawi are trying to stem the tide by using paraprofessionals to fill the gap. ‘Clinical officers’ as these paraprofessionals are called are not formally trained doctors, but have sufficient competencies to perform lifesaving procedures. What is critical is that they are not going to be poached by wealthy countries, and provide much needed manpower to the sinking healthcare ship at home. Norway’s Minister of International Development, Hilde F Johnson, draws attention to the predicament that the personnel crisis has raised saying, “in dealing with the double crises of AIDS and personnel shortages we will need new political solutions and a broader sense of accountability”. It is evident that greater priority must be given to budget allocations for the public health sector. Patriotism alone is not going to keep skilled medical personnel at home. What is needed is greater supportive commitment from states to ensure that those who are in many ways the ‘life blood’ of their societies are able to operate effectively.

It is clear from this overview that food insecurity and its related problems of hunger and famine is a symptom of deeper structural and political forces. The reliance of African countries on food aid as a stop-gap measure has in itself become an impediment to long term management of the situation. Certainly the use of ‘food aid’ as a form of secondary market to dispose of excess produce by industrialised nations should be critically evaluated. As agricultural oversupply found a conduit for disposal in the way of overseas food aid, therefore becoming
an undisputed way of protecting northern agricultural interests? Moreover, the debate on whether or not genetically modified food should be accepted as aid has obscured the real and underlying causes of food insecurity. Together with HIV/AIDS the problem will not simply be solved through increasing food aid per se, but requires a considered response that must account for both external and ‘man made’ impositions on communities.

Significantly, the emphasis must shift towards understanding the divide between subsistence and commercial farming so that both activities are adequately supported. This requires a disengagement by African governments from a passive reception of food aid to an adaptation of policy in support of agricultural development. Some of the strategies offered by Martin Rupiya, for example, include supporting national food producers and agro-business through education, extension services, improved seed selection and credit, together with improved irrigation and transport and distribution networks. Investment in agriculture is critical to developing capacity for individual and community wide livelihoods. To this end, it would be pertinent to consider the challenges to sufficient irrigation considering the short rainy season that is relied upon to support crops through to harvesting. Statistics suggest that only 4.5% of land on the continent is under irrigation compared to the 38.4% in Asia. South Africa is taking positive steps in this regard and has launched a Micro Agricultural Finance Scheme to complement the Comprehensive Support Programme to support emerging farmers and land reform beneficiaries. R1 billion has been set aside for this scheme.

Moreover the use of food aid and land reform as political tools must also be considered within the governance paradigm. Recent reports from Zimbabwe suggest that the ruling party is influencing the Grain Marketing Board in Matabeleland South to distribute grain according to party allegiances. In the context of Southern Africa the term ‘land reform’ has almost become synonymous with the land seizures in Zimbabwe undertaken by the Mugabe regime. However, considering the precarious state of humanitarian affairs in Zimbabwe there is a growing need to move beyond simple distribution focus to supporting livelihood through agricultural investment. In this regard Southern Africa would do well to take a leaf from the Indian experience, or what has been termed the “green revolution”. The populous subcontinent has proved that external aid is not always the key to development. Ironically having been excluded from foreign food aid, the country developed its internal capacity to meet basic food security needs. By deliberately linking peasant production with commercial agricultural business India was able to avert the ‘begging bowl syndrome’ that has characterised the African development agenda.

It is clear that the current mix of structural factors together with external climatic changes will continue to destabilise livelihoods if an integrated approach to the issues of food security and HIV/AIDS is not adopted. It is imperative to sustainable development that issues of responsible government be incorporated into seemingly unpredictable events like the Southern African famine. To this end the recent public statements on debt relief and poverty eradication by the UK government are seen as positive steps towards contributing to the complex nature of humanitarian crises in the region. Latest research findings on the impact of global warming on Africa for example suggest that early warning systems are capable of alerting authorities to possible disaster, the key issue being to recognise that Africa’s high vulnerability is also a function of chronic stresses induced by poor or ineffective governance. The addition of HIV/AIDS as a multi-dimensional stress to the social and economic fabric of society requires urgent cross-cutting attention. The immediate and short-term emergency relief and long-term development relationship must be reviewed in order to prevent a simple reactionary form of assistance, particularly food aid. To “make poverty history” requires more than an increase in aid, but an understanding of the extent to which human insecurity is compounded by intensifying conditions of political, socio-economic and environmental vulnerability.
The author is a Researcher on humanitarian relief and development issues, in the African Security Analysis Programme at the Institute for Security Studies.

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