

IV. EARLY WARNINGS, INFORMATION, AND DONOR RESPONSE

Introduction

53. Governments across Southern Africa declared emergencies and called for international assistance at different times between February and May 2002.⁹⁵ However, signals of an impending food crisis were evident from many months before, when harvests failed in mid-2001. NGOs were reporting on localised household food insecurity in Malawi and Zimbabwe by August 2001. In her oral evidence, Clare Short emphasised that the response in Malawi was not “extraordinarily slow”, but acknowledged that: “There was a general lack of urgent response to the crisis in Southern Africa”.⁹⁶ NGOs⁹⁷ and other commentators⁹⁸ suggested to us a number of reasons why the signals were not acted on promptly, and why the donor response was late. In general, the obstacles to an effective humanitarian response are either informational, political-institutional, or logistical. The humanitarian response can be derailed at various stages, from the initial collection of information for early warning systems, to the assessments made on the basis of that information, to the warnings issued or not on the basis of those assessments, to the response of donors to those warnings, to the delivery of assistance (see figure 7).

54. Problems at each stage resulted in the failure to prevent a tragedy in southern Africa, especially in Malawi, in early 2002. Official information about food availability and access was confused or inadequate, governments and donors were slow to react to signals of impending food crisis, and the humanitarian response was delayed by logistical bottlenecks. We were encouraged to hear that information flows are stronger now than in late 2001, and the political and logistical failures of 2001/02 have been addressed by stronger commitment of key actors and a more timely response to the evolving 2002/03 emergency. There remain some concerns about whether the international community has sufficiently recognised the underlying problems of poverty and vulnerability of which the immediate crisis is a symptom. This is the subject of later chapters.

Famine Early Warning Systems

55. Famine early warning systems were established across most of sub-Saharan Africa following the drought-triggered famines of the 1980s. In southern Africa, national early warning systems are coordinated by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Regional Early Warning Unit (REWU). This early warning unit draws on data collected or analysed by: SADC’s Regional Remote Sensing Unit and Regional Food Security Database Project; the USAID-funded Famine Early Warning System (FEWSNET); WFP and other donors; and NGOs, as well as Ministries of Agriculture. However, the southern African systems are less comprehensive and are institutionally

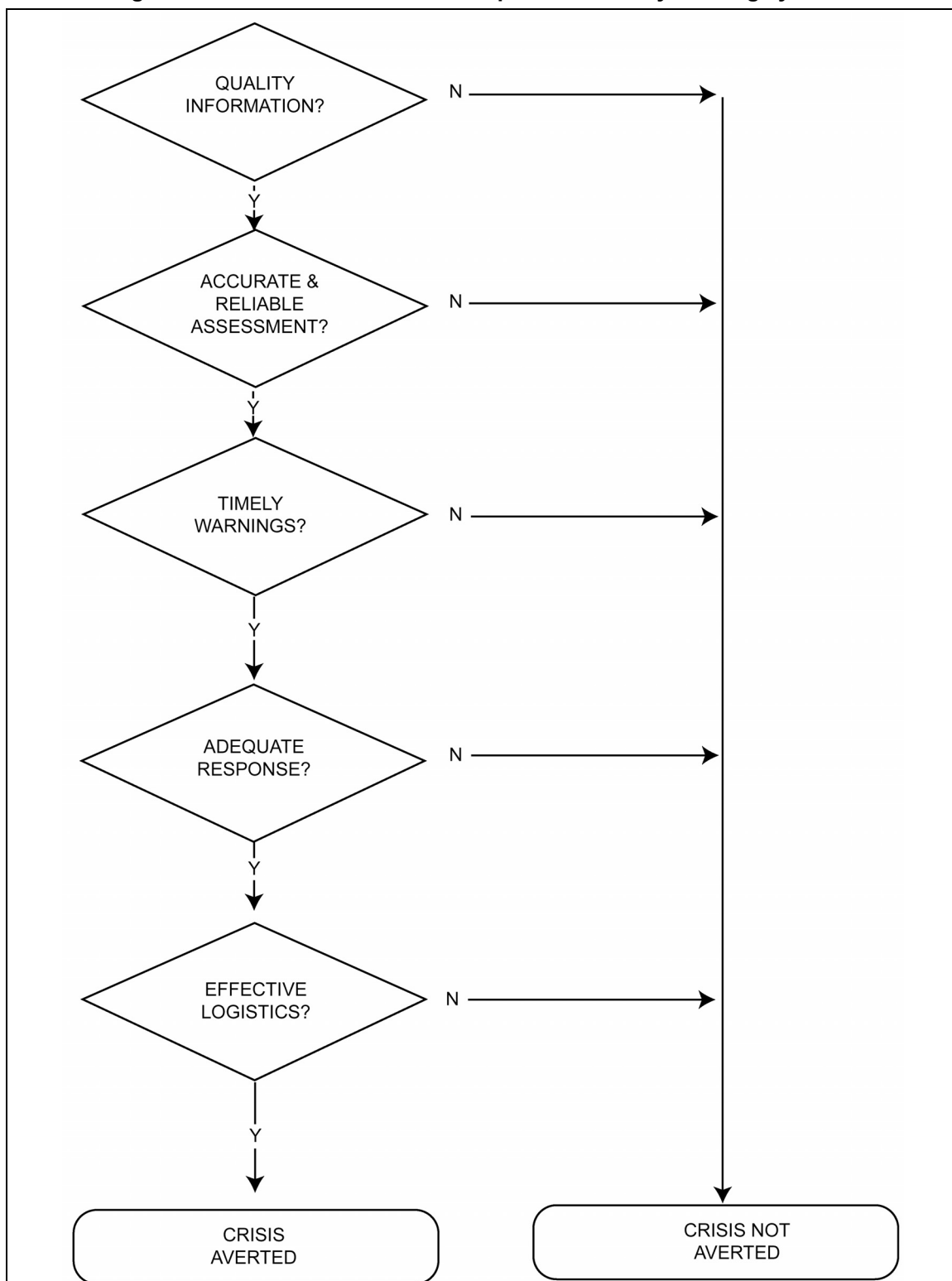
⁹⁵ The dates when emergencies were declared in 2001 were: Malawi, 27 February; Lesotho, 19 April; Zimbabwe, 30 April; Zambia, 29 May.

⁹⁶ Q 177 [Clare Short]

⁹⁷ Ev 42-49 [SCF-UK memorandum]; Ev 62 [Christian Aid memorandum]; Ev 113-114 [ActionAid memorandum]

⁹⁸ Ev 75 [Jonathan Kydd, Andrew Dorward, Megan Vaughan memorandum]; Ev 123 [Carlos Barahona and Sarah Levy memorandum]; Ev 119-120 [Stephen Carr memorandum]; Background Paper 6 – Megan Vaughan’s note on DFID’s response to the situation in Malawi in late 2001 – copy placed in House of Commons Library.

Figure 7: Obstacles to the effective operation of early warning systems



Source: Committee's own

weaker than those in the Horn of Africa, where recurrent droughts and conflict-triggered food emergencies necessitate constant vigilance. Consequently, although national and regional food security information systems are in place, REWU has not been adequately

resourced, either financially or technically.⁹⁹ The USAID-funded FEWSNET project synthesises available information on food security in most countries of the region, but draws mainly on other sources, such as Ministry of Agriculture crop estimates, which are not always reliable. Because of these limitations, conflicting signals about food shortages in the region during 2001 were difficult for policymakers to reconcile and interpret.

56. A second problem faced by early warning systems is that estimating crop production is only the first step in the famine prevention process. Understanding how crop failure will affect rural livelihoods and survival prospects is far more complex, but is critical for mobilising an adequate, appropriate, and timely response. Most of the investment in early warning systems in Africa has gone into predicting harvest failures. Recognising the limitations of early warning systems based on rainfall and crop forecasts, DFID and other donors are beginning to invest more of their resources into “vulnerability assessment” approaches such as the “household economy” approach pioneered by SCF-UK. This will be supported throughout the SADC region, and will emphasise bottom-up reporting from local “vulnerability committees”.¹⁰⁰ Work needs to be done to establish why the needs assessment in Zambia lacked geographical nuances and therefore over-estimated problems in some areas. DFID is also drawing up a programme of support to SADC in food security which will, among other things, improve the ability of SADC member states to acquire and use information on vulnerability.¹⁰¹

57. We strongly endorse these encouraging developments. Food crises are likely to recur in southern Africa in the coming years. It is vital therefore that famine early warning systems are strengthened at both regional and national levels:

- **Firstly, by improving *crop production forecasts*, especially of non-maize food-crops including cassava, and assessments of their contribution to food availability and consumption;**
- **Secondly, by strengthening *vulnerability assessment* at national and sub-national levels, including systematic monitoring of market prices and better understanding of the analytical linkages between poverty, seasonality, and access to food;**
- **Thirdly, by incorporating *non-official data sources*, such as qualitative NGO reports and monitoring by vulnerability committees, into official early warning systems.**

58. Implementing these improvements to early warning systems in Southern Africa will require a commitment of financial resources and technical expertise from the donor community, national governments and regional organisations, notably SADC. We urge DFID to support reasonable requests for financial and technical assistance.

59. Early warning systems should provide information to policymakers about food supply (availability) as well as the demand for food. In late 2001, three sources of information about the evolving food crisis in southern Africa were available to policymakers: crop production estimates, reports from rural areas, and maize prices. These information sources are discussed below.

⁹⁹ Q 111 [John Seaman, SCF-UK]

¹⁰⁰ Q 28 [John Hansell, DFID]

¹⁰¹ Ev 4, para 22 [DFID memorandum]

Supply-side (Food availability)

60. A primary function of conventional early warning systems is to forecast national levels of food availability, especially the annual harvest. As Save the Children Fund (UK) told us: “The estimation of supply is a proper, necessary and fundamental step.”¹⁰² In 2001, harvests in southern Africa were reduced by erratic weather, compounded by policy failures such as the “fast track resettlement” programme in Zimbabwe, which reduced the area planted to crops by an estimated 40%. In January 2001, WFP announced that 500,000 tonnes of food aid would be needed for Southern Africa because of flooding of crops, and Swaziland appealed for international assistance for flood victims. In Malawi, the early warning system proved to be reasonably accurate in terms of predicting a 32% fall in the maize harvest (though only after the mid-season and interim forecasts were each revised downwards). But it was highly unreliable with respect to other food crops, resulting in inaccurate projections of total national food availability.

61. The problem of over-optimistic crop forecasts leading to complacency and sluggish response was most acute in Malawi. Although it was known that maize harvests were lower than the previous (bumper) year, the scale of the food deficit was not accurately predicted. Specifically, the Famine Early Warning System used Ministry of Agriculture final crop production figures to conclude, in its Monthly Food Security Report of July 2001, that the projected maize deficit of 273,000 MT would be more than adequately covered by other cereal crops and tubers, especially cassava, leaving “a national food surplus of 438,000 MT.”¹⁰³ This forecast turned out to be grossly exaggerated.¹⁰⁴ One reason why forecasts proved to be wrong may well be that as cassava and other tubers grow underground, it is inherently difficult to predict harvests. One reason why the forecasts were so exaggerated might be the fact that the agricultural extension workers who were involved in making the assessments have an incentive to over-estimate, to demonstrate their success in encouraging cassava production.

62. An unanswered question is why these estimates were accepted as credible, and used by donors as a justification for late and minimal intervention, when it was well known that their methodological foundations were seriously flawed. DFID’s Food Security Adviser acknowledged the low credibility of cassava production estimates in Malawi, but explained to us that: “What we did not expect was that the figures we were given were going to be as exaggerated as they turned out to be.”¹⁰⁵ DFID also wondered in late 2001 whether the “fixation on maize” in the countries of southern Africa might have led to cassava being dismissed as a snack food, with the result that actual availability of cassava would be greater than that reported,¹⁰⁶ and the food shortage less severe than predicted.

63. Conversely, information about food shortages from NGOs active at community level was ignored, presumably because the estimation of crop production is seen as a technical task that can only be undertaken by experts and agricultural specialists. In December 2001, for example, SCF-UK commissioned a national study on the availability of roots and tubers in Malawi. The report found that surpluses were produced in those areas where roots and tubers are predominantly grown (along the

¹⁰² Q 114 [John Seaman, SCF-UK]

¹⁰³ Ev 45 [SCF-UK memorandum]

¹⁰⁴ Ev 120 [Stephen Carr memorandum]

¹⁰⁵ Q 24 [John Hansell, DFID]

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

lakeshore and in northern region), but that poor transport networks and weak markets made it prohibitive to shift this food to maize deficit areas.¹⁰⁷

Demand-side (Food accessibility and affordability)

64. A second function of famine early warning systems is to predict the likely consequences of food shortages on affected population groups, to answer the key policy question: “What proportion of households of what type will be unable to acquire sufficient food to meet their requirements?”¹⁰⁸ In the second half of 2001, community-level reports from NGOs and community-based organisations highlighted emerging problems including poverty and demand failure, problems which were publicised in the international media by October. Rapidly rising maize prices in the same period—maize prices in rural Malawi quadrupled between July and October 2001—provided a further indication of emerging problems. Nutrition data and, later, reports of hunger-related mortality in some communities, provided late indicators of food stress.

65. NGO reports failed to mobilise an official response, perhaps because their information was perceived as localised and/or not credible. SCF-UK conducted household economy assessments in two Malawi districts during October and November 2001 that reached “alarming” conclusions about the inability of large proportions of the rural population to meet their annual food energy requirements. In mid-November, SCF-UK convened a meeting of government, donor and NGO representatives in Malawi to convince them of the severity of the food crisis. Although their predictions were subsequently confirmed by later tragic events, SCF-UK was unable to mobilise a concerted humanitarian response. Instead, FEWSNET, WFP and the European Commission Food Security Programme conducted a rapid food availability assessment, after which WFP approved an Emergency Operation (EMOP) that targeted only 255,000 beneficiaries over a period of three months.

66. Maize prices were monitored and reported in Malawi by FEWSNET as well as by NGOs, but received surprisingly little attention, despite a widespread recognition that rapid food price rises are both a symptom and a cause of household food insecurity. As Professor Kydd, Dr. Dorward and Professor Vaughan explained in their memorandum:

rapid rises in staple food prices relative to purchasing ability are the key problem and symptom of famine situations, and therefore need to be taken very seriously. They are also relatively easy to monitor. [...] It therefore seems extraordinary that the dramatic rise in maize prices was not recognised as a key indicator of widespread and rapid deterioration in food security over the period June to October 2001.¹⁰⁹

67. Following the abolition of price controls and food subsidies in most southern African countries in the 1980s and 1990s,¹¹⁰ price seasonality has returned as a major cause of household food insecurity. Food price movements in rural areas follow a predictable seasonal pattern, with prices being lowest around the harvest period when supplies are abundant and market demand is low, then rising gradually through the dry season and into the next farming season, as granary stocks and market supplies dwindle.

¹⁰⁷ Ev 46 [SCF-UK memorandum]

¹⁰⁸ Q 114 [John Seaman, SCF-UK]

¹⁰⁹ Ev 75 [Jonathan Kydd, Andrew Dorward and Megan Vaughan memorandum]

¹¹⁰ Zimbabwe reintroduced price controls on many commodities in late 2002, mainly in an attempt to control rampant inflation, not as a food security instrument.

Food prices typically peak in the pre-harvest “hungry season”, which is associated with peak under-nutrition rates. As such it is extremely important to monitor food price movements closely, as a “demand-side” component of famine early warning systems. As the Nobel Prize-winning economist Professor Amartya Sen has demonstrated, it is possible for people to die of starvation simply because food prices rise to levels that are unaffordable for the poor, irrespective of the food availability situation at local or national level.¹¹¹ The Indian Famine Codes of the late 19th century—a famine early warning system established by the British—included food price monitoring as an early warning indicator, and contemporary early warning systems in East Africa use price rises above seasonal norms to trigger relief interventions.

68. Finally, nutrition surveys conducted in Malawi found clear evidence of deteriorating nutrition status—the outcome of acute food insecurity. In Salima District, global malnutrition rates rose from 9.3% in December to 19% in February 2002. These statistics provided quantitative support for the anecdotal evidence from NGOs and community-based organisations of severe coping strategies being adopted by crisis-affected households, including distress sales of livestock and other assets, withdrawal of children from school, and dietary adjustments including food rationing.

69. We agree with Stephen Carr¹¹² that: “donors have to be prepared to seek advice from members of the local community with a broader knowledge of the situation than that available to their own staff, many of whom have only brief local experience.”¹¹³ We endorse too the recommendation made by Professor Kydd, Dr. Dorward and Professor Vaughan, in their written submission: “Early warning systems should place more emphasis on maize price monitoring and on reports from rural areas.”¹¹⁴ But we would go further still: **Agricultural market information systems should be introduced or strengthened as a matter of urgency in all southern African countries. Lessons should be learned from the Indian Famine Codes and Kenya’s Turkana District drought monitoring system, about how to incorporate price information into national and regional early warning systems. In addition to monitoring food prices and supplies in local markets, these systems should also collect data on agricultural input supplies and prices (especially fertiliser), and possibly also livestock prices and volumes, as “distress” sales of livestock at low prices are widely acknowledged as a robust indicator of livelihood stress.**

70. More generally, however, we conclude that lack of information was not a critical constraint in triggering the food crisis of 2001/02. If anything, the problem was too much contradictory and uncoordinated information, to which the appropriate actors failed to respond. Rob Holden of DFID’s Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department, explained to us the importance of institution building at national and regional levels. He stated that: “More work needs to be done in terms of building institutions, particularly in Africa, so we need good baseline data and regular data coming in so that when we get blips in the system we can respond rapidly to check that and to obtain some more detailed information coming through. More important is to have an institution and mechanism that will give us the level of analysis and give us

¹¹¹ Amartya Sen (1981), *Poverty and Famines*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

¹¹² Stephen Carr has extensive first-hand experience of farming in Africa, built up over 50 years. He lives in Malawi, and has held the posts of: Director of Agriculture in the Southern Sudan; agricultural advisor to the Prime Minister’s Office in Tanzania; and the Principal Agriculturalist in the Africa Region of the World Bank.

¹¹³ Ev 120 [Stephen Carr memorandum]

¹¹⁴ Ev 77 [Jonathan Kydd, Andrew Dorward and Megan Vaughan memorandum]

credible data on which we can base a response in a more timely manner.”¹¹⁵ We share Mr. Holden’s views; improvements to the capacity of early warning mechanisms, and Ministries of Agriculture, are very important. However, the Secretary of State cautioned against the naïve view that these complex problems can be easily resolved through technocratic interventions. In a context of collapsing state capacity—as in Zimbabwe—building or rebuilding effective early warning systems may be politically unfeasible for the foreseeable future. As she put it: “In many very poor countries we are experiencing a collapse in state capacity so you cannot put in a good early warning system on hunger if everything else is weakening. We have to put it in a context that works.”¹¹⁶

The humanitarian response

71. The donor response to the humanitarian crisis in southern Africa has gone through three phases. At first (late 2001) the donors denied there was a crisis at all; then they responded but slowly and inadequately (early 2002); and finally they launched an enormous international appeal (mid-2002) and moved rapidly to prevent the recurrence of a tragedy. As SCF-UK wrote in their memorandum: “Until mid-2002, the international humanitarian response to this crisis was inadequate, lacking due attention and in-depth analysis. [...] the international humanitarian community is now orchestrating what may become the largest humanitarian effort in the southern Africa region.”¹¹⁷

72. In 1995, a book published about famine early warning systems had the subtitle: “The Missing Link”.¹¹⁸ This book focused on policymakers’ failure to act on available information as a key factor contributing to famines. Several witnesses made this point in the context of the current southern African emergency:

- early warning systems are only as good as the information that goes into them; but they are also as good as the response that they generate. What we have seen increasingly is not a failure of information but a failure of response. [...] for whatever reason governments and donors do not act on the signals.¹¹⁹
- inadequate food security and livelihood monitoring systems existed, and there was poor integration of these systems with effective national, regional and international policy response mechanisms.¹²⁰
- some of the donors—in particular the EU Food Security Office—did not take the early warning signals about food crisis seriously in the 2001-02 season. As a result, much valuable time and many lives were lost. [...] There is a need to create a system for translating early food crisis warnings into action. The system should agree on indicators which would ring alarm

¹¹⁵ Q 181 [Rob Holden, DFID]

¹¹⁶ Q 181 [Clare Short]

¹¹⁷ Ev 43 [SCF-UK memorandum]

¹¹⁸ Margie Buchanan-Smith and Susanna Davies (1995), *Famine Early Warning and Response: The Missing Link*. London: Intermediate Technology Publications.

¹¹⁹ Q 95 [Stephen Devereux, Institute of Development Studies]

¹²⁰ Ev 45 [SCF-UK memorandum]

bells—such as a low maize harvest and sharp increases in key food prices.¹²¹

Fund-raising: Food and non-food aid

73. In the last quarter of 2001, the World Food Programme (WFP) changed their senior management in Malawi and Zambia and opened a new office in Zimbabwe to improve and increase their capacity in the region. In March 2002 the United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee Working Group convened a special meeting in Rome on the emerging Southern Africa Food Crisis. Following this, in April/May 2002, WFP coordinated a series of inter-agency vulnerability assessments in the six most affected countries in the region, together with OCHA, UNICEF and FAO. In May, WFP set up a regional coordination and logistics unit in Johannesburg, to provide an overall humanitarian coordination role. On 6-7 June, a Humanitarian Needs Meeting was held in Johannesburg, and in July 2002 WFP launched an international appeal (EMOP 10200) for almost one million tonnes of food worth \$507 million, with the aim of assisting 10,255,880 people throughout the region, including a General Food Distribution to 9,958,000 people. The initial focus of the appeal was on food, with a slightly delayed recognition of the centrality of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In its November 2002 update, the UN remarks that although the international community was acutely aware of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, its depth and breadth “was not fully factored into the response.”¹²² Nevertheless, as part of the July 2002 appeal, \$104 million was requested for non-food items, including support to health, water supplies and other vital social services, as well as the provision of agricultural inputs.

Figure 8: Funding for the southern African humanitarian response

Sector	Requirements (US\$)	Contributions (% of requirements)
Agriculture	29,783,796	35%
Coordination and support	9,814,183	42%
Economic recovery and infrastructure	1,949,000	Not available
Education	11,016,731	Not available
Family shelter and non-food items	900,000	Not available
Food	539,378,619	70%
Health	64,339,161	15%
Multi-sector	557,000	378%
Protection/human rights	1,425,000	Not available
Water and sanitation	8,511,385	8%
Total	671,864,225	60%

Source: UN-OCHA, reported in UN Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Support Office (RIACSO) update, 24 February 2003 – Available at www.reliefweb.int

¹²¹ Ev 123 [Carlos Barahona and Sarah Levy memorandum]

¹²² UN, *Crisis in southern Africa: Update regional strategy*, (November 2002) p. 1. See www.reliefweb.int/appeals/2003/files/saf03.pdf

74. By 21 February 2003, contributions to the southern Africa appeal (EMOP 10200) amounted to 60% of requirements¹²³ This is a significant improvement from the situation in October 2002, when only \$200 million of the total appeal for \$611 million had been secured.¹²⁴ The food aid component of the appeal is now—March 2003—70% funded, with the largest contributions coming from the United States and the United Kingdom. As is typical in most famine relief programmes, the response to the non-food appeals has been much lower than for food. For instance, the health component and the water and sanitation components of the appeal are 15% and 8% funded respectively. In November 2002, UN-OCHA complained that non-food needs, although of equal importance to food, “cannot be described as ‘adequately addressed.’”¹²⁵ Most worryingly, UN-OCHA noted too that: “the impact of HIV/AIDS both as a cause and an effect of the current food crisis has been underestimated in terms of response required”¹²⁶ (see paragraphs 141-153). Also in November 2002, the UN summed up the response to the food appeal to date as “positive”, but the response to the non-food requests as “limited” and the timing of contributions as “disappointing”.¹²⁷ These remain fair assessments, and were re-iterated in February 2003 by the UN’s Mid-Term Review, which emphasised the need to fund non-food items including water and sanitation, educational supplies, agricultural inputs and medicines.¹²⁸

Logistics and delivery

75. Transport and infrastructure bottlenecks throughout southern Africa imposed constraints on the mobilisation and delivery of both commercial food imports and food aid in 2001/02. As we were told: “Simultaneous shortages elsewhere in the region, together with difficulties in managing the demands placed on an already difficult transport system meant that maize imports came into [Malawi] very slowly.”¹²⁹ Limited port handling capacity, deteriorating rail and road infrastructure and lengthy customs clearance procedures were identified as serious impediments.¹³⁰ Nacala port in Mozambique proved unable to cope with the volume of food imports, rail routes from South Africa were affected by a derailment on the Zimbabwe border, and trucks were already engaged in transporting other commodities (including fertilisers, later Christmas goods), leaving little spare capacity. Within Mozambique, “the almost complete lack of adequate road and railway infrastructure linking the maize deficit south from the maize surplus north” inhibited the movement of food within the country.¹³¹

76. Following the problems with food imports and food aid distribution in 2001/02, substantial investments have been made in upgrading ports and rail lines to expedite the response to the crisis of 2002/03. In particular, DFID deserves praise for its support for the major improvements made to the Nacala rail link from Mozambique to Malawi. Nonetheless, it remains the case, that: “what is happening in Southern Africa is as much a logistical crisis right now as anything else, because they do not have enough transport; they do not have the institutional support; they do not have the presence of aid agencies like WFP on the same scale; they do not have the history or institutional memory for

¹²³ UN RIACSO update, 24 February 2003. Available at www.reliefweb.int

¹²⁴ UN, *Crisis in southern Africa: Update regional strategy*, (November 2002) p. 11 – see footnote 122.

¹²⁵ Ev 24, para 2 [UN-OCHA memorandum]

¹²⁶ Ev 25, para 3 [UN-OCHA memorandum]

¹²⁷ UN, *Crisis in southern Africa: Update regional strategy*, (November 2002) p. 1 – see footnote 122.

¹²⁸ UN, *Mid-Term Review*, February 2003, pp. 7-10. Available at www.reliefweb.int

¹²⁹ Ev 76 [Jonathan Kydd, Andrew Dorward and Megan Vaughan memorandum]

¹³⁰ Ev 25, para 5 [UN-OCHA memorandum]

¹³¹ Ev 59 [Christian Aid memorandum]

dealing with these kinds of crises.”¹³² The Government of Mozambique has set up a National Institute of Disaster Management (INGC) to coordinate emergency preparedness, with financial support from UN Development Programme (UNDP). However, information flows to and from the provinces and districts are extremely weak, because the INCG has been under-resourced and lacks physical infrastructure. Local NGOs have been working with the INCG to strengthen its role, with support from Christian Aid, which concludes: “Despite a current lack of capacity, such national bodies could play a key role in assisting communities to cope with situations of stress before they occur. However, they need to be resourced, well planned and supported by local structures to be effective.”¹³³

77. Despite the financial and logistical constraints which it has faced, the WFP has achieved impressive—if somewhat patchy—results, particularly as regards the proportion of its intended beneficiaries that it has managed to deliver food aid to (see figure 9). At one extreme, in Zambia, where the GM issue has added another layer of constraints, WFP had by December 2002 reached 40% of its intended beneficiaries. In Swaziland, WFP had met 93% of its target number of beneficiaries. For the region as a whole, WFP had delivered food aid to more than 6 million people, 62% of the target number.

	Lesotho	Malawi	Mozambique	Swaziland	Zambia	Zimbabwe	Regional Total
Beneficiary target	445,000	3,188,000	440,000	231,000	1,706,000	3,903,000	9,913,000
Beneficiaries actual	330,440	2,339,527	247,130	214,589	680,876	2,354,210	6,166,772
Coverage of beneficiaries	74%	73%	56%	93%	40%	60%	62%
Metric Tonnes target	40,175	140,943	42,435	16,548	90,024	290,852	620,976
Metric Tonnes actual	13,307	100,821	14,301	9,775	31,506	96,263	265,973
Metric Tonnes coverage achieved	33%	72%	34%	59%	35%	33%	43%

Source: The office of Judith Lewis, WFP

Donor-Government relationships, NGOs, and donor coordination

78. A crucial determinant of the speed and effectiveness of public response to contemporary humanitarian emergencies is the nature of the relationship between international and national actors. In most recent food crises, bad relations at the critical time between bilateral and multilateral donors, on the one hand, and national governments, on the other, have resulted in famines that could and should have been prevented.¹³⁴ This was a factor in the current southern Africa emergency, certainly in

¹³² Q 104 [Stephen Devereux, Institute of Development Studies]

¹³³ Ev 62 [Christian Aid memorandum]

¹³⁴ *Institute of Development Studies Bulletin* (2002), vol. 33, no. 4, The “New Famines”. Copy placed in House of Commons Library.

Zimbabwe and Malawi, and to a lesser extent in Zambia and Swaziland. Professor Kydd, Dr. Dorward and Professor Vaughan noted in their submission that: “Problems of weak governance led to difficult relations between government, donors and NGOs, [and] was a major factor in delayed recognition of and response to emerging evidence of a famine crisis.”¹³⁵ ActionAid similarly pointed to poor relations between national governments and international donors as fatally delaying donors’ response to the food crisis.”¹³⁶ In reacting slowly to signals of impending food shortages in southern Africa, the donors did not appear to act in concert, but individually and for different reasons in different countries.

79. In Malawi, for instance, DFID’s official position was that the maize production shortfall should have been adequately covered by cassava and sweet potatoes, but subsequent discussions about food aid needs were also “clouded” by the non-transparent sale of the Strategic Grain Reserve. After the EU’s first delivery of food to Malawi was allegedly misappropriated, they were reluctant to pledge more food aid. USAID at first accepted the misleading information provided by FEWSNET, the USAID-funded early warning system, and later argued that they were statutorily unable to deliver food aid because Malawi had exported food earlier in the same agricultural year.¹³⁷ In Zambia, the inclusion of genetically-modified commodities in the food aid basket led to lengthy negotiations—and delays—about the delivery of relief supplies. In Zimbabwe, accurate information about the true situation was, and still is, difficult to ascertain. In addition, once an emergency response was mobilised, donors were concerned about the possibility that the relief programme would be politicised, with evidence that opposition areas and opposition supporters were excluded from food aid, food-for-work and school feeding programmes. In Swaziland, donors withdrew all non-humanitarian assistance as they doubted that poverty reduction was being prioritised sufficiently.

80. The network of local and international NGOs that are active throughout southern Africa have played an important and commendable role during the humanitarian crisis, firstly in alerting the world to the impending emergency, then in mobilising and delivering relief resources to affected households and communities. For example, Save the Children Fund UK: commissioned nutrition surveys in food insecure districts of Malawi; called meetings with government and donors to urge that assistance be provided; made representations to the United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee Working Group on the Southern Africa Food Crisis; and contributed to vulnerability assessments in several affected countries. ActionAid commissioned a study of the food crisis in Malawi and lobbied in the UK, Washington and elsewhere for a more effective international response. In late 2002, an NGO “Consortium for the Southern Africa Food Emergency” (C-SAFE) was established, based in Johannesburg, with lead agencies being CARE in Malawi, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in Zambia and World Vision in Zimbabwe. **We were impressed in Malawi with the coordination between NGOs involved in the delivery of food aid and humanitarian assistance. In the medium term, such tasks ought to be performed by government, but NGOs are providing an essential and much-needed service.**

81. International agencies are routinely criticised for failing to respond in a coordinated fashion to humanitarian emergencies, but coordination among the donors does not

¹³⁵ Ev 76 [Jonathan Kydd, Andrew Dorward and Megan Vaughan memorandum]

¹³⁶ Ev 113, para 8 [ActionAid memorandum]

¹³⁷ Both the General Manager of the National Food Reserve Agency and Alfred Kammer, the Deputy Divisional Chief of the IMF’s southern Africa division told Stephen Devereux that some maize from the Strategic Grain Reserve had been sold to Kenya, on IMF advice.

appear to have been a significant problem in this crisis. One reason for this may be the strengthening of UN coordination around emergency response over the past few years. The Secretary of State acknowledged this in evidence, stating that: “The building up of OCHA as the core centre part of the UN system that is capable of moving has strengthened enormously. My department and the people in CHAD [DFID’s Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department] have been leading workers on that.”¹³⁸ In terms of the current southern Africa crisis, since the United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee Working Group first met in March 2002 to assess the situation, UN agencies have worked together with bilateral donors and NGOs to mobilise and deliver relief assistance. The UN has set up an inter-agency mechanism in Johannesburg, together with the Red Cross, “so that they can take a collective view and a collective approach to dealing with the problems on the ground and providing direction and support to the country teams at the coal face. It is quite an interesting test case in some respects and I think on the whole it has added a lot of value to the operation and has helped enormously.”¹³⁹ DFID have provided technical and financial support to a number of UN agencies and NGOs, and are actively engaged in strengthening donor coordination at the regional level.¹⁴⁰

82. SCF-UK however, argued that “the big players of USAID, EU and DFID have not worked well together.”¹⁴¹ Other witnesses pointed out that SADC (especially through its technical body, the Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Division) had not taken as strong a lead in “managing the crisis both politically, economically as well as operationally” as might be expected, given the central role of SADC as a regional institution.¹⁴² There was a general view that the current crisis has the potential to improve coordination between regional institutions and the donors, as well as within the donor community, for instance through joint needs assessments. As John Seaman of SCF-UK points out: “Agency coordination is a national function: only governments can adequately coordinate external agencies. Paradoxically, those countries that depend most heavily on external assistance have the least capacity to control its use.”¹⁴³ This reality presents enormous challenges to governments attempting to coordinate external agencies. Yet the effective coordination of multiple organisations and institutions, each pursuing its own interests, is vital for accurate prediction and timely intervention in all emergencies.

83. We are concerned at the lack of coordination within and between the donor community and regional institutions on food insecurity in southern Africa. On the basis that we believe food crises are likely to recur in the region, we believe it is unrealistic and unfair to expect regional governments in the immediate future to implement alone effective co-ordination between multiple organisations and institutions. As part of its evaluation of the UK response to the southern Africa emergency, DFID should assess the effectiveness of its working relationships with international, regional and national partners, including NGOs, and should draw lessons for improved coordination among multilateral and bilateral agencies.

¹³⁸ Q 186 [Clare Short]

¹³⁹ Q 187 [Rob Holden, DFID]

¹⁴⁰ Ev 3, para 13 [DFID memorandum]; Q 11 [Rob Holden, DFID]

¹⁴¹ Q 132 [Richard Mawer, SCF-UK]

¹⁴² Ev 25, para 3 [UN-OCHA memorandum]

¹⁴³ John Seaman (2002), “The failure of early warning in Malawi in 2001: Time to rethink international famine early warning systems”, *Humanitarian Exchange*, no. 22, p10.

The politicisation of food aid

84. In some countries, especially Zimbabwe and to a lesser extent in Malawi, there have been concerns over the manipulation of food aid and commercial imports for political objectives. We are aware too of the suggestion made in relation to Zambia, that the methodology used for assessing food aid needs is seriously flawed and “wide open to subjectivity and political manipulation.”¹⁴⁴ We are not in a position to comment in detail on the methodology for assessing need, but the importance of accurate, reliable and trustworthy assessments, free of political manipulation, is clear. As regards Malawi, it has been suggested to us that the scheme agreed between the Government of Malawi and the World Bank to deliver an untargeted food subsidy might be connected to forthcoming general elections. In Zimbabwe, donors and relief agencies have tried to operate independently of government interference, but in a very difficult and even hostile context, as DFID explained:

The environment in Zimbabwe poses particular problems for the relief effort. Against a background of deep political polarisation and antagonism to the outside world, the Government has not maintained an open dialogue with donors or civil society. The extent and impartiality of Government plans to mitigate the crisis are unclear. There are frequent complaints from the opposition and human rights groups that the Government is using food as a way of rewarding its supporters and punishing its opponents. Donors have agreed that external food aid must be distributed through impartial and independent channels. However, the authorities have failed to facilitate the use of all available distribution channels. The strict control on private sector imports, together with price controls, has frozen the private sector out of the national response.¹⁴⁵

85. The WFP is very careful to ensure that the food aid that it provides is not diverted, but there are concerns about the mis-use of the Grain Marketing Board’s [GMB] supplies. UN-OCHA noted that: “Politicisation of food distribution is a major impediment to effective targeting in Zimbabwe. [...] There have been reports of specific examples of opposition members being denied food assistance or access to the GMB-sold maize, as well as cases of children from known Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) supporters being denied supplementary feeding at school.”¹⁴⁶ UN-OCHA added that the Government has been “extremely reticent” about the needs of Zimbabwean farm workers made vulnerable by land redistribution, and has not supported relief efforts targeted at these farm workers and their families, estimated at 175,000 households or around 950,000 people. In SADC’s December 2002 Emergency Food Security Assessment, it was noted that distribution of GMB imports at the community level is inconsistent with reported imports at the national level. National level figures indicate a surplus of 200,000 MT while at sub-national levels 40% of communities were reporting that cereals were not, or rarely, available from the GMB or the market. This suggests, at best, that the distribution of food within the country is very uneven. As SADC states: “The discrepancy between reported import levels at the national level and community availability of cereals warrants further investigation.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ “Means to measure ‘famine’ in Zambia”, *The Times*, 3 February 2003, Letters.

¹⁴⁵ Ev 4, para 21 [DFID memorandum]

¹⁴⁶ Ev 26, para 5 [UN-OCHA memorandum]

¹⁴⁷ *SADC-FANR Assessment*, December 2002, p. 3. See footnote 2.

86. Despite these difficulties, a fairly extensive relief programme has been launched in Zimbabwe. Judith Lewis of the World Food Programme told us that WFP was working during 2002 with ten NGOs in Zimbabwe to deliver 55,000 tonnes of food aid per month. She also reported that the Executive Director of WFP, James Morris, had told President Mugabe “that WFP [has] a zero tolerance policy for political interference in its feeding programmes.”¹⁴⁸ John Winter of DFID told us that DFID was contributing to the WFP programme and was also running bilateral supplementary and general feeding programmes in Zimbabwe, with its NGO partners.¹⁴⁹ **We applaud these efforts by the international community to deliver effective relief programmes in the face of political indifference or hostility by certain governments. DFID and its partners in the international community must strive to maintain freedom from political interference in their responses to humanitarian emergencies, while at the same time ensuring that the humanitarian imperative remains the overarching principle, irrespective of the nature of the regime or difficulties in relationships between international actors and national governments.**

DFID’s response

87. The principal objective of DFID’s humanitarian regional strategy for southern Africa has been “to support efforts that enable vulnerable people to survive and cope through the provision of life saving services and goods, while seeking to establish the basis for recovery activities that promote sustainable development.”¹⁵⁰ We were told that DFID’s response to the crisis was “led by the country offices”, because the causes were “deeply rooted in governance and economic and agricultural policy within the countries.”¹⁵¹ This country-level response was supported by DFID’s regional Food Security Adviser, based in Harare since April 2002, and by DFID’s Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department (CHAD), which set up a Unit in Johannesburg in September 2002.¹⁵² DFID’s response has been extensive and varied (see figure 10); by 25 February 2003 DFID’s humanitarian assistance in the region since September 2001 amounted to £141 million.¹⁵³

88. If timeliness of response is assessed in terms of humanitarian need, DFID was late to respond to the food crisis in 2001/02. It was however the first donor to respond, and has since demonstrated its commitment to ensuring that a similar crisis is prevented in 2003 and future years. We have no doubt that compared with the other donors, who shared DFID’s concerns about governance and corruption, DFID performed well. Indeed one major donor, DANIDA, the Danish development agency, pulled out of Malawi completely because of deteriorating relations with the Government of Malawi. In a recent debate, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Sally Keeble, stated that: “In Malawi, the Government and donors agreed in August 2001 that action needed to be taken, but the Government decided not to ask for outside help. An emergency was finally declared in February 2002.”¹⁵⁴ This is true, but it fails to explain what happened in the months between August 2001 and February 2002, or to explain adequately why

¹⁴⁸ Q 66 [Judith Lewis, WFP]

¹⁴⁹ Q 6 [John Winter, DFID]

¹⁵⁰ DFID, *Background Briefing on Humanitarian Crisis in Southern Africa*, 12 December 2002. See www.dfid.gov.uk/News/News/files/bg_brief_safc_dec2002.htm

¹⁵¹ Q 3 [John Winter, DFID]

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ See www.dfid.gov.uk/News/PressReleases/files/sa_crisis.htm

¹⁵⁴ HC Deb, 6 February 2002, col 143WH.

DFID and its partners failed to act in late 2001 to prevent or minimise the tragedy of early 2002.

Figure 10: DFID's response

Country	2000/ 01 Regular DFID Spend (£ m)	2001/ 02 Regular DFID Spend (£ m)	DFID Humanitarian Assistance
Zimbabwe	10.5	14.7	DFID spend is expected to rise to £25 m in 2002/03. Zimbabwe has also benefited from Regional programmes amounting to £33m in 2003/04. DFID has pledged £47m since September 2001 for humanitarian assistance, using NGOs and UN structures to deliver assistance. The UK was an early contributor and is the second largest bilateral donor.
Malawi	56	43	DFID is the biggest donor (inc. multilaterals) contributing £62m, including suspended £25m budgetary support. As regards the immediate humanitarian crisis, DFID has spent approximately £34m on food import and distribution, provision of wages for employment on public works programmes, support to agricultural production and rehabilitation of rail and road links on the import corridors.
Zambia	52	45	DFID is a big player and contributes funds between five and eight percent of the Government of Zambia's expenditure. As regards the current humanitarian crisis, this year DFID has provided £16.1 million supporting WFP feeding programmes and the distribution through NGOs and the FAO of seeds and tools, and improving food surveillance systems.
Lesotho	2.5	2.7	DFID is supporting the Government's PRSP process. At current forecasts DFID expect to spend approximately £4m on development assistance in 2002/03. As regards the current crisis, DFID responded with an immediate contribution of £1.5m for food through WFP and a later contribution of £0.5m. DFID has provided a further £1 million for essential development assistance for the worst affected areas with a Livelihoods Recovery through Agriculture programme. Under regional funding, DFID is supporting improvements to UNICEF's national surveillance system.
Mozambique	30	40	Donors fund some 50 percent of Government expenditure. DFID is the fourth largest donor and has a high level of policy influence, particularly through its provision of direct budget support. During the current crisis, DFID has provided just under £2m for interventions related to the drought and is considering a further £300,000. With other donors, and through the national agricultural development programme, DFID supported the distribution of input kits and seed fairs. DFID also funds a longer-term programme in Zambezia Province, in partnership with World Vision, which includes both agricultural and infrastructure development, and supports UNICEF and Red Cross supplementary feeding and food ration programmes and WFP food-distribution programmes.
Swaziland	1.3	1.1	DFID's bilateral programme is declining as DFID moves to implement a new Southern Africa Regional Strategy. At current forecasts we expect to spend approximately £0.5m in 2002/03 on direct development assistance to Swaziland. DFID responded to the current crisis with a donation of £0.25 million through WFP. Under a regional programme, DFID is supporting UNICEF's national surveillance system. DFID is appraising further support for emergency water supplies building on DFID's current Rural Water Supply programme and possible support to SCF's contribution to the National Disaster Task Force.

Source: DFID – received on 13 February 2003

89. In the months leading up to the crisis in Malawi, DFID was asked directly on at least three separate occasions—by the Minister of Agriculture in Malawi, by concerned experts both in-country and in the UK, and by international NGOs led by SCF-UK—to respond to the signals of impending food crisis. On each occasion, DFID declined to intervene. In late October 2001, DFID chaired a meeting at which Malawi’s Minister of Agriculture asked the donors for food aid to alleviate the shortfall in local production. DFID declined this request, arguing that the maize-gap should be bridged by a combination of other food-crops (especially cassava), Strategic Grain Reserve stocks, commercial imports, and food aid already pledged (15,000 tons from the EU).¹⁵⁵ In November 2001, DFID Malawi claimed that there was no overall shortage of food, giving the impression that there was “no crisis”.¹⁵⁶ In December 2001, SCF-UK appealed to DFID for funding to launch an emergency programme for Mchinji District, but this request was declined until the crisis had peaked, three months later.¹⁵⁷

90. It seems highly likely that DFID was aware of the unreliability of the Ministry of Agriculture’s cassava production estimates, and of the fact that the government had sold most of the 165,000 MT of maize in the Strategic Grain Reserve, leaving no grain stocks to draw upon.¹⁵⁸ However, DFID claim they were unaware of the extent to which cassava production was overestimated. The logistical constraints that hampered the subsequent food import programme could not have been predicted. DFID acknowledged that they did have “information on crops, information from rural areas and information on prices” in Malawi by August/September 2001, but argued that these sources of information “did conflict”.¹⁵⁹ As John Hansell of DFID admitted: “there was a glitch in Malawi with the early warning systems.”¹⁶⁰ The second reason given by DFID for what might be perceived as its inaction was political: “a lot of the discussion with government in the last quarter of last year was clouded by the problem of what had happened to the national food reserve.”¹⁶¹

91. Save the Children Fund UK applauded DFID for being the first donor to respond to the crisis in Malawi, but suggested several shortcomings in DFID’s response across the region. These included: DFID’s inconsistent engagement with civil society in different countries at different times; a lack of clarity about where decision-making was taking place—at national, regional or London level—which may have delayed DFID’s response; and unclear internal linkages between long-term development programmes and emergency response, and between the functions of DFID country offices and DFID’s Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department. As SCF-UK wrote: “It was unclear what triggers DFID were using to prompt an emergency response, with its concomitant requirements of appropriate scaling-up, urgency of response and the need to view the crisis within a regional rather than specifically national context.”¹⁶² In addition, SCF-UK suggested that there were varying degrees of commitment to the emergency and post-emergency recovery needs of different countries; high commitment in Malawi and Zimbabwe, but unclear commitment to Angola and Mozambique.

¹⁵⁵ Ev 119 [Stephen Carr memorandum]

¹⁵⁶ Background Paper 6 – Megan Vaughan’s note on DFID’s response to the situation in Malawi in late 2001. Copy placed in House of Commons Library.

¹⁵⁷ Ev 46-47 [SCF-UK memorandum]

¹⁵⁸ Ev 45 [SCF-UK memorandum]

¹⁵⁹ Q 12 [John Winter, DFID]

¹⁶⁰ Q 28 [John Hansell, DFID]

¹⁶¹ Q 12 [John Winter, DFID]

¹⁶² Ev 43-44 [SCF-UK memorandum]

92. It is important not to lose sight of the longer-term in responding to the emergency. In this context, SCF-UK suggested to us that there may be a danger, in the current trend towards budget support and away from donor financing of projects and programmes, that the vulnerability of rural livelihoods may be overlooked. That is, governments receiving budget support may not prioritise sufficiently investment in rural livelihoods. As SCF-UK wrote: “Whilst direct budget support to governments is welcome, this should not be at the expense of livelihood support initiatives (e.g. in Mozambique where no emergency response is anticipated).”¹⁶³ DFID—which endorses the move among the donor community towards budget support—argued that food security, and rural livelihoods more generally, must be better emphasised within Poverty Reduction Strategies.¹⁶⁴ We agree.

Genetically-modified food aid

93. During 2002, it emerged that genetically-modified (GM) maize, mainly provided by the United States, was included in food aid shipments to southern Africa. The Government of Zambia took strong exception and refused to accept GM food aid. They felt that GM food aid posed potential health risks to the population, and that if GM seeds contaminated local crops, Zambian export farmers might be barred from access to European Union markets. Referring to the latter possibility, Clare Short suggested to us that: “I think in the early days when this was being argued, representatives of the European Commission were not exactly active in putting down the notion.”¹⁶⁵

94. In October, the Zambian government turned away 18,000 tonnes of American maize, after also turning down an offer by DFID to mill the food into flour so that it could only be consumed, not planted. President Mwanawasa told the international media: “I’d rather die than eat something toxic.” Of course, in the event of food shortage, it would be the poor and hungry people of Zambia, rather than the President, who would die. **We take the view that Zambia’s decision—and especially the refusal to accept milled maize which could not possibly have impacted on Zambia’s future export potential as it cannot germinate—was mistaken, particularly in the context of widespread hunger.** This issue hampered the relief effort to Zambia, as Clare Short explained to us: “It meant that the humanitarian response was damaged, there was food in the country, there were hungry people and they were not allowed to eat it and, indeed, logistics had to be used to take it out of the country when we had to find other food and get it into the country.”¹⁶⁶ DFID’s estimate of the cost of removing this food and importing non-GM food was £25-£30 million.¹⁶⁷

95. International opinion on the food safety and environmental risks attached to GM organisms (GMOs) is divided. Even within the UK Government there are a range of views. Some argue that scientific evidence has found no significant health risks associated with consuming GM crops. Others claim that American multinationals have cynically exploited recent food crises to introduce GM crops into African diets and agriculture. At a meeting about GM food aid on 27 November 2002, Michael Meacher, Minister of State for the Environment and Agri-Environment, suggested that countries were being pressured to take GM food for reasons of GM politics, behaviour which he

¹⁶³ Ev 44 [SCF-UK memorandum]

¹⁶⁴ Ev 5, para 22 [DFID memorandum]

¹⁶⁵ Q 201 [Clare Short]

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Q 201 [Anthony Smith, DFID]

described as “wicked”.¹⁶⁸ Mr. Meacher’s allegation was forcefully denied by the US Embassy. Clare Short dismissed strongly such allegations in oral evidence. She described the suggestion made by Greenpeace¹⁶⁹—that the US Government, USAID and the GM industry are using the famine to force the introduction of GM crops—as “a complete lie.”¹⁷⁰ She described fears that GMOs could pose risks to human health as “myths”, asserting that the World Health Organisation has declared these fears to be “absolutely untrue”.¹⁷¹ The Director General of the World Health Organisation (WHO), Dr. Brundtland, stated on 28 August 2002 that GM foods “are not likely to present human health risk”. Dr. Brundtland explained that “WHO is not aware of scientifically documented cases in which consumption of these foods has had negative human health effects”, and concluded that “these foods may therefore be eaten” and that southern African countries should consider accepting GM food aid in the face of the humanitarian crisis facing the region.¹⁷² **We recognise that GM is a complex and fast-moving technology, but we believe that the UK Government should seek to build a consensus on the use of GM food aid, and agree a clear and coherent policy on GM-maize if it is to succeed in persuading food aid recipients of its benefits.**

96. Under the terms of the Cartagena bio-safety protocol, to which the UK is a signatory, national governments are encouraged to develop their own regulatory framework for the importation of GMOs, and informed agreement should guide any importation decision. Zambia does not yet have a regulatory framework in place, but took a precautionary stance against importing GM maize, highlighting in particular the centrality of maize in local diets and livelihoods. With better information, a different decision may have been reached. In a country at risk of mass starvation, a different decision certainly should have been reached. However, if the Cartagena protocol is to be adhered to, poor countries as well as rich countries must have the right to determine their position on GMOs, and to apply the precautionary principle.

97. DFID and other donors—but not the USA which is a non-signatory—are bound, under the Cartagena Protocol on bio-safety, to respect the right of aid-dependent governments to refuse genetically-modified commodities if these are offered as food aid. We were pleased to hear Clare Short state that: “We take the view under the Cartagena Convention, the bio-diversity convention,¹⁷³ that every country has the right to decide for itself whether to import GM food or seeds and needs the capacity to be able to think about it and make the decision in an intelligent way.”¹⁷⁴ It seems to us that this is at heart an issue of governance; an accountable government, making decisions intelligently, would surely not opt for a policy of rejecting GM food aid when many of its citizens face starvation?

98. WFP told us that: “The lesson we are learning is that we have to have a good, sound, solid discussion about GM and the commodities that are available before we go into humanitarian situations in terms of what governments will and will not receive. We have to be very clear with our cash donors that we are going to need more cash in the future. We cannot depend on 50 per cent of commodities coming from the United States Government, so we have to do a lot more effort and energy in discussions up-front

¹⁶⁸ “US policy on aid is ‘wicked’”, *The Independent on Sunday*, 1 December 2002, p. 7.

¹⁶⁹ Greenpeace, *USAID and GM Food Aid*, October 2002. Available at www.greenpeace.org.uk

¹⁷⁰ Q 202 [Clare Short]

¹⁷¹ Q 201 [Clare Short]

¹⁷² WHO, *WHO Director General speaks on GM foods*, 28 August 2002. See www.afro.who.int/press/2002/pr20020828.html

¹⁷³ To be precise, the Cartagena Protocol concerns bio-safety and is supplementary to the Convention on bio-diversity.

¹⁷⁴ Q 201 [Clare Short]

before we get into a humanitarian situation.”¹⁷⁵ **Donors should make every effort to provide food and non-food aid of a type and form acceptable to recipients. Looking beyond the current emergency, donors should also make more concerted efforts to source food staples locally as this is likely to be nutritionally-appropriate and culturally-preferred, is less likely to be genetically-modified, and will often be cheaper than shipping food aid from Europe and North America. In regions like southern Africa, where markets are relatively well-developed except in the most isolated rural areas, more consideration should be given to providing relief aid in the form of cash rather than food, as this maximises choice and supports rather than undermines local food producers and traders.**

The humanitarian response: Conclusions and lessons

99. **There is no room for complacency, but the humanitarian response has so far been a success.**¹⁷⁶ **Overall, we commend DFID and its partners in the international community for responding generously to the crisis in Southern Africa in 2002, after a slow start and in the face of difficult governance contexts in several countries.** We agree with Judith Lewis of WFP, that “the lack of emaciated and starving people on our television screens should be heralded as a success”, rather than as proof that initial assessments of need were exaggerated.¹⁷⁷ We are reassured that every effort is being taken to avert famine deaths and protect rural livelihoods in the crisis-affected countries, and that the food security situation in Southern Africa is currently under control. However, we agree too with the assessment made by Rob Holden of DFID’s Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department. He stated that: “there has been good work done up to now and food has got in but it is time to take stock, it is time to make sure that where the need for food is required that should continue but we need to take a more analytical, more strategic approach making sure that the continuing operation is clearly targeted, [that] it is based on assessed need and, more important, [that] it does very minimal damage to people’s recovery systems and people’s coping systems.”¹⁷⁸

100. It is highly likely that there will be recurrent food shortages and subsistence crises in countries such as Malawi and Zimbabwe in the next few years. Indeed, food shortages are likely to continue beyond the March harvest, which, in many countries is expected to be disappointing. **We therefore urge the donor community and its regional partners (governments, SADC, NGOs and civil society) to establish contingency plans, such as pre-positioning of food stocks in the region, technical support to national safety net programmes, including better planned and transparently-managed Strategic Grain Reserves, and greater dialogue with the private sector to enhance coordination between public and private food flows. Those responsible for ensuring food security in the countries of southern Africa—including national Governments, the SADC-Food Agriculture and Natural Resources Vulnerability Assessment Committee, DFID, WFP and other bilateral and multilateral donors, NGOs and community-based organisations active in poverty reduction activities in the region—must establish clear criteria for predicting food shortages, declaring humanitarian emergencies, and mobilising relief resources. This requires institutional strengthening and coordination. To this end, national governments**

¹⁷⁵ Q 77 [Judith Lewis, WFP]

¹⁷⁶ UN, *Mid-Term Review*, February 2003, pp. 4-7. Available at www.reliefweb.int

¹⁷⁷ “Reality of crisis in southern Africa”, *The Times*, 29 January 2003, p. 19.

¹⁷⁸ Q 194 [Rob Holden, DFID]

and their donor partners should consider establishing permanent Food Security and Evaluation Units, probably located in Ministries of Agriculture, which would liaise closely with local Vulnerability Committees.¹⁷⁹

101. As for the longer term, steps must be taken to reduce vulnerability to food production shocks. These will include: encouraging diversification away from maize and even out of agriculture for some of the population; providing appropriate support to poor households affected by HIV/AIDS; and where direct budgetary support is given, prioritising household food security within Poverty Reduction Strategy Programmes.

¹⁷⁹ Ev 123 [Carlos Barahona and Sarah Levy memorandum]; Ev 43 [SCF-UK memorandum]