

INVITATION TO A SARPN DEBATE

RESPONDING TO THE FOOD CRISIS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Southern Africa is struggling through its second major food shortage in a decade. The latest SADC Regional Food Security Emergency Assessment forecasts that the cereal harvest this year will be well below normal in areas that are already affected by food shortages. This implies that some 15,2 million people, concentrated in Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Swaziland, Malawi and Mozambique, will require food aid for a lengthy period.

The assessment notes:

The December VAC emergency food security and vulnerability assessments confirm that food aid needs are increasing much as expected, with the most severe months from January through March. Efforts to alleviate this year's food shortages by national governments, the international community and civil society have thus far averted a major crisis. However, large volumes of outstanding planned imports will be a challenge to realise in the coming months. Early indications from the current production season are that there will be equal or even greater food shortages throughout the region in the year ahead. The current crisis is a manifestation of chronic poverty and vulnerability, exacerbated by escalating HIV/AIDS prevalence. This demands integration of short-term relief efforts with a longer-term development response within a framework of essential policy reforms.

Again:

Longer-term and more fundamental issues underpin the current food crisis. Critical adverse trends include HIV/AIDS, government economic and agricultural policies, transparent governance, regional and international trade agreements and dietary patterns that disproportionately rely on maize. Within the current situation lies the opportunity to address these and other issues to ensure food security in the future. There is the need for political commitment at all levels within the region and for coordinated support in the longer-term to improve food security. This should include a close partnership between National Governments, SADC, UN, NGOs, donors and civil society.

SARPN is pleased to invite you to a debate on these points. The two speakers are:

- Ms Judith Lewis, Regional Director of the World Food Programme (WFP)
- Mr Francis Ng'ambi, Malawian Economic Justice Network (MEJN)

Both speakers are well known across Southern Africa for their analysis of the causes of the crisis and for appropriate policy responses by governments, donors and civil society.

Details:

Date: 20 February 2003

Time: 2.15pm for 2.30pm to end at 4.30pm

Venue: HSRC Conference Centre

Address: 134 Pretorius Street, Pretoria (between Bosman and Schubart Street)

RSVP for acceptances only: sarpn@hsrc.ac.za or call Nonkosi (012) 3022334.

Note: SARPN's web site contains a wide range of documents on the food crisis. It can be accessed at: www.sarpn.org.za. This includes the latest VAC report and a report co-authored by Francis Ng'ambi on Malawi's situation.