

WORKSHOP REPORT

FOOD SECURITY IN SOUTHERN AFRICA: CAUSES AND RESPONSES FROM ACROSS THE REGION

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A Meeting hosted by the Southern African Regional Poverty Network in collaboration with CARE International and the French Institute of South Africa

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1. Background

The severe food shortages and hunger that have recently struck countries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, particularly in Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Lesotho, Swaziland and Mozambique, have been described by the World Food Programme as the 'worst food crisis in a decade'. The region has suffered from a lethal mix of food shortages, lack of access to basic social services and an alarmingly high prevalence of HIV/AIDS all contributing to the growing numbers of vulnerable people in rural and urban Southern Africa. According to several reports from missions undertaken in the SADC region in 2002 by the World Food Programme and the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, fourteen million people were living on the brink of starvation and faced serious shortages until the region's main harvest in April 2003.

The Southern African Regional Poverty Network (SARPN) recognized the current food crisis facing the region as a vital area for intervention within their mandate to stimulate debate on key issues and promote effective communications². SARPN together with its partners in this endeavour, CARE International and the French Institute of South Africa (IFAS), co-hosted a workshop entitled "Food Security in Southern Africa: Causes and Responses from across the Region" and co-ordinated the attendance of a wide range of practitioners involved in food security issues from across SADC. The participants were drawn from government departments, research organisations, international and national non-governmental organisations, and donors. A regional overview and a series of country papers, including several undertaken by CARE in an analytical exercise to better understand the underlying causes of the crisis, were commissioned to be presented at the meeting on the 18th of March 2003.

2. Purpose of Meeting

The purpose of the meeting was to examine the underlying causes of the current food crisis in a number of Southern African countries and to outline initial policy responses aimed at addressing food insecurity in the region. The workshop therefore attempted to:

- ❑ Identify long-term livelihood trends and coping strategies, using examples from the region.
- ❑ Identify shocks and stresses, including HIV/AIDS that have impacted on livelihood strategies and assessed their contribution to food insecurity and poverty in the Southern Africa region.
- ❑ Identify lessons learnt and initial responses for government, civil society, donors and regional institutions that move beyond the current food crisis.

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² In keeping with the goals of SARPN, the workshop was designed to facilitate the sharing of perspectives on food security issues in several Southern African countries and to generate debate about appropriate responses to the crisis in the region.

The core objective of the meeting was to stimulate debate and to guide future analytical work as part of a regional action-research agenda. The ultimate objective was to contribute to the development of livelihood recovery strategies in the Southern African region, and to inform and influence key government and donor agendas that integrate long and short term responses to the food crisis. This report attempts to distil the major arguments and recommendations presented at the workshop, particularly in the closing plenary. The papers presented at the workshop and a contact list of the participants, along with a wide range of other documentation pertaining to the regional food crisis can be accessed on the SARPN website at www.sarpn.org.za

3. Workshop papers and presentations

The workshop saw a total of ten papers, four presentations and additional commentaries, listed in Table 1 below, covering food security issues in Angola, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe as well as for the region as a whole.

Table 1: Workshop papers and presentations

Author	<i>Paper (or presentation, in italics)</i>
Dubois, Philippe	<i>Commentary on the regional crisis</i>
Frankenburger, Timothy, Kristina Luther, Karyn Fox and John Mazzeo	Livelihood erosion through time: macro and micro factors that influenced livelihood trends in Malawi over the last thirty years
Hugon, Philippe	Food insecurity and famine in southern Africa. An economic debate: lack of availabilities, market failures, inequities of rights, effects of shocks or systemic risks?
Marsland, Neil	<i>Vulnerability assessments in southern Africa: concepts, findings, strengths, challenges and future developments</i>
Mbaya, Sue	The Southern African food security crisis. Causes and responses. A regional overview
McEwan, Margaret	Literature review. Macro and micro factors influencing livelihood trends in Zambia over the last thirty years
Modiselle, Salome & Mike Aliber	Pilot study on methods to monitor household-level food security
Mphale, M M	HIV/AIDS and food insecurity in Lesotho
Mudimu, Godfrey	<i>The case of Zimbabwe</i>
Roberts, Ben	<i>Perspectives and Alternatives: HIV/AIDS and the Food Crisis</i>
Samatebele, Helen	Overview on the current food security crisis in Zambia
Sawdon, Gary	Moving beyond food aid. Incorporating livelihoods analysis into vulnerability assessments in Swaziland
Steinberg, Douglas & Nina Bowen	Food security challenges in post-conflict Angola
Sylvester, Kerry	<i>The case of Mozambique</i>
Watkinson, Eric	Overview of the current food security crisis in South Africa
<i>Also tabled:</i> SADC, Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Vulnerability Assessment Committee	Regional emergency Food Security Assessment Report, December 2002

4. Recommendations

The workshop provided a “series of conversations” on the food crisis in the region with a diverse range of perspectives presented and debated. The recommendations emanating from the workshop touched on a number of issues although a particular need to understand and influence policy processes was raised by a number of participants. Thus the need for different kinds of strategies to inform and influence key government and donor agendas that integrated long and short-term responses to the food crisis were major concerns of the workshop. It was particularly important to note that a range of civil society organizations indicated a desire to engage with policy making at both the national and regional level but lacked a clear framework or set of guidelines as to how this might be done.

Issues raised in the final plenary included:

4.1 The challenge of engaging and influencing policy

- The lack of capacity in policy analysis across the region in all sectors but particularly in the public sphere;
- The lack of access to policy documentation, strategies and discussions;
- Poor institutional capacity within civil society to participate in policy-making processes;
- The lack of inter-sector dialogue to feed into food security policies and programmes at national and regional levels;
- The lack of intra-sector dialogue to feed into food security policies and programmes at national and regional levels. This reflected a failure to communicate between different directorates or sectors within national government departments;
- The challenge for civil society to become more influential in order to engage with their own governments in order to better influence policy;
- The challenge of finding creative ways to feed into and effectively engage with policy-making processes. This raises questions around who to target, how best to communicate, and how to identify those who undertake the strategic thinking;
- Suggestions around how to influence policy included:
 - The development of policy briefs
 - Small roundtable meetings with key personal within the policy-making processes to ensure dialogue – for example, for workshop participants to take forward the main issues into small meetings at national level
 - The development of short presentations to be made to relevant policy makers – it was noted that these presentations had to be readily “digestible” for policy makers
- It was suggested that food security debates needed to feed into the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers to influence national poverty reducing frameworks.

□ Proposed Follow-Up:

- In terms of policy dialogue breakdown, SARPN undertook to link with the SADC Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN), considering particularly their emphasis on building networks related to food security and to develop local capacity to engage in policy-making processes (see www.fanrpan.org).
- SARPN would develop some key policy briefs, which covered issues discussed at the workshop.
- SARPN would explore the viability for a workshop focused on “Influencing Policy-Making” to be held as a matter of priority.

4.2 A need to have a comprehensive understanding the current food security crisis from a policy perspective

- The “new” debate on HIV/AIDS and food security has not been clearly understood by a number of regional organizations engaged with food security;
- More attention was required on long-term solutions for food security, particularly on achieving and securing the capabilities and assets of affected people;
- More research was required into the issue of food security – and funding found to support such research.

□ Proposed Follow-Up:

- SARPN would compile a poverty brief around some of the main issues pertaining to HIV/AIDS and food security drawing on the two Lesotho papers presented at the workshop. In addition it would further disseminate its poverty brief on HIV/AIDS and land (see www.sarpn.org.za).
- SARPN would continue to collect and disseminate information on its website around food security (with particular emphasis on HIV/AIDS) and ensure that these penetrated the region through strategic partnerships.
- SARPN would continue to update delegates on the workshop on “Mitigating the Impact of HIV/AIDS through Agriculture and Rural Development” organized by FAO/GTZ and OXFAM-GB (27th to 29th of May 2002, Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria).
- Participants were encouraged to link with the analytical process driven by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in their review of regional food security (see “way forward”).
- Participants were encouraged to link with the analytical exercise driven by CARE, which formed a central component of the papers presented at the workshop (see “way forward”).
- Participants were encouraged to engage with the commissioned research undertaken by SADC FANRPAN, the SADC Hub and the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) on understanding the current food crisis (see www.fanrpan.org and <http://www.fews.net>).

4.3 More effective regional co-ordination and accountability

- A major gap identified in the workshop, and in food security debates in general, was around effective co-ordination of understanding food security and a need to develop frameworks to guide responses;
- A standard guideline was required for the region to better co-ordinate responses to food insecurity;
- Scenario planning and mapping was required to support long-term response to the crisis, to better anticipate the impact;
- The issue of accountability, particularly for recipient governments, was raised as a key requirement for an effective response to food insecurity – this was raised in terms of tracking what was happening to food aid and its distribution (e.g. Zimbabwe);
- Questions around the NEPAD peer-review mechanism were raised in the context of ensuring national food security and effective response to ensure regional stability.

□ Proposed Follow-Up:

- Participants were encouraged to engage with FANRPAN and other existing institutions set up at the regional level on the issue of regional co-ordination, the development of guiding frameworks and the improvement SADC member accountability.

5. Way Forward

SARPN undertook to compile and table a report outlining the recommendations of the workshop at the conference in Gaborone, Botswana, sponsored by USAID, the Committee on Tropical Agriculture (CTA), the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), and the SADC Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss “Agricultural Recovery and Trade Policies and Strategies for Southern Africa” with a clear intention of helping to secure long-term food security in the region. This event seemed an ideal platform on which to take many of the issues discussed forward. The meeting was scheduled to take place on the 26th and 27th of March 2003.

In addition, SARPN would create a web-page on the existing SARPN website (www.sarpn.org.za) to post the papers and proceedings of the workshop, which would complement the existing focus on the site on “Hunger and Food in Southern Africa”. A range of related papers would also be posted on this page. The SARPN secretariat also undertook to create an electronic mailing list of all the workshop participants so that ongoing dialogue, debate and discussion could be facilitated.

CARE intended to finalise the analytical process that it had undertaken in Angola, Lesotho, Malawi and Zambia and to disseminate these to a wider regional audience when complete. Both CARE and SARPN would continue to dialogue with the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in their endeavour to establish a “Forum for Food Security in Southern Africa”.

ODI intended to support strategic thinking on food security issues in Southern Africa by facilitating a forum of specialists and key policy stakeholders from the international and regional research community, donors, NGO, civil society and private sector with identified specialist knowledge of the issues and the region. The project intended to produce Policy Papers and to host a combination of moderated electronic discussions and workshops on the key policy options. The purpose of the Forum was to support initiatives by governments and donors to improve food security in the region. The work would focus in five countries, namely Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe, which were representative of a range of food security contexts across the region.

ODI had agreed to outline the objectives of the “Forum for Food Security in Southern Africa” at the Gaborone conference on “Agricultural Recovery and Trade Policies and Strategies for Southern Africa”. In addition, ODI intended to use the space allocated to them at the conference to report some of the findings that emerged from the SARPN/CARE/IFAS workshop.

IFAS had facilitated the attendance of Professor Jean-Luc Dubois of the University of Versailles Saint-Quentin-En-Yvelines and the Institute of French Research for Development (IRD) at the workshop. Professor Dubois agreed to link SARPN and other delegates with an existing food security network based in France.