ZIMBABWE AGEING AND POVERTY

Introduction and background Since Independence the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) has striven to address the racial and other inequities in the country. In 1981 the main thrust was established namely to engage the Zimbabwean people in the process of managing and owning their natural resources. In 1995, the Government adopted the Poverty Alleviation Action Plan (PAAP) as the framework for poverty alleviation which was underwritten by the Social Development Fund (SDF) to finance structural adjustment related poverty under the (1991-1995) Economic and Social Adjustment Programme (ESAP). In 1998 the Zimbabwe Programme for Economic and Social Transformation (ZIMPREST) was launched to cover the period 1996-2000 and in response to the failure of the ESAP under which poverty increased and stood at 61% in 1998. In August 2001, the Millennium Economic Recovery Programme (MERP) was launched to address the continuing decline in economic performance through price atabilization, exchange rate stabilization abd protection of the vulnerable groups. The National, Economic Revival Programme (NERP) was launched in February 2003 to provide, inter alia, humanitarian support in the face of a long term drought.

A centerpiece of the economic and social programme is the land reform and redistribution programme which aims to redress the skewed distribution of land and provide farms for landless peasants.

Sector programmes addressing ageing and poverty issues The Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) is designed to provide social protection to school age children and those orphaned through HIV/AIDS. The Micro-Enterprise Development Programme (MEDP) addressed poverty reduction and employment creation through micro-credit to the economically active poor.

Social policy and strategy with respect to the Older Persons The main instruments of poverty monitoring is the 1995 Poverty Assessment Study (PASS – 1) survey which has provided a poverty baseline. The PASS-2 survey bias now being undertaken to include more attention to human poverty issues – including social and other entitlements – such as food, shelter, access to safe water, health and others and the impact of HIV/AIDS. Both PASS –1 and PASS-2 cover older persons poverty issues.

Social Safety nets with respect to older persons Apart from monitoring the situation, the Government has provisions to cushion the impact of the recent economic situation on older persons. The following steps have been taken:

- Provision of free food and nutrition under the Welfare Assistance Act and care and protection under social protection?
- Provision of free medical treatment
- Provision of shelter in three schemes catering for older persons in the form of (i) those who are independent; (ii) those who need supervision and (iii) other who require nursing care 24/7. The approach is community based.
- Legislated care and protection for older persons – a Draft Older Persons Bill is under consideration
- Income Security – in principle approved but suffers from lack of adequate resources
**Budgetary provision for Older Persons**

OPs are involved in the budget preparation process but lack of resources affects the budgetary provisions for OPs.

**Current thinking on Ageing issues**

OPs in Zimbabwe have traditionally and currently been seen to play a critical role in society as the repository of information and experience. OPs are the main provider of care for AIDS patients and orphans but are suffering financially as a result. In September 2002 – in response to the MIPAA - a planning WS was held to map out the National Policy on Ageing and prepare a National Plan of Action.

The national policy includes the following:

(a) the rights of OPs to Life and Liberty to work and freedom from discrimination. A baseline survey is to be undertaken on the situation of OPs; awareness raising is on-going in conjunction with NGOs and faith based CBOs;

(b) poverty and employment and income security focus and the ongoing review of National Social Security Schemes needed to identify opportunities for the development of a pension scheme for older persons out of employment and the self-employed.

(c) Health, nutrition and social services – to develop a comprehensive medical and social welfare schemes for OPS;

(d) Strengthened participation of OPs in emergencies and epidemics

(e) Education and training component includes a databank on retired persons and the educational levels of OPs.

**Integration of Ageing into National Poverty Strategies**

OPs welfare and services are catered for by the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare. The National Social Security Scheme is currently being explored to extend coverage of benefits and those OPs not covered under the scheme.

The OPs policy and the drafting of the 2002 Older Persons Bill is a means to ensure that OPs rights are addressed and access to basic social services for OPs is improved.

**Conclusions**

The OPs poverty and ageing issue must been seen in the broader context of the current challenges facing Zimbabwe including agrarian reform, macro-economic stability and other poverty programmes. In order for the GoZ to improve the well-being of OPs, the following steps are necessary:

(a) more resources for social protection budget for OPs

(b) need to establish a databank for OPs

(c) poverty monitoring systems biased towards the elderly need to be adequately funded and updated continuously