

5 Capacity of the Humanitarian Community to Respond

5.1 Overview

The ability of the United Nations Country Team to respond to the scale of humanitarian needs resulting from Operation Restore Order is currently very limited. With 700,000 people already directly affected, it has had an overall impact on the lives of an estimated 2.4 million people representing 18 percent of the population. At the time of the mission, the humanitarian community was providing assistance to just a small fraction of the population directly affected by the evictions. Resources had mostly been diverted from ongoing humanitarian programmes without any assured replenishment and few additional resource commitments. Given the Government's earlier wish not to have a Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) for 2005, the humanitarian community is suffering from weak resource mobilization and a lack of an overall framework, let alone an agreement with the Government, for a coordinated response. The Government has several times stopped assistance being provided to people near demolition sites, and nearly two months into the crisis, the United Nations has been unable to survey humanitarian needs in coordination with the authorities. Some NGOs and UN agencies are concerned their office premises could be earmarked for demolition. And some donors have concerns that aid channeled through Government might indirectly support policies to which they are opposed. These constraints have now been compounded by the burgeoning impact of the Operation Restore Order, a prevailing political climate of mistrust and fear, and the lack of information on, and access to the affected population.

5.2 Current Levels of Humanitarian Response

Many churches are providing life-saving, temporary assistance including shelter to evicted families. However, they do not have the capacity to take care of all their needs, including health care. Nevertheless, their strong links to the communities have been invaluable in reaching people with assistance in the first phase of the response.

UNICEF is providing assistance mainly in water and sanitation, child protection and temporary shelter. By 9 July, it had delivered close to one million liters of drinking water by truck to Caledonia Farm and started deliveries in Bulawayo. Similarly, it delivered 120 mobile toilets and soap in Caledonia Farm, Bulawayo and Mutare. In addition, it provided plastic sheeting, blankets, mattresses and cooking pots to affected persons at various locations, and provided transport for other kinds of assistance from the World Health Organization, the Red Cross and Christian Care. To cover these additional expenses UNICEF had reprogrammed some USD 300,000 and raised an additional USD 1 million mostly from national committees in Europe.

Early in the crisis, the authorities advised WFP that it should not provide direct food assistance to victims of Operation Restore Order. WFP is therefore providing food assistance to evicted households through IOM and other partners. Through the UN interim response plan, WFP and its partners are targeting 27,000 households for food assistance over three months at an estimated cost of USD 1,100,000. Priority interventions include: the provision of food packs to particularly vulnerable households; distribution of cooked meals at transit camps; interventions to prevent

deterioration of nutrition among children; and the establishment of a nutrition surveillance system in areas where people have resettled.

In addition, WFP's ongoing targeted feeding programmes, started prior to the evictions are reaching about 1 million vulnerable persons such as school children, orphans, AIDS sufferers and pregnant women, mainly through schools and hospitals. However, the Operation has automatically increased the number without secure food access by up to half a million. Pending the availability of additional resources from donors, WFP is hoping to augment its feeding programme to reach up to 3 million people from October 2005. However, there are few signs that these resources will be forthcoming, particularly as the Government of Zimbabwe has thus far refused to appeal for international food assistance.

IOM, through a network of local NGOs and churches, has so far distributed non-food items such as blankets, soap and cooking utensils to about 15,000 families affected by the evictions. It also plans to start distributing tents. Its regular, ongoing programmes to assist about 180,000 mobile and vulnerable persons have not been severely affected, although a group of 145 ex-farm worker households which had recently started receiving assistance from IOM were evicted from their homes in Kasam in the Makoni district of Manicaland.⁹⁵ IOM's own appeal for funds to cover the immediate response amounts to USD 3.7 million, and so far, USD 2 to 2.5 million in additional resources has been raised. However, the original needs assessment and timeframe of 12 months will have to be revised, owing to the increasing number of families affected.

On 30 June 2005, the United Nations Country Team finalized an interim response plan for three months pending a more detailed needs assessment. This plan calls for an immediate mobilization of USD 11.9 million. However, the polarized political climate and the continuation of Operation Restore Order are undermining resource mobilization efforts, particularly for longer-term development programmes. Although many donors have indicated their willingness to channel material assistance through NGOs, they are reluctant to commit funding out of concern of indirectly supporting policies and actions to which they are opposed.

5.3 Lack of an Overall Framework Guiding Humanitarian Response

The humanitarian response from the UN and its partners in Zimbabwe suffers from the lack of an overall agreement with the Government on the nature and scope of humanitarian assistance. Earlier in the year, the UNCT finalized a joint "Humanitarian and Developmental-Relief Plan for 2005" that identified the main challenges and their programmatic implications. This document has been presented to the Government on various occasions, but no substantive feedback has been received so far.

In the absence of the above, assistance continues to be provided in a largely ad-hoc manner, with the risks this entails. There is an urgent need to reach an understanding with the Government on the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, the status of people displaced by the Operation, and the policies and standards that will govern humanitarian response, including the SPHERE standards and the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.⁹⁶

The lack of an overall UN-Government plan is particularly apparent at Caledonia Farm, where the UN and its partners are currently responding to day-to-day government requests for food,

⁹⁵ Confidential source.

⁹⁶ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs: "Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement", 1997.

tents and blankets and water and sanitation and other forms of assistance. UNICEF, for example, is delivering water for the camp by truck. At the conclusion of the mission, the Government had not yet allowed UNICEF to open the existing well on the site under the pretext that the camp is only temporary, and that people would soon be moved to other sites or rural areas. The camp continued to be run by a police unit, rather than humanitarian actors. The assistance and protection provided at Caledonia Farm did not comply with SPHERE standards, particularly in the areas of shelter, sanitation, protection of vulnerable groups and education. Furthermore, the organized transport of people to and from the camp was reported to be involuntary in many cases, which would not be in accordance with the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement as well as other international instruments.⁹⁷

Although the authorities insist that the camp at Caledonia Farm is temporary, many of the displaced people have previously experienced long stays in “temporary holding centers” lasting for years and even decades. A top priority is to clarify the status of the camp and the people staying there, and to identify long-term solutions involving secure tenure. In this regard, UN-HABITAT has provided a settlements expert to support the UNCT to offer sustainable relief and reconstruction.

The objective of humanitarianism is to preserve and maintain human life, and the cycle of support is often never-ending. It creates dependency, and by virtue of its unconditionality, often disempowers its beneficiaries. While sometimes suitable for refugees who remain outside of their home countries for many years, it could be detrimental for IDPs in non-war situations like those in Zimbabwe. UN-HABITAT’s expert will help the UNCT’s humanitarian effort to create opportunity to “develop out” of the crisis that has befallen the IDPs. Emergency shelter in the form of tents will be linked to allocation of land to the beneficiaries by the Government as its contribution to remedy a crisis of its own creation.

5.4 Limited Opportunity for Humanitarian Access

The Government has, on several occasions, prevented humanitarian actors from providing shelter and basic services to the displaced population, particularly near the demolition sites, even though many of the affected persons remain without any form of shelter or ready means of sustenance. It has also impeded data collection.⁹⁸ Lack of access is therefore a serious obstacle to humanitarian action, with significant, adverse consequences for the affected populations.

Almost two months into the crisis, it has not been possible for the United Nations to conduct any comprehensive assessment of humanitarian needs in coordination with the authorities. Lack of information on the number of people affected, their profile, and their whereabouts makes programming, coordination and resource mobilization extremely difficult and onerous.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies: Sphere Handbook, 2004. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs: Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement”, 1997.

⁹⁸ Confidential sources.

¹⁰⁰ The Government provided figures on the affected population on the last day of the Special Envoy’s mission.

5.5 Humanitarians as Potential Targets for Evictions

Staff members from humanitarian agencies have also been affected by the ongoing evictions. For example, one UN agency reported at the beginning of July that 20% of its staff had either been evicted or were providing shelter for evictees.¹⁰¹ Several NGOs as well as UN agencies expressed concern that their own offices could eventually be targeted for demolition, as they were located in residential buildings that had been converted into offices, and that they therefore had been forced to prepare contingency plans. The ongoing demolitions are thus contributing to an overall sense of insecurity, lowering staff morale and the effectiveness of agencies operating in Zimbabwe.

5.6 Limited space for Effective Dialogue

There is currently no regular forum for joint working-level consultations on the humanitarian response between the Government, the UN and the civil society. The establishment of such a forum is essential to improving dialogue, formulating joint strategies and action plans, and promoting the implementation of best practices.

Most international, regional and local NGOs have been requested by the Government to focus their efforts on their ongoing programmes and not to get involved in assisting victims of Operation Restore Order. Overall, the NGO community considers itself marginalized by bureaucratic restrictions such as difficulties in obtaining visas for key international staff and invasive investigations into finances and foreign exchange. These restrictions have driven up the cost of operations and oblige management to spend a disproportionate amount of their time dealing with administrative red tape. This constrained humanitarian space has led some NGOs to leave the country entirely (e.g. Medair in November 2004¹⁰²), while others have considered scaling down their operations and focusing their attention on other countries.

In meetings with the mission, many NGOs described a “climate of fear”, which has led both national and international NGOs to exercise “self-censorship” to avoid being closed down or evicted.¹⁰³ Anecdotal evidence shared with the mission suggests that these fears are not unfounded. For example, on 12 July, the police reportedly detained a staff member from Action Aid for seven hours after she took pictures of aid being distributed by another NGO at Caledonia Farm.¹⁰⁴ In meetings with civil society, several NGOs also expressed fears of retributions following their testimonies to the mission of the Special Envoy.¹⁰⁵

National NGOs are generally concerned about taking any actions that may provoke the Government. According to several NGOs, the new NGO Bill, which was passed by Parliament in 2004 but ostensibly rejected by the President, is *de facto* in place.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Confidential source.

¹⁰² <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/0/b5b3e9c15ba87ea6c1256f580055f1ac?OpenDocument>

¹⁰³ Testimony made in the Special Envoy’s consultation with international NGOs in Harare.

¹⁰⁴ “Aid worker arrested for taking photographs”, South African Press Association, 12 July 2005.

¹⁰⁵ Fears expressed at a town hall meeting with civil society in Mutare on 2 July 2005, and during consultations with women’s organizations in Harare on 29 June 2005.

¹⁰⁶ In the SE’s consultation meeting with civil society in Bulawayo, it was observed that “President Mugabe” was aware of this and “was having his cake and eating it too”

5.7 Concluding Observations

The capacity of the humanitarian community to respond to the crisis caused by Operation Restore Order is inadequate. What assistance is being delivered is seriously hampered by Government insistence that people will return to rural areas and that Operation Garikai will cater to all shelter and other basic needs. Lack of access, bureaucratic red tape and an overall climate of mistrust are exercising a heavy toll both in terms of resource mobilization and effective response.

While immediate humanitarian measures need to be taken to prevent an imminent crisis of potentially far-reaching proportions, there is an urgent need for the implementation of confidence building measures to help establish pre-conditions for dialogue. The critical components of these confidence-building measures include:

- h. An immediate halt to all forms of eviction, demolition and, most importantly, relocation of populations by the Government;
- i. The establishment of a joint Government of Zimbabwe multi-stakeholder monitoring and assessment unit in all affected areas to identify area-specific priorities for humanitarian intervention and coordinated response;
- j. The appointment of a joint UN-Government Working Group to formulate a medium-term community development programme, engaging local authorities, and linking humanitarian assistance with secure tenure and good urban governance along the principles of sustainable relief and reconstruction.