



COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN

OVERVIEW

Country: Zimbabwe

Planning Year: 2006

2006 COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN FOR ZIMBABWE

PART I: OVERVIEW

1. Protection and Socio-Economic Operational Environment

Zimbabwe is a state party to the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. At the regional level, Zimbabwe is also a party to the 1969 OAU Convention Governing Specific Aspects of Refugee problems in Africa and has registered no reservations. Both these international instruments are translated into enforceable domestic law by the 1983 Refugees Act. Since independence in 1980, Zimbabwe has hosted hundreds of thousands of refugees, the biggest operation being the Mozambican one that successfully ended with organized mass voluntary repatriation in 1995. Refugee camps were closed down and the residual caseload, including refugees and asylum seekers from other countries, allowed to stay and sustain themselves anywhere in Zimbabwe as there was no designated place at the time. The prevailing socio-economic and political environment at the time enabled the enjoyment of quality asylum until late 1998 when the situation started changing rapidly.

On the political arena, the tension and mistrust between the two main political parties subsisted. ZANU-PF continued to dub the MDC a puppet servicing the interests of the West. MDC on the other hand continued to challenge the legitimacy of the current Government. Out of the 16 by-elections held from the 2000 parliamentary elections, MDC retained three and lost seven of its seats to ZANU-PF. In addition, ZANU-PF retained all of its six constituencies that had to undergo a by election since the last parliamentary elections. MDC alleged the elections were marred by violence and political intimidation and did not field a candidate in one of the by-elections in protest. MDC proceeded to publicly announce that they would not take part in the March 2005 election unless the SADC Protocol on Principles and Guidelines Governing Elections were implemented in their totality in Zimbabwe. This position has since changed. MDC has reserved its former boycott and will now be participating in the March 2005 parliamentary election. On the other hand and with the renewed confidence as a result of the above victories, ZANU-PF went full throttle and started re-positioning itself in readiness for the March 2005 parliamentary elections.

On the economic front, several changes were introduced into the fiscal policy. On the 21st of April 04, the Governor of the Reserve Bank submitted the Country's Monetary Policy Review. One of the highlights was the re-opening of the foreign exchange purchasing centers around the country. These had been shut down by Government in 2002 as a result of the foreign exchange crisis in the country at the time. For diplomatic missions, non-governmental organizations and international institutions, a special banking facility was established at the Reserve Bank to facilitate their operations. The daily withdrawal limit was raised from the previous US\$500 to US\$1000 to allow better flexibility and convenience of operations.

The monetary situation has improved significantly as a result of these new fiscal policies. According to the economic update of UNDP for the year 2004, there has been a positive move towards a stable macro-economic environment. The GDP growth in 2004 was -5% compared to -9% in 2003. The introduction of a heavily managed foreign currency exchange auction system and the clamping down on the parallel market improved the official exchange rate of

the US to the Zimbabwe dollar from 1:3,900 in January to 1:5,814 in December 2004. However, this bank exchange rate remains over-valued and the inflation rate is still much higher than that of other countries in the region. This defeats the purpose of the auction rate, which was basically meant to bridge the gap between the rate of the bank and that of the parallel market. Currently the parallel market rate is 1USD to 14,500 Zim dollars, more than double the bank rate.

Despite the aforementioned changes, the general socio-economic situation continued to deteriorate. The prices of essential food and non-food basic commodities are based on the parallel market rates and therefore unaffordable to majority of the people. Despite the availability of most essential commodities in the market, they were inaccessible to majority of the people because of the soaring consumer prices. Similarly, the cost of basic services also continued to rise beyond the reach of majority of Zimbabweans.

On the humanitarian side, people in formerly drought-affected areas continued to be in need of food aid. The new farmers generally lacked sufficient capacity and/or agricultural in-put to enhance food security in the reporting period. Moreover, the accelerated land re-acquisition in the reporting period had an impact on food security in some areas. The challenge however, was the Government stance that they did not require food aid any longer. It was announced that a bumper harvest of approximately 2.4 million tones of maize was expected in 2004/5 and that the Government had sufficient food to feed its people for a year. The Government, through the Grain Marketing Board, assumed the responsibility for food distribution in May 2004, the same time that WFP and its implementing partners wound up general food distribution. The Government's stand is that NGOs could continue to assist vulnerable segments of the population through food for work and other similar programs.

MDC protested this stand and accused Government of attempting to use food as a political tool. It accused Government of targeting the populations that supported them in the previous elections in Masvingo, and Matabeleland (North and South), provinces. MDC alleged that food aid was being used to mobilize vulnerable populations into supporting ZANU PF. The Government denies these allegations in total and has remained adamant that it took this decision based on the fact that food security was no longer an issue for Zimbabwe.

As a direct consequence of this stance, there has been tension between UN Humanitarian Agencies and the Government over the reality of the situation. For example, the Relief and recovery Unit (hereinafter referred to as the RRU) of the UNDP had field offices in the three Provinces of Manicaland, Matabeleland and Midlands. The objective of these offices was to inter alia build capacity of local government to identify areas of possible humanitarian aid, and most importantly to monitor and ensure the non-politicization of humanitarian aid. There were calls from Government quarters to close these field offices from the beginning of 2004, but the demand was formalized in July 2004. RRU was closed down resulting in the exit of twelve international staff, leaving only two to support the work of the Resident Co-ordinator in the successor unit, the Humanitarian Support Unit. A routine joint Government and UN crop yield assessment was abruptly called off in the reporting period when the Government withdrew its representatives who were participating in the exercise. The Resident Coordinator was also accused of meddling in the internal affairs of the country after he wrote an official letter expressing concern about the situation of thousands of displaced farm workers from re-acquired commercial farms.

Another development is the continued restriction on non-governmental organizations, both local and international. Beyond the strict regulatory regime under the Private Voluntary Organizations Act requiring the mandatory registration of NGOs, a new NGO Bill was passed in parliament in the reporting period and is awaiting Presidential Assent to become law. In its section 9 (4), it expressly states that, "No foreign non-governmental organization shall be registered if its sole or principal objects involve or include issues of governance". In section 17, it states that "no local non-governmental organization shall receive any foreign funding or donation to carry out activities involving or including issues of governance". However, the Bill was still passed by a majority vote in parliament on the 16th of November and is currently awaiting the Presidential assent to pass into law.

The Electoral Commission Bill was tabled before parliament on the 6th of October 2004. After the first reading, it was passed on to the Parliamentary Legal Committee for further deliberations. The latter declared parts of it unconstitutional especially as regards the banning of foreign funding for civic education, as well as regulating who can or cannot conduct civic education in Zimbabwe. The Parliamentary Legal Committee's objections were all over-ruled by a majority vote in the ZANU-PF dominated parliament on the 16th of November 2004. It was then presented with a few amendments for the second parliamentary reading. It has since received Presidential assent and is now an Act of Parliament that will govern all elections in the future including the upcoming March 2005 Parliamentary elections.

It is against this backdrop that UNHCR Representation in Zimbabwe has been coordinating and monitoring delivery of assistance and international protection to persons of concern to UNHCR. Zimbabwe currently hosted 10,688 refugees by the end of 2004. The majority originates from DRC, Rwanda and Burundi in the Great Lakes. It is interesting to note that all refugees in Zimbabwe came from countries that are not its immediate neighbours. It is believed that a substantial number of them have passed through first or second country/ies of asylum. Many of them have approached UNHCR for resettlement to third countries. Perhaps this explains the irregular movement from countries of first asylum, where local integration prospects may have been availed to them (Uganda and Zambia). The majority of the refugees reside in urban centers and only 1,568 refugees were living in Tongogara.

2. OPERATIONAL GOALS AND POTENTIAL DURABLE SOLUTIONS

The main protection and operational goals for the Zimbabwe Refugee Programme for 2006 will be as follows:

- ❑ To ensure the integrity of the institution of asylum in Zimbabwe, the right of refugees to access physical and legal protection and continued material assistance while pursuing durable solutions.
- ❑ Actively promote voluntary repatriation of Rwandan refugees in safety and dignity.
- ❑ Pursue resettlement as part of durable solutions
- ❑ To provide adequate assistance as the basis for protecting the dignity of refugees and meeting their basic needs while strengthening self-reliance projects.
- ❑ To manage efficiently the refugee programme and the resources put at the disposal of the High Commissioner to ensure improved overall UNHCR co-ordination and timely mobilization of resources.

The following activities will be pivotal in realizing the objectives set above, taking into consideration the policy of the organization and UNHCR's commitment to refugee women.

- ❑ Through close collaboration with the host Government, ensure protection of refugees, their basic human rights, the right to seek asylum, principle of *non-refoulement* and assist in securing work permits for qualified professionals.
- ❑ Ensure basic facilities including shelter, sanitation and continuous water supply is available at the Transit Center. Non-food items and food vouchers were given to asylum seekers upon arrival and during their stay at the Waterfalls Transit Center.
- ❑ Refugees in Tongogara are assisted with food, potable water supply, health care, sanitation, education, agricultural/environmental activities and community services. While self-reliance projects are implemented to allow gradual phase out of the assistance programme.
- ❑ Promote social integration in all fronts, family unity with special emphasis to extremely vulnerable refugees, women and children.
- ❑ UNHCR commitments to Refugee women: equal representation of refugee women in leadership, access to registration and ID cards, prevention and response to sexual and gender based violence, active involvement of refugee women in management of food and provision of sanitary materials.
- ❑ Strengthen partnership with other sister UN agencies and International Organizations so that refugees benefit from their country programmes and to facilitate eventual scaling down of UNHCR programme in Zimbabwe.