

FOREIGN ASSISTANCE



Highlights of [GAO-03-644](#), a report to the Ranking Minority Member, Subcommittee on African Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate

Sustained Efforts Needed to Help Southern Africa Recover from Food Crisis

Why GAO Did This Study

The southern Africa food crisis threatened 15.3 million people in six countries (Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe) with famine. GAO was asked to look at (1) factors that contributed to the crisis, (2) how well the populations' needs were met, (3) obstacles to the food aid effort, and (4) challenges to emerging from crisis.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretaries of State and Agriculture and Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development

- review issues related to biotech foods in emergency food aid—such as health, trade and environment concerns—in anticipation of future crises; and
- work with international donors and national governments on a recovery strategy integrating, among others, agricultural development, HIV/AIDS, and natural disaster management.

The Departments of State and Agriculture, USAID, and WFP generally agreed with our recommendations. Their technical comments were incorporated as appropriate.

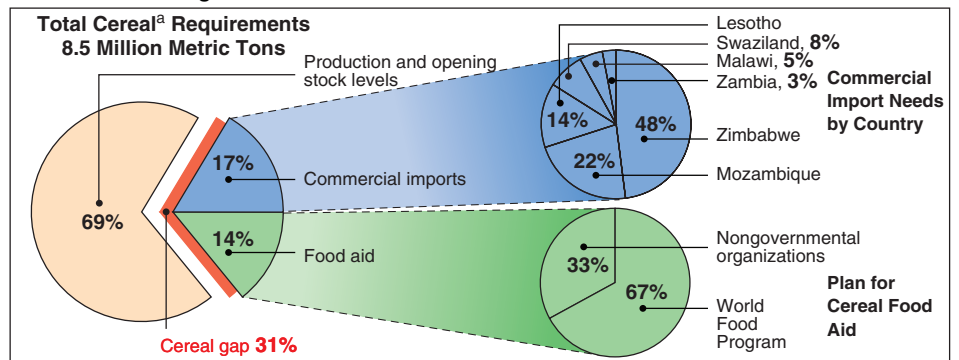
[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-644](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-644).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact David Gootnick (202) 512-3149 (gootnick@gao.gov).

What GAO Found

- **Multiple factors contributed to the food crisis.** Erratic weather reduced maize (corn) production. A poorly functioning agricultural sector caused food supply shortages. Government actions—including the sale of Malawi's grain reserve and Zimbabwe's land reform—further cut available food. Widespread poverty contributed to food insecurity and the HIV/AIDS epidemic exacerbated food shortages by reducing the labor force.
- **Food aid averted famine, but the overall response did not prevent widespread hunger.** About 93 percent of the total cereal gap—the difference between domestic needs and production—was met by the end of the April 2002-March 2003 crisis period. However, food aid deliveries fell short in several countries, and vulnerable households had limited ability to purchase commercial maize.

Plan for Addressing Cereal Needs in the Six Countries



Source: GAO analysis of information provided by WFP.

<sup>a</sup>Cereal includes maize and other grains suitable for food.

- **Slow donations, poor infrastructure, and concerns about biotech food were major obstacles to an effective response.** Excluding the United States, most donors did not make sufficient, timely donations to the World Food Program. Poor transportation systems and storage facilities hampered efficient food delivery. Zambia rejected food aid because of concerns regarding biotech food; other countries required milling maize for the same reason. This compromised the food aid pipeline given the United States was the region's key donor and its aid may contain biotech food.
- **Declining investments in agriculture and the HIV/AIDS epidemic pose challenges to emerging from crisis into sustained recovery.** U.N. and U.S. officials cite the need to reverse declining trends in agricultural investments by international financing organizations, national governments, and donors. Without a strategy that integrates, among other things, agricultural development, the impact of HIV/AIDS, and natural disaster management, food crises will recur.