

**COMMUNIQUE**  
**SADC REGIONAL FOOD SITUATION : MEETING OF THE SADC**  
**DISASTER RESPONSE TASK FORCE**  
**Gaborone, Botswana, 11<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> April 2002**

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1. Following reports of emerging food crises in some of the SADC Member States, the SADC Secretariat in collaboration with the SADC Food, Agricultural, and Natural Resources (FANR) Unit in Harare, convened a Meeting of the SADC Disaster Response Task Force in Gaborone, Botswana from 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> April 2002. The meeting was opened by Dr P. Ramsamy the Executive Secretary of SADC. Participants at the meeting included Senior Officials responsible for policy, planning and early warning activities from the Ministries of Agriculture, as well as Senior Officials responsible for transport and logistics and officials from the Disaster Management Agencies. Countries represented were Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The representatives of the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Food Agriculture and Organisation (FAO) also participated at this meeting.

**Objectives of the Meeting**

2. The main objective of the meeting was to get first hand accounts from the affected countries, ascertain what was being done, determine what still needed to be done in terms of resource mobilisation, transport logistics co-ordinating requirements and also to explore possible non-food requirements. In particular, the meeting:
  - i) Assessed the available food supplies both at regional and national level particularly maize and other cereals from the current production as well as carry over stocks in the Strategic Grain Reserves (SGR).
  - ii) Established preliminary import requirements for the affected Member States and assessed individual country capability for commercial imports of all these requirements, and deliberated on whether a regional response could be a better alternative.
  - ii) Where possible, identified vulnerable groups in broad terms and food aid requirements. These, however, were preliminary figures, which will be refined in May 2002 by Food Supply and Crop Assessment Missions to be undertaken by FAO/WFP jointly with the SADC Regional Early Warning Unit (REWU) and national governments.
  - iv) Reviewed the transport and logistics, which are required for bulk importation of maize and other cereals including availability of rail wagons/trucks, the high costs of overland transportation, imposition of transit fees and other cross-border trade restrictions.

- v) Reviewed the recovery plans that SADC Member States need to put in place in preparation for the coming cropping season. These include ensuring timely supply of inputs such as seeds and fertilisers, and reviewing the incentives for farmers that may have to be put in place in order to produce the required supplies; and
- vi) Discussed the efficacy of making a regional appeal for international assistance, and considered the need to revive institutions under the FANR Directorate such as the Logistical Advisory Centre, which served the region during the worst drought of the 1991/92 crop season.

### **Overview of the Regional Food Situation**

3. For the 2001/2002 season, which is just ending, it was noted that the region had anticipated a cereal deficit of 3.22 million tonnes, which included a maize deficit of 1.10 million tonnes. Ministers of Food Agriculture and Natural Resources aware of the critical food situation met in August 2001 in Harare and in September 2001 in Mauritius and approved short-term and long-term measures to ameliorate the cereal deficit situation. These measures included import programmes for the affected Member States.
4. The meeting noted that in practice, the planned import programmes were not fulfilled due to a number of problems. These included transport bottlenecks especially derailments of freight trains, congestion of routes with competing demands on freight services and high transit costs. As a result, some Member States have experienced severe food shortages particularly the land locked countries of Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Some governments have declared the situation to be a disaster and have appealed for donor aid and support.
5. For the coming marketing season, 2002/2003, the meeting noted that preliminary indications reveal yet another cereal deficit . The situation regarding maize is of particular concern as it has deteriorated compared to last year, the region' SGR stocks have been depleted. Maize stocks are projected to be down from over 3 million tonnes last year to just over half million tonnes this year. As at the end of March, an overall maize deficit of 3.22 million tonnes is projected compared to a deficit of 1.10 million tonnes last year.
6. At individual country level, the most affected Member States are Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland and Lesotho. All projected figures, including food aid requirements, will be refined in May 2002 by Crop Assessment Missions, which will be undertaken by the FAO/WFP jointly with the SADC Regional Early Warning Unit (REWU) and national governments.

7. A UN Agency meeting with SADC's participation will be held at the end of May to discuss the results of these assessments. The meeting is expected to analyze the individual country assessment findings and determine, magnitude of the regional crisis and the resources required. The meeting will also determine the magnitude of the problem and agree with SADC on concrete action steps to be taken including a consolidate appeal.

### **Recommendations of the Disaster Response Taskforce**

8. In the light of the above situation, the SADC Disaster Response Task Force recommended the following urgent steps:
  - The regional mechanisms be utilized to launch an appeal for assistance to the international community for all countries affected by the severe food shortages. Figures of the affected population and the support required, will be determined after the Food Supply and Crop Assessment Missions have been completed in the affected states in May 2002. Missions should also be launched in Botswana and Namibia.
  - To mobilise resources concurrently at regional (SADC Secretariat) and national level after the Food Supply and Crop Assessment Missions have been completed. These include, financial, human, and physical resources.
  - Revive the Logistics Advisory Centre, whose major function will be to coordinate all aspects of transport and logistics related to the current effort to import and distribute food among Member States. The exact location and duration of its operation will be determined by the SADC Secretariat.
  - Studies be initiated as a matter of priority to look at national policies that may be adversely impacting on the food security situation both at national and regional level. The FANRPAN was suggested as likely institution to do this.

As medium to longer term strategies, the Task Force also recommended the following:

- that SADC initiate various studies including a review of livestock products can be incorporated in food security assessments to complement the current cereal Balance Sheets. FAO and other agencies can be called upon for technical assistance.
- that a regional position on Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) be established.
- countries should embark on irrigation development to minimise the over dependence on rainfed production. Individual countries should approach FAO for assistance in developing their irrigation strategies as well as training national officers.

9. The meeting noted that the short term and long term strategies that were adopted by FANR Ministers in August 2001 to deal with the cereal deficit at that time remain relevant and should be put in place by all Member States.

**FANR Directorate**  
**12<sup>th</sup> April 2002**