



PROFILE OF INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT : ZIMBABWE

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Profile Summary

Zimbabwe -- until the mid-1990s grouped among the more prosperous and politically stable countries in Africa -- has since then seen both her economy and political stability deteriorate. Population movements, both voluntary and forced, have become an increasingly visible aspect of the new situation. Economic hardship has led to new movement patterns between the rural and urban sectors, but people have also been forced on the move because of political violence, both separate from and closely linked to the accelerated land acquisition programme implemented by the Government.

Available information reveal that several hundred thousands workers and family members on commercial farms have been negatively affected by the land reform, but it remains to be assessed how many of these have had an opportunity to remain on the farms or adjacent areas or to return to their original homes and how many have ended up in a situation of internal displacement. With regard to victims of political violence not related to the land reform, there have been indications that several thousand people have been forced to seek protection away from their homes because of their affiliation with the opposition movement during elections in 2000 and 2002. Again, there is as yet no clear picture of numbers, protection needs and the duration of displacement.

MDC supporters displaced because of political violence

Credible human rights observers have documented how a 'climate of fear' has emerged over Zimbabwe since the beginning of 2000 when political opposition to the ruling party ZANU-PF became more articulate during a constitutional referendum and subsequent parliamentary elections. The outcome of the latter was that the new opposition party Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) gained nearly half of the seats. Both MDC politicians and supporters have since then been exposed to systematic threats, intimidation and direct violence. A major perpetrator has been the youth militias affiliated with the ruling ZANU-PF party, often directed by militant veterans of the independence war of the 1970s. Much of the militia violence has taken place in rural areas. However, there have been regular reports of intimidation of opposition supporters in urban constituencies especially in the two main cities, Harare and Bulawayo -- by police and military personnel (HRF August 2001). This state-sponsored violence continued both prior to and after the presidential election in March 2002 (PHR 21 May 2002). During the first five months of 2002 alone, the NGO umbrella Human Rights Forum documented nearly one thousand cases of torture (HRF June 2002).

The displacement caused by political violence is often on an individual basis. A typical pattern appears to be that victims are exposed to intimidation because of their MDC affiliation. This often include beating and temporary detainment, and in many cases looting of property and burning of houses before or after the victims have fled their homes. The practical organisation of elections exposed active MDC supporters and the militias have used public lists of polling agents when seeking out targets for their violent campaign. Teachers in rural areas have been particularly targeted (AI June 2002, p29).

Displacement related to the land reform

Most observers tend to agree that there is an urgent need for land reform in Zimbabwe because of the skewed distribution of the best farm land that has remained since the colonial days. However, previous attempts to undertake land distribution in an orderly manner were by the end-1990s overtaken by political events and put on a "fast track" by the government without regard for the negative consequences for national food security and the farm worker population.

The precise number of large-scale commercial farms in Zimbabwe is not available but appears to be at least 7,000. At the outset of the present crisis in 1999 these farms employed about 322,000 farm workers (MPSLSW September 2001, table2). Taking into account family members this may equal a total farm worker population of up to 2 million people (FCTZ May 2002, p5).

Land redistribution has been high on the agenda since independence in 1980 when a total of 15.5 million hectares land was in the hands of farmers of European descent operating the large-scale commercial farms. Only about 3.5 million hectares of this land were redistributed between 1980 and 1997. In June 1998 the government set a target for Phase II of its land-reform programme to redistribute an additional 5 million hectares of land within six years. However, two years later only about 3 percent of this target had been reached. In mid-2000 the Government embarked on a "Fast Track" implementation of the programme aiming at distributing 9 million hectares before end-2001 by radically expanding the list of land to be acquired from white farmers. By November 2001 a total of 4,874 farms totalling 9,233,859 Ha were listed for acquisition (UNDP January 2002, pp5-13). It should be noted that there are different categories of acquisition and that this does not necessarily imply that all of the farmers affected would necessarily have to transfer all their land. However, a dramatic measure was taken in May 2002 to accelerate the land reform process when the Government pushed through the legislature a 'Land Acquisition Act' which directs that about 2,900 farms falling under its 'Section 8' should cease all farming activities by 25 June 2002 and leave their farm 45 days later (IRIN 24 June 2002).

It is a positive achievement that more than one million poor Zimbabweans have benefited from the re-distribution of land since 1980 (UNDP January 2002, p20). However, the recent approach to land acquisition has dire consequences for the workers on the commercial farms. Violent farm occupations have become a hallmark of the "fast track" approach, and the process has become deeply politicised as the farmers and the farm workers have been considered supporters of the MDC opposition. In many cases the farms have become forcefully occupied by ZANU-PF militias often led by war veterans. This has not only affected farms officially listed for acquisition, but also several hundred non-listed farms (UNDP January 2002, p17). Several credible human rights observers have documented serious acts of violence against farm owners and the farm workers (e.g. AI June 2002, HRF August 2002, HRW March 2002). Already by June 2000 it was reported that as many as 26 farm workers had been killed and 1,600 assaulted when farms were forcefully occupied. As of October 2001 a total of 1,948 farms had been

temporary or permanently occupied (HRW March 2002, pp 11, 19-21). Many of the workers on the farms affected by these occupations have decided to flee the farms as the violence, intimidation and the undermining of their livelihoods have become unbearable. By mid-2002 media brought stories of farm workers brutally forced to leave the farm and congregating in camps in the bush (BBC 10 July 2002)

Although the pattern outlined above illustrates the situation in large parts of Zimbabwe, there are regional differences with regard to the level of violence associated with the farm occupations. For example, it was reported in May 2002 that the situation was "calm with the new settlers co-existing with the farmer and the farm workers" in Manicaland and Mashonaland West provinces, while the situation remained tense and confrontational in neighbouring provinces (FCTZ May 2002, p8).

How many displaced in Zimbabwe?

Political violence in Zimbabwe is widespread and the perpetrators, especially the youth militias, has established bases throughout the country (PHR 21 May 2002, p8). There are no opposition held areas in Zimbabwe out of reach of the militias, so the only option for the victims of the violence is to keep a low profile and seek shelter in secret locations alone or together with their families. This displacement patterns makes it difficult to quantify the number of people displaced.

However, available information gives some indication of the gravity of the situation. For example, it was reported in May 2002 that 1,000 displaced were given shelter in 'safe-houses' run by the NGO Amani Trust. About 20 new victims were assisted per day before these shelter facilities were closed down. This may indicate at least 3,500 individual IDPs caused by violence alone during the first half of 2002. As many of the displaced are provided shelter by relatives and church groups, the real number is likely to be substantially higher. As of May 2002 an estimate of between 20,000 and 50,000 people displaced by the violence was talked about within the NGO and human rights community (OCHA 26 May 2002, p6). By end-2001 USCR estimated that 50,000 people were internally displaced due to political violence and the land-reform (USCR 2002, "Zimbabwe"). Other observers have claimed that the combination of political violence and land occupations have caused the displacement of more than 300,000 since the year 2000 (ICG 14 June 2002, p2).

With regard to the number of people forced to leave the commercial farms it is possible to estimate the number of people leaving, but it remains difficult to assess to the extent to which these people subsequently end up in a situation of internal displacement. One reality is that the existing farm workers are only to a limited extent being offered employment by the new owners or offered farm land when larger farm units are divided into small plot farms. Government figures reveal that as of October 2001 former farm workers represented only 1,7 percent of the beneficiaries of re-distributed land (UNDP January 2002, p.36). It has been reported that ZANU-PF supporters are being given preference in the land allocation (HRW March 2002, pp3, 27).

Taking into account regional differences, information about past farm closures and surveys of farm workers' preferences, it appears that after farms are acquired between 10-45 percent of the farm workers have an option to return to their homes in communal areas and between 10-50 percent may find ways of remaining on the farms or adjacent areas (FCTZ May 2002). A preliminary interpretation of available information may suggest that at least 50 percent of the employees on commercial farms may ultimately end up in a vulnerable position without any viable alternative for long-term resettlement if their farms are acquired under the fast-track programme. The Commercial Farmers' Union has reported that the effect of 653 farm closures between February 2000 and June 2002 was that 76,000 employees and family members were evicted (CFU 24 June 2002). Based on this, one may expect that more than 300,000 farm workers and their dependants become homeless if the estimated 2,900 commercial farms that fall under the "Section 8" regulation close down.

One fifth of the farm workers have ancestral roots in countries outside Zimbabwe and represent a particularly vulnerable group in the land reform process. A government survey in 2001 showed that only between 4 and 10 percent of this group wished to be repatriated to their home of origin (MPSLSW September 2001, p9). One reason for this may be that many of these people are second and third generation farm workers who have never lived in their ancestral country, and who therefore see limited opportunities for access to land and employment if they returned. The Government has in fact previously recognised that farm workers who entered Zimbabwe during the federation period (1953-1963) should together with their children be entitled to citizenship (Amanor-Wilks 12 February 2000). A consequence of this would be that a large share of the "foreign" farm workers should in reality be considered internally displaced when expelled from the farms where they have been permanently employed.

Physical security undermined

A major concern in Zimbabwe is the fact that the perpetrators of the political violence can operate with impunity vis-à-vis the state law and order enforcement institutions. The militias, in particular, appear to operate above the law. According to Amnesty International, "By ignoring the violation, the state compounds it. [...] Moreover, this failure by the state gives a green light to the perpetrators to continue (AI June 2002, p1)." Even more disturbing are reports documenting how police and army staff have been indirectly and directly involved in the violence, for example by assisting the militias with transport and other resources during the farm occupations (AI June 2002, p19; HRW March 2002, p23). This situation raises serious concerns regarding the protection of displaced people. International law and the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement clearly assigns national authorities the "duty and responsibility to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons within their jurisdiction (Guiding Principles, principle3)."

NGOs and the opposition party MDC have tried to offer displaced victims of violence shelter and protection in "safe houses". It is difficult to estimate how many of the displaced people benefit from this, but it is clear that the present situation adds serious constraints to the opportunity to maintain such shelters without the interference of the

militias. There have been reports of direct attacks on "safe houses" and abduction of those who had been in hiding (HRF August 2001, p8).

Subsistence Needs (Health Nutrition and Shelter)

Serious drought combined with land acquisition resulted in a 75 percent decreased crop production in nearly two-third of Zimbabwe's districts during the 2001/2002 agricultural season. While the national maize requirements are almost 2 million MT, only 0.5 MT was harvested at the end of the 2001/2002 season. Inflation, high unemployment and a major HIV/AIDS problem has further compounded this situation. A total of 5.6 million Zimbabweans will be food insecure during the April 2002-March 2003 consumption year, and it was reported in June 2002 that people in 40 of Zimbabwe's 57 districts were facing a situation of "extreme food insecurity". These are the same districts where most of the communal areas of return for many of the displaced farm workers are located (FEWSNET 3 July 2002, sects 1.3 & 2.3; SC 31 May 2002, p1; WFP November 2001, para8).

It has been estimated that workers on commercial farms cover 80 percent of their food needs by the income from their farm employment (SC 31 May 2002, p6). Given the overall poor food security situation in Zimbabwe, it is clear that displacement and loss of income and other in-kind benefits from employment at the commercial farms put those affected in a situation with only limited coping mechanisms available. Many of the displaced farm workers are expected to return or seek temporary shelter in rural areas where the food security situation already has reached a critical stage. Displaced farm workers with ancestral roots in countries outside Zimbabwe will be particularly vulnerable as they already lack access to communal land within Zimbabwe (SC 31 May 2002, p6). The latter group and others have no options but to join the urban poor and seek shelter in peri-urban areas or informal settlements – environments where the available coping mechanisms may be even more limited than in the communal areas where at least some opportunities for subsistence farming may exist.

Major concern has been expressed over state control of the mechanisms for distribution of food aid. The state Grain Marketing Board has a monopoly on grain imports and much of the food aid provided by donors is distributed through government structures. The latter has raised concern as the ruling ZANU-PF party has effective control over local government structures as well as traditional institutions. It has been reported that people associated with the opposition have been discriminated against in distribution of food assistance and that in some cases ZANU-PF membership has been a requirement. Even children have been denied food aid because of their parents' affiliation with the opposition (PHR 21 May 2002). There are strong reasons to expect that displaced farm workers, who are often seen as opposition supporters, may face similar problems to access food aid unless humanitarian actors target these groups especially.

Orphans have been identified as one particularly vulnerable group when people are forced to leave the commercial farms. One report has estimated that there may be between 75,000 and 100,000 orphans on the commercial farms. As the situation deteriorates the existing support structures for these children are often undermined.

Reports indicate that the older orphans end up as street children and may become exposed to prostitution or child labour (OCHA 27 May 2002, pp.6-7)

Constrained humanitarian access

In addition to the discrimination in food aid distribution, humanitarian assistance to the displaced is undermined by constrained access facing both national and international humanitarian actors. There have been several reports of food distribution activities being hindered by war-veterans and the militias (IRIN 12 June 2002; ICG 14 June 2002, p7). It has been reported that the Government actively undermines the work of national NGOs, among others by imposing restrictions on foreign funding and closing down "safe houses" established to shelter victims of the political violence (HRF August 2001, pp. 8, 14; ICG 14 June 2002, fn8). The opportunities for raising awareness about the rights of IDPs and the obligations of national authorities are limited due to restrictions on human rights education activities (HRW March 2002, p36). Some areas controlled by the ZANU-PF militias have become "no-go" areas with blocked access for both monitoring and delivery of humanitarian assistance (PHR 21 May 2002, p13).

National and International Responses

Both the Government and the humanitarian community are well aware of the consequences of the political violence and the fast track land reform. Between March and July 2001 the Government undertook an IOM-sponsored survey of options for farm workers (MPSLSW, September 2001). On the request of the Commonwealth and the Government of Zimbabwe, the United Nations undertook an assessment mission in November/December 2001 and produced a comprehensive report on the land reform programme and the need for durable resettlement of the farm workers (UNDP January 2002).

Zimbabwe is party to most major international human rights instruments (HRW March 2002, p36), including those that forms the basis for the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, and has thus a clear obligation to protect its population from being displaced and to provide protection and humanitarian assistance after displacement. Official policy documents from the late 1990s in fact recognise the needs of farm workers and their rights to resettlement as part of the land reform programme (FCTZ May 2002, p7).

Some food aid has arrived in Zimbabwe in response to the generally poor food security situation, but it appears that displaced people are not particularly targeted for such assistance. Food security between December 2002 and the harvesting time in March 2003 is expected to be especially critical, and the World Food Programme has appealed for 452,955 tonnes of food aid. Some NGOs, among others Plan International and Oxfam (GB), have in addition obtained licences to import food (UN RRU 8 July 2002).

Assistance to IDPs in Zimbabwe has so far been provided mainly by national NGOs. No particular UN programme or agency has been designated as "lead agency" responsible for humanitarian assistance to IDPs. However, the major UN agencies have established a Relief and Recovery Unit (RRU) with responsibility to coordinate the humanitarian

assistance programme established as a response to the drought situation. RRU has also been asked to "increase its intervention and advocacy for IDP Issues" (OCHA 27 May 2002, p8). However, reports by RRU seldom mention the issue of internal displacement (e.g. RRU 8 July 2002). UNDP is in the process of mobilising resources to establish a database in internal displacement within RRU (IRIN 3 July 2002).

The political climate in Zimbabwe has made it difficult to raise the issue of political violence and the effects of the accelerated land reform process with the government. International organizations tend to avoid confrontations with the government and even the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights have not responded to the situation (ICG 14 June 2002, p8). Other African countries have chosen to keep a low profile on the issue of human rights in Zimbabwe. In fact, in April 2002 fourteen African countries blocked a UN Human Rights Commission resolution on human rights in Zimbabwe that, among others, would invite UN human rights experts to monitor the situation in the country (BBC 19 April 2002).

(updated 15 July 2002)

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CHOGM	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
CFU	Commercial Farmer's Union
CIO	Central Intelligence Organisation
COHRE	Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions
DN	The Daily News
ESC	Electoral Supervisory Commission
FCTZ	Farm Community Trust of Zimbabwe
FG	The Financial Gazette
HCRA	Harare Combined Residents' Association
ICG	International Crisis Group
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
LOMA	Law and Order (Maintenance) Act
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MP	Member of Parliament
MPSLSA	Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare
NAGG	National Alliance for Good Government
NCA	National Constitutional Assembly
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NYTS	National Youth Training Scheme
POSA	Public Order and Security Act
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SC	Save the Children
UMP	Uzumba-Maramba-Pfungwe (constituency in Zimbabwe)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union (also known as ZANU-Ndonga)
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African Patriotic Union
ZIMCET	Zimbabwe Civic Education Trust
ZNA	Zimbabwe National Army
ZNLWVA	Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association
ZRP	Zimbabwe Republic Police

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