

SECTION 9. CONFLICT VULNERABILITY ISSUES

Conflict vulnerability exists in all countries experiencing poverty and deprivation. However, there are all levels of vulnerability and populations have a variety of coping skills that they employ to adjust to their difficulties. In very serious cases, coping measures are exhausted leading to protest against the government and society and sometimes violence.

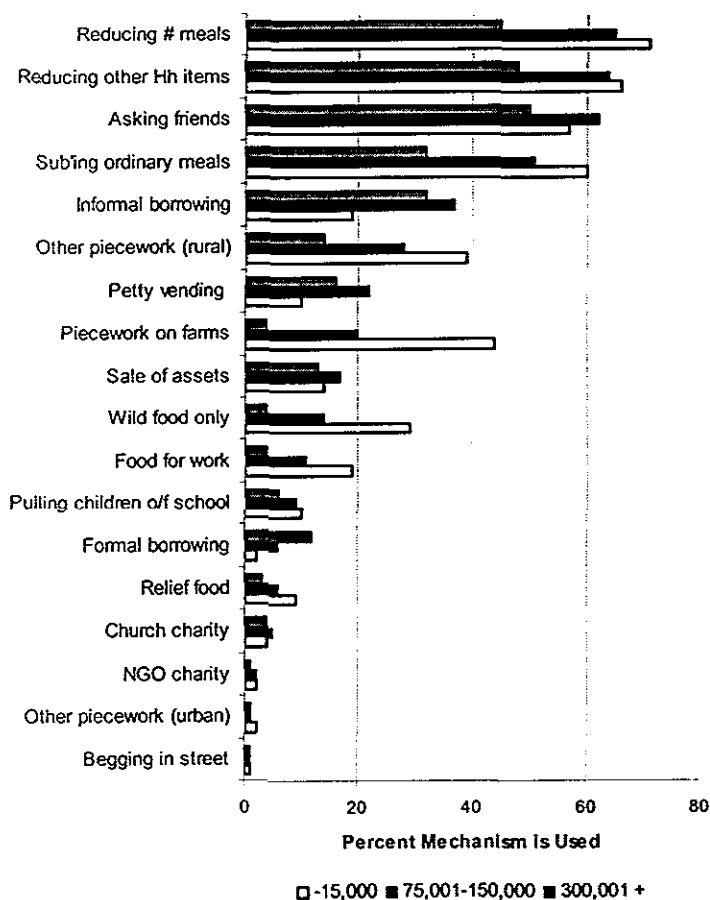
Zambia is a country that where poverty is endemic and the majority of the population is considered poor. However, Zambians are a resilient people who are dealing with difficulties in a manner that is non-violent. In fact, Zambia by and large has had a conflict-free history since independence and its citizens have displayed a non-violent character during that time. Zambians also appear to project a national identity and do not reflect serious differences along ethnic or religious lines. We see no evidence that this national personality is changing, despite the difficulties of drought and economic deterioration that the country has been experiencing.

On the political front, there is a democratic process in elections and serious national issues are being discussed and dealt with by increasingly democratic processes. The new president has put good governance and anti-corruption at the forefront of his government policy, something significantly different than past administrations have practiced. Several trials are on-going in the court system involving very influential citizens, including past presidents. Economic development has been stressed in the 2004 country budget, with major attention being paid to food production and health assistance to the major HIV/AIDS problem. The government has a close relationship with international donors and is actively working with them on economic development. There are regional political problems, but they do not appear to affect Zambia in a negative way. There are about 250,000 Angolan refugees on the western border, but they are housed in well maintained camps with adequate food supplies. Reports indicate that the refugee population is content with the present arrangement and not returning home in large numbers. While Angola is becoming increasingly stabilized its absorptive capacity of returning IDPs is still limited. On the Zimbabwe front there is no evidence of refugees moving into Zambia. It's more likely that any of those potential population movements would be towards South Africa. Nevertheless, Zambia has a tradition of absorbing refugees with hospitality and of working effectively with international refugee organizations. There is no evidence to suggest that refugee populations present any serious conflict vulnerability issues at this time.

Food security is another factor to evaluate in looking at the potential for conflict vulnerability. Zambia has experienced two seasons of drought and deteriorating economic conditions have seriously tested the resilience of many individuals and communities. In the rural areas, the compounding effect of drought, escalation of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and the widespread loss of cattle to disease have had serious impacts on the majority of the population. In the urban sector, escalating food prices, erratic food shortages, HIV/AIDS and unemployment have added to the increasing poverty and stress on this population. Overall, from 70-80 percent of the population is stressed and falling back on coping mechanisms to deal with food deficits and poverty. According to some PVOs implementing emergency feeding programs, there is growing sense of uncertainty and despair among many households, especially those affected by HIV/AIDS. However, there seems to be a passive acceptance of these situations and there are no indications of resentment against the government. In fact, the government has been active in acknowledging this national issue and publicizing prevention messages through a variety of public institutions.

Rural communities have always had built-in coping mechanisms to draw on in hard times. It appears that the situation this year has continued to deplete the remaining reserves of vulnerable households in some areas of the country affected by drought over the past two years. Below is a profile of these types of mechanisms that were employed by different income groups in 1998. (*Republic of Zambia, Living Conditions in Zambia*). The survey of these mechanisms was conducted to determine what people did in response to the economic stress caused by the Structural Adjustment Program. This can give us an idea of what people

Coping Mechanisms by Income Category
Low, Medium and High Income Groups



have been doing during the drought crisis to cope. Some observers believe these mechanisms are wearing out. As evidence of this, theft and petty crime have escalated in both the rural and urban areas. However, there are no reports of violent conflict or demonstrations. Most Zambians are still falling back on coping mechanisms and emergency feeding programs are caring for the most vulnerable.

A successful agricultural harvest is very important for the economy this year. It appears that rainfall in most parts of the country has been normal to above normal. Timing of water delivery, however, is very important with the development of the primary national crop, maize, so new food assessments won't be accurate until about May-June of this year. However, there is a sense of optimism in the Government and among donors that the agricultural harvest will be much improved. In the meantime, erratic rainfall in Southern

Province indicates that maize production this year will again be below normal. PVOs feel that targeted feeding of vulnerable groups in this region will have to be continued for some time but that we have passed the worse in terms of the drought.

The December VAC Assessment (*SADC*) estimated that up to 2.77 million Zambians were at risk due to the drought. Some groups, including PVOs doing direct feeding in the rural areas, believe these numbers to be over-inflated and not representative of the real situation existing in many regions of the country. Food is available in rural and urban markets. Certainly, "access" to food is a serious issue as many households lack sufficient incomes to purchase the whole of their food needs. Nevertheless, data from hospitals do not indicate any rise in mortality which means that coping mechanisms remain in place for the majority of vulnerable households. Child malnutrition however, remains a chronic issue. Relief food supplies in the WFP pipeline are increasing and fully meet the population needs through March. The agricultural grain harvest will begin in March-April. All indications point to an easing of the food crisis that should allow households to start recovery in the next few months. In fact, some donors are arguing that WFP should start implementing an exit strategy after the harvest and that continued widespread food distribution would have a negative effect on agricultural prices and the market. At any rate, the at-risk population due to drought will be significantly reduced within the next few months to only a few vulnerable areas that did not experience a good grain harvest this year.

Presently, the new President seems actively committed to good governance and has just presented a new annual budget where food security and agriculture are top priorities. It remains to be seen if the government follows through on implementing these development priorities. Present indications are that there certainly is renewed attention being given to agriculture as the next engine of growth. This was not the focus of previous administrations. Most donors are also highlighting food security in their new programs, so the environment seems right for achieving progress in this all-important sector of the economy.

In summary, a surface analysis by this Team of factors affecting conflict vulnerability in Zambia does not point to any significant risks at this time or in the near future. The USAID Regional Advisor on Conflict Mitigation visited Zambia in December and concluded that conditions were not sufficient to justify conducting a Conflict Vulnerability Analysis (CVA). We support that conclusion. Consequently, the Mission, through AFR/SA, has requested a waiver of a CVA being a requirement for Zambia's new country strategy. We support that request.