

South Africa – Botswana - Zimbabwe Border Region: The need for a Security Assessment and Framework

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Safer Access produced a short summary of the declining situation in Zimbabwe in March, 2007, available for download at our website. As the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate in Zimbabwe, the likelihood of regime change and potential instability remains high. As has been well documented by a number of humanitarian organisations, large numbers of Zimbabweans have been escaping the dire situation within their own country through undocumented migration to neighbouring states.

Estimates of the number of Zimbabweans entering South Africa or already residing there are highly political and difficult to gauge. From May-July 2007, IOM has processed 51,725 Zimbabweans being deported from South Africa via Beit Bridge. This number surely only reflects a portion of the total Zimbabweans entering South Africa via the porous border. The numbers of migrants entering Botswana is also unclear.

These migrants enter into the “grey” economy in efforts to support their families, with mixed success. Deportations by South African authorities do not seem to have deterred migrants, as they continue to arrive. The potential for a humanitarian crisis in the Zimbabwe -South Africa border region, exacerbated by the continuing decline of the viability of Zimbabwean society, is high.

There are currently agencies working in this border area to assist those in need. Should this wider potential crisis occur, there will undoubtedly be an increased international response. The sudden influx of agencies to a region that will be new to many of them, coupled with the proximity of a potentially unstable country embroiled in internal conflict, poses security risks to the responding agencies.

Safer Access recommends that the following measures be taken to mitigate against the likely security risks for agencies in the planning stages of a potential emergency response in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe – South Africa, or Zimbabwe - Botswana border regions:

- Agencies should include adequate budgets for robust security structures in their plans for an emergency response, and should discuss security needs with potential donors, including the security and safety needs of beneficiaries
- Agencies conducting early planning visits to the region should ensure that issues of security are considered in conjunction with any proposed programmes, and personnel with a security mandate should be included in visiting teams
- Informal sharing of security related information between agencies already working in the region and those planning potential emergency responses should begin as early as possible to build up future situational awareness
- Discussion of the implementation of a security related information sharing network between Agencies planning a potential emergency response should begin before that emergency response occurs, in order to ensure that it is in place from the outset
 - The process of gathering information, establishing local contacts and conducting analysis of the changing security situation in the areas of likely emergency response should begin as early as possible to ensure that the unfolding situation is clearly understood and potential issues anticipated