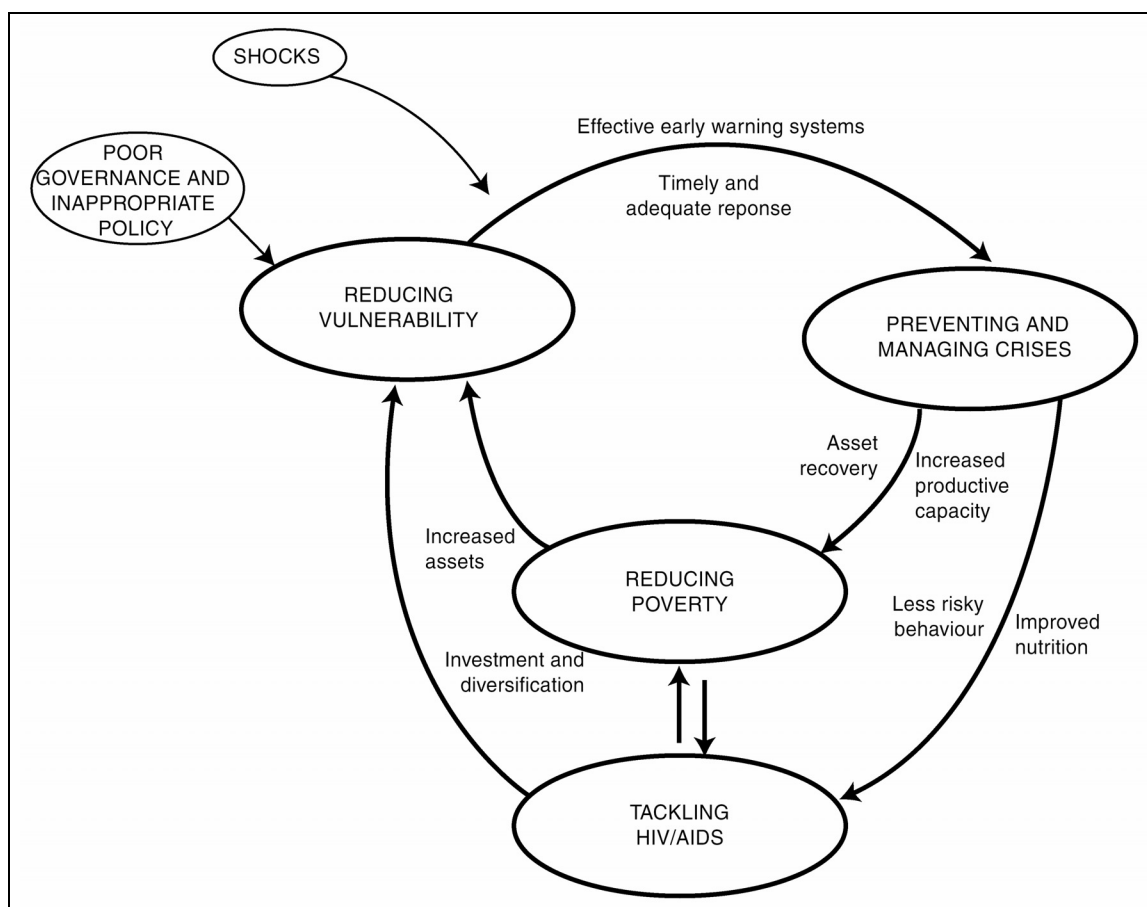


VI. FROM A VICIOUS CIRCLE TO A VIRTUOUS CIRCLE

From a vicious circle to a virtuous circle

154. If southern Africa is to emerge from the humanitarian crisis and achieve food security and sustainable livelihoods, then its cycle of vulnerability, crisis and poverty must be broken. The current vicious circle must be transformed into a virtuous circle of preventing and managing crises, reducing poverty, tackling HIV/AIDS, and reducing vulnerability (see figure 16). In a virtuous circle, Famine Early Warning Systems would be effective and the international humanitarian response would be adequate and timely. Crisis would be averted. Assets would be built up, productive capacity would be increased and nutrition would be maintained. Poverty would be reduced, and prevalence rates of HIV/AIDS would fall. Households and communities would make more investments in, and seek to diversify, their future livelihoods. Vulnerability—both in terms of exposure to shocks, and inability to cope—would be reduced as a result of addressing the sources of vulnerability. The question is, what can be done to move towards a virtuous circle?

Figure 16:
The virtuous circle: Vulnerability reduction—crisis management—poverty reduction



Source: Committee's own

Actors, roles and relationships

Governments, markets, the private sector and NGOs

155. If the countries of southern Africa are to achieve sustainable livelihoods, a concerted and coordinated response will be needed from governments, NGOs, the private sector, donors and international organizations. Different actors will play different roles, but there must be more creative thinking about the roles which actors play, and the nature of their relationships. The starting point for allocating roles, managing relationships, and developing partnerships has to be: “what works?” Donors should acknowledge the role of governments in shaping market reforms so that they contribute effectively to rural development, food security and poverty reduction.²⁷² But an enhanced role for governments must not be at the expense of the private sector. The private sector has to provide the innovation and dynamism which is necessary to generate the growth and resources needed for poverty reduction.

156. Professor Kydd spoke of “an ecology of variety competing to provide the best service” and suggested that “the way forward [in terms of escaping rural poverty and improving food security] is likely to involve a hybrid of NGOs, various levels of private sector and government and indeed, as we have indicated earlier, what may be elements of supra-national regional government institutions.”²⁷³ In their memorandum, they wrote that: “Institutional innovation is needed to develop more imaginative solutions that reduce risk and promote coordination, sustainable investment, confidence and market development, addressing the twin problems of state and market failure that have each bedevilled in different ways both the market intervention and the market liberalisation approaches to development.”²⁷⁴ **We urge DFID, with its partners, to consider these suggestions, and to examine what a poverty-reducing “ecology of variety” might look like, and how it might be nurtured in southern Africa. We also encourage DFID to continue its work in helping healthy civil societies to grow in the countries of southern Africa. Civil society provides an important counter-balance to government, making governments more accountable to their electorates and improving governance. Finally, of perhaps greatest importance, we would like to hear from DFID as to how it plans—with its partners—to help to build the capacity of governments, and key ministries such as those concerned with agriculture, education and health.**

Donor roles and resources

157. No matter how innovative the proposal for southern Africa’s development, there will continue to be a long-term role for development agencies such as DFID, for the UN’s humanitarian and developmental agencies, and for the resources provided by developed countries such as the UK to their developing country partners. As the Monterrey Consensus on financing for development emphasised, developing country governments have to take responsibility for their own development, in part through improving their governance. To fulfil its side of the bargain, the developed world must provide more financial resources. This is what the Chancellor of the Exchequer refers to

²⁷² Ev 82, para 20 [Oxfam memorandum]

²⁷³ Q 149 [Jonathan Kydd, Imperial College at Wye]

²⁷⁴ Ev 79 [Jonathan Kydd, Andrew Dorward and Megan Vaughan memorandum]

as the “global new deal”.²⁷⁵ This global new deal, with both sides fulfilling their responsibilities, is the only way in which the Millennium Development Goals might be reached. **Africa is missing the Millennium Development Goals partly because donors are missing the 0.7% target. We once again urge the UK Government to make swift progress towards its target of providing 0.7% of GNI in aid, to set out a timetable for meeting this target, and to encourage other donors to do likewise. We welcome in this regard, the Chancellor’s innovative proposal for an international financing facility.**²⁷⁶ **On trade, we urge the UK Government to press its EU partners, and to press them harder, to agree to substantial reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. It is disgraceful for the developed world to subsidise over-production and the dumping of surplus agricultural products, and to restrict access to the EU’s market, whilst preaching the virtues of trade liberalisation to developing countries.**

The World Food Programme and other international organisations

158. The WFP is the central player in any food crisis, and southern Africa has been no exception. All of the UN’s humanitarian agencies expect to be busy for the foreseeable future. This year, to repeat ourselves, UN-OCHA estimates that 50 million people worldwide will need humanitarian assistance, at a cost of nearly \$3 billion.²⁷⁷ This raises important questions of capacity, effectiveness and funding, particularly for the WFP.²⁷⁸ According to James Morris, the Executive Director of the WFP: “The World Food Programme [...] are finding it increasingly difficult to find the resources to respond adequately to the growing number of emergencies. Dependent on voluntary contributions, WFP and NGOs are caught between the rising needs of millions of hungry people and government budgets that are already stretched and contending with a global economic slowdown. The sad truth is that, as things stand, the humanitarian system faces the prospect of being completely overwhelmed.”²⁷⁹ The WFP’s funding arrangements are unsatisfactory. Under the present system, whenever there is a crisis, there is a lengthy process of announcing appeals, receiving pledges, translating those pledges into funds, purchasing food aid, and delivering it to the areas of need. This makes it more difficult for WFP to plan ahead and to ensure that food pipelines are maintained.²⁸⁰ In an informal meeting, James Morris, the Executive Director of the WFP, told us that WFP would welcome an approach based on a more reliable funding structure, which would save valuable time and money, and enable greater pre-positioning of stocks.²⁸¹ DFID agreed, stating that: “It may well be that if we get to the point where WFP are feeling they are going to be faced, year after year, with very large emergencies that we do need to move to some kind of more predictable funding basis.”²⁸²

159. We urge DFID—particularly at a time when WFP’s Executive Board is chaired by a DFID representative—to help WFP to make progress on three fronts: one, to consider a change to WFP’s funding regime, to provide it with some predictable base funding; two, to engage more with a wider range of donors such as

²⁷⁵ Fifth Report from the International Development Committee, Session 2001-2002, *Financing for development*, HC 785, para 4. See www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmselect/cmintdev/785/785.pdf

²⁷⁶ See www.dfid.gov.uk/Pubs/files/International%20Finance%20Facility2003.pdf

²⁷⁷ UN-OCHA, *Hope for the future* – see footnote 37.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁹ WFP, *Millions threatened with starvation in Horn of Africa*, 28 October 2002. Available at www.reliefweb.int

²⁸⁰ Q 184 [Rob Holden, DFID]

²⁸¹ Informal meeting with James Morris, WFP, 28 October 2002.

²⁸² Q 1 [John Winter, DFID]

India, Russia, China and the oil-exporting countries; and three, to encourage donors including the USA to provide cash donations rather than food, in order to increase WFP's flexibility and ability to deliver timely and effective humanitarian assistance. In addition, DFID must seek to ensure that other international organisations—the World Bank, the IMF, and the WTO, as well as the UN humanitarian agencies and the FAO—work well together, both in addressing short-term humanitarian needs and in helping countries to move towards sustainable development. Organisations must coordinate their work, but should take care not to step into areas where they are not competent. We welcome the announcement made recently by WFP and the UN agency which focuses on HIV/AIDS, UNAIDS, that they are to work more closely on issues of food shortages, malnutrition and HIV/AIDS.²⁸³

Unsustainable countries and a regional solution

160. The prospects for transforming a vicious circle into a sustainable virtuous circle vary across southern Africa. For a densely-populated, land-locked, resource-poor country such as Malawi, whose people are lacking in skills, sustainability is a distant dream. Given its current access to technology, Malawi is not able to achieve food security, either through food production, or through earning foreign exchange to import food.²⁸⁴ Neither can it afford to buy sufficient fertiliser to boost its agricultural productivity. Without the long-term assistance of donors and multilateral agencies, the situation looks bleak. Large-scale migration, new technologies, or the discovery of natural resources seem to offer the only options. But, this is not an excuse for inaction. If considerable donor support is needed to ensure household food security, then it should be given. As Professor Kydd, Dr. Dorward and Professor Vaughan wrote in their memo: “The fiscal costs of rural development must be set against the human, economic and financial costs of development failure, either continuing poverty and sporadic relief (with unacceptable human costs that are particularly apparent in the current crisis) or indefinite safety nets.”²⁸⁵ In addition, in supporting the development of a more dynamic rural economy, donors will “buy time”—time in which there may be important institutional, political and technological breakthroughs—and stimulate the emergence of new, and as yet unpredicted, ideas and opportunities.²⁸⁶ We must not underestimate the potential, resilience and resourcefulness of the Malawian people.

161. One solution suggested throughout the inquiry for the problems of southern Africa, and particularly for the problems of countries such as Malawi, has been a “regional solution”. This has been proposed in terms of vulnerability assessments and early warning systems,²⁸⁷ managing grain reserves,²⁸⁸ responding to crises,²⁸⁹ facilitating greater trade,²⁹⁰ and addressing questions of land reform.²⁹¹ In their memorandum, UN-OCHA noted that:

With the exception of WFP, the UN and donor governments have been slow to establish mechanisms that could think and act on a regional basis. This could

²⁸³ *WFP Emergency Report*, no. 06, 2003. Available at www.reliefweb.int

²⁸⁴ Ev 79 [Jonathan Kydd, Andrew Dorward and Megan Vaughan memorandum]

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ Ev 95 [Andrew Dorward supplementary memorandum]

²⁸⁷ Ev 48 [SCF-UK memorandum]; Ev 24, para 1 [UN-OCHA memorandum]

²⁸⁸ Ev 60 [Christian Aid memorandum]; Q 142 [Jonathan Kydd, Imperial College at Wye]

²⁸⁹ Ev 131 [WorldVision memorandum]; Ev 25, para 3 [UN-OCHA memorandum]

²⁹⁰ Ev 22, answer 11 [DFID supplementary memorandum]

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

easily be improved if the principal regional institution (SADC) were more centrally engaged in managing the crisis both politically, economically, as well as operationally. [...] With increased capacity and responsibility, SADC could facilitate and lead a more dynamic international response for the region particularly if were able to take more of a political and economic lead for its member states. This in turn could enhance the prospects for improved food security for its member states.²⁹²

162. Moves to enhance the role of SADC are a matter for the member states themselves, involving, as they do, sharing of responsibility and even sovereignty. But they could provide one way of enhancing the region's food security and prospects for sustainable development. As DFID noted in evidence, moves towards regional cooperation and economic integration are in line with the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) agenda.²⁹³ DFID should encourage governments in the region to consider seriously the benefits which enhanced coordination of policy through SADC might confer.

International development, human rights and accountability

“Good governance”

163. Effective well-coordinated institutions are the key to transforming the vicious circle of vulnerability, crisis and poverty into a virtuous one of vulnerability reduction, crisis prevention, and poverty reduction. For institutions to be effective, and to become progressively more effective, they must be well-governed and accountable to those whom they are meant to serve. The international development community, including DFID, is correct to emphasise the importance of good governance to developing countries' prospects. The crisis in southern Africa has demonstrated clearly the importance of good, accountable, domestic governance by such issues as: land reform and political opposition in Zimbabwe; the decision by Zambia to refuse GM food aid; the sale of the Strategic Grain Reserve in Malawi; and plans to purchase a luxury jet for the King of Swaziland.

164. Less dramatically, but of no less importance, if southern Africa is to move towards food security and sustainable livelihoods, greater emphasis must be given to these issues within countries' Poverty Reduction Strategies. Christian Aid noted that “food security is not dealt with adequately in the World Bank-sponsored poverty reduction strategies of Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, and Zambia.”²⁹⁴ DFID agreed with this assessment, and stated that this is one of the areas where DFID wants to work with governments to deliver improvements.²⁹⁵ **We urge DFID to encourage its governmental partners to pay more attention to rural livelihoods and food security in their PRSPs, and trust that the World Bank will be supportive of this move.**

165. Although good governance is hugely important, the “good governance” agenda does raise issues which must be addressed: first, the agenda must not be abused; second, “good governance” should be practiced by donors as well as developing country

²⁹² Ev 25, answer 3 [UN-OCHA memorandum]

²⁹³ Ev 22, answer 11 [DFID supplementary memorandum]

²⁹⁴ Ev 50, para 7 [Christian Aid memorandum]

²⁹⁵ Q 2 [John Winter, DFID]

recipients of assistance. The World Development Movement argued that: “The agenda of good governance and accountability has all too often been abused by donors, using it as leverage to ensure that developing country governments comply with their policies.”²⁹⁶ The IMF and World Bank do insist on policy reforms if countries are to qualify for financial assistance; the question is, when does the use of such conditionality move from being prudent financial management and helpful policy influence, and become excessive and illegitimate leverage? When does the external imposition of policy conditions undermine the local ownership and accountability which is crucial to good governance and effective institutions?

166. It is difficult for donors to find the right balance between making sure that their taxpayers’ funds are spent effectively, and ensuring that the development process is owned by the developing country itself. As we noted in our report on Financing for Development: “Donors have a right and a responsibility to ensure that aid is used effectively, that recipient countries are committed to poverty reduction, and that appropriate policies are in place. However, we recognise that the external imposition of conditions can undermine local ownership and accountability. Conditionality, in some form, is sure to continue, but it needs to be practised flexibly so that countries are treated on a case-by-case basis, rather than in a one-size-fits-all manner, and so that local ownership and accountability are not undermined.”²⁹⁷ **“Good governance” must be more than a badge given to countries which accept the donors’ policy advice. Good governance, fundamentally, is about being accountable to those who one is supposed to serve. Governments, if they are to be democratic, must be accountable to their citizens. Donors, in their use of policy conditionality, must take care not to undermine the relationship between developing country governments and their citizens upon which true good governance is based. As Clare Short recently wrote: “The old approach to aid, with a plethora of projects, reporting requirements, conditionality and management systems, undermines sovereignty and accountability.”**²⁹⁸ **We would welcome more information about DFID’s work on defining and assessing standards of governance. In addition, we encourage DFID to show leadership in the donor community and put itself forward for the donor review process which is envisaged as part of (NEPAD).**

167. Donors face particular problems when their partner governments are ineffective and unaccountable. The question then is: how can donors such as DFID engage with countries with corrupt or ineffective governments so that poor people are effectively supported, but bad governments are not? This question has been posed repeatedly in the current crisis. DFID officials told us, in relation to Zimbabwe that: “The Secretary of State took the view very early on in this developing crisis that we were going to do all we could to make sure that the people did not starve (in her words) because of the actions of the government in Zimbabwe.”²⁹⁹ Similarly, speaking of the sale of the Strategic Grain Reserve in Malawi, Clare Short told us that: “you must never say, ‘It is so disgraceful it has happened we are not going to work with this country’ because that means the poor old people who have already been abused by that happening would be doubly abused if in response to that corrupt behaviour we said we would be not be willing to step forward and work with the government to provide the food people

²⁹⁶ Ev 129, para 9 [World Development Movement memorandum]

²⁹⁷ Fifth Report from the International Development Committee, Session 2001-2002, *Financing for development*, HC 785, para 79. See footnote 275.

²⁹⁸ “A new way to help the poorest”, *The Times, Business and Sport*, 11 February 2003, p. 25.

²⁹⁹ Q 29 [John Winter, DFID]

need.”³⁰⁰ **We welcome DFID’s commitment to the humanitarian imperative and its efforts to remain free from undue political interference, in what have been very difficult circumstances** (see paragraphs 84-86).

168. Institutional change and more effective institutions are needed at all levels, from the household, through the village, to the national, regional and international level.³⁰¹ As such, the agenda of good governance and accountability should apply to donors and international organizations as well as to developing countries’ governments. For instance, whilst DFID’s Public Service Agreement for 2003-06 includes as an objective, to: “Increase the impact of key multilateral agencies in reducing poverty and effective response to conflict and humanitarian crises”, the Service Delivery Agreement says little, and the Technical Note is silent, about how this is to be achieved and how progress is to be measured.³⁰² **DFID plays a major role in the international humanitarian system in its own right as well as a supporter of UN agencies. We believe that DFID and other donors should be accountable for the humanitarian assistance they provide; such accountability must begin with clarity about the purpose and methods of humanitarian assistance, and about how the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance might be measured.**³⁰³

Accountability and the right to food

169. The Universal Declaration on Human Rights established a right to food, which, in 1976, was defined more clearly by the entry into force of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The right to adequate food is realised “when every man, woman or child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement.”³⁰⁴ The right to food entails the right to food security. In November 2002, the UN Secretary General’s Special Rapporteur, using an emotive vocabulary of “murder”, emphasised that governments have a legal obligation to “respect, protect and fulfill the right to food”.³⁰⁵ In reference to the crisis in southern Africa, Oxfam argued that: “in the long-term the food crisis will recur unless the right to food for all is put top of the agenda of international financial institutions and governments both inside and outside the region, and policies changed.”³⁰⁶ **If the right to food is to mean anything, someone—governments, organisations and individuals—should be held accountable when the basic human right to food is violated.**

170. In terms of allocating responsibility for fulfilling the right to food, Clare Short argued that “the first duty is on the state and clearly in Zimbabwe at the core of this crisis the state has completely and absolutely failed in its duty.”³⁰⁷ We agree; states have the primary responsibility for ensuring their citizens’ food security. But responsibility

³⁰⁰ Q 176 [Clare Short]

³⁰¹ Ev 63-64 [Christian Aid memorandum]

³⁰² DFID’s 2003-2006 Public Service Agreement, Service Delivery Agreement and Technical Note. See www.dfid.gov.uk/AboutThisWebsite/files/AboutPubServ.htm - It should be noted that the Technical Note available at 26th February 2003 is still labelled “draft”.

³⁰³ See Overseas Development Institute research on humanitarian assistance, donors and accountability - www.odi.org.uk/hpg/donorship.html

³⁰⁴ UN, Note by the Secretary General, *The Right to Food*, 27 August 2002. UN Document A/57/356. Available at www.un.org/ga/57/

³⁰⁵ *Press release from UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food*, 11 November 2002. See www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2002/gashc3721.doc.htm

³⁰⁶ Oxfam (2002), *Crisis in southern Africa*, Briefing Paper no. 23. See www.oxfam.org.uk/policy/papers/southernafrica/crisisinsouthernafrica.rtf

³⁰⁷ Q 200 [Clare Short]

does not end with the state. Indeed in its “Eliminating hunger” strategy paper, after reasserting that the primary responsibility lies with the state, DFID accepts that “there are obligations above state level and within states that require us all to act to eradicate hunger wherever it occurs.”³⁰⁸

171. In some instances, the position which a state finds itself in—because of its relationships with other, more powerful organisations—may partially diminish its responsibility. When poor countries are dependent on rich countries for humanitarian assistance, development assistance and policy advice, it is too simplistic to argue that poor countries’ governments alone should be accountable for ensuring the food security and the right to food of their citizens. In such instances, the meaning of sovereignty has become blurred, and the basis for accountability confused. As Dr. Stephen Devereux put it: “accountability has in a sense been ceded by national governments to the international community. As they have given up some of their sovereignty in terms of economic policy, and, to some extent, political policy as well, they have also given up control over their food security.”³⁰⁹ When a range of actors have such an influence on the fate of the country and its citizens, there is no clear locus of accountability. Everyone is partially responsible; no-one takes responsibility. To re-iterate, donors must take great care to ensure that they do not undermine the policy autonomy and accountability upon which good governance is based. Otherwise, the international humanitarian system may find itself sucked into a “black hole”³¹⁰ of unaccountability.

172. The solution may be some form of joint accountability, in which a range of actors shares the responsibility for ensuring food security. This might take the form of a “National food security agency”, jointly owned by national governments, together with local representatives, local NGOs and community-based organisations, working together with donors.³¹¹ **We urge DFID to consider how progress towards realising the right to food might be furthered by improving accountability within the international humanitarian system, and what this might mean in practice for the provision of food security in southern Africa. We would be interested too, to hear DFID’s views about the wider relationship between international development partnerships, sovereignty, and accountability.**

Human rights and international development

173. As Clare Short reminded us, the framework of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights stipulates that when people’s rights, including the right to food, cannot currently be provided, the “best possible effort must be made to bring them to people as rapidly as can be done.”³¹² Human rights must be progressively realised. As such, signatories to the Universal Declaration must consider carefully the ways in which violators of human rights should be held accountable. Over the course of this inquiry we have heard a range of suggestions as to how to achieve this goal. In reference to the famine of early 2002 in Malawi, ActionAid (Malawi) argued that “the parties involved should be accountable, and where necessary there should be some commitment for compensation for those directly affected.”³¹³ The UN Secretary General’s Special Envoy on HIV/AIDS in Africa

³⁰⁸ DFID (2002), *Eliminating hunger: Strategy for achieving the Millennium Development Goal on hunger*, p. 10 – see footnote 44.

³⁰⁹ Q 92 [Stephen Devereux, Institute of Development Studies]

³¹⁰ Q 97 [Stephen Devereux, Institute of Development Studies]

³¹¹ *Ibid.*; Q 92 [Stephen Devereux, Institute of Development Studies]

³¹² Q 200 [Clare Short]

³¹³ Ev 114, para 10 [ActionAid memorandum]

suggested, in relation to what he sees as the under-funding of the Global Fund by developed country governments, that: “There may yet come a day when we have peacetime tribunals to deal with this particular version of crimes against humanity.”³¹⁴ Violators of human rights should be held accountable for their actions. But determining compensation—who should pay how much to whom for what—seems to us to be fraught with complexities; and, holding peacetime tribunals for violations of the right to food is not going to happen in the foreseeable future, and may not be the best route to accountability and improvements in the provision of human rights.

174. Clare Short, developing this theme, argued that the way to progressively realise human rights is to employ the force of shame, “exposing failure rather than locking people up in prison.”³¹⁵ The Secretary of State described how the Cold War divided the discourse on human rights into “blue rights” about individual political freedoms and “red rights” which address economic and social welfare. We agree with her; there should be a re-focusing of attention towards what she termed “red rights”, which are perhaps of more concern to those seeking to escape from poverty.³¹⁶ We were encouraged to hear the Secretary of State express her vision of the relationship between human rights and international development, and to make the link between the Millennium Development Goals for poverty reduction and human rights. Poverty is a denial of human rights; a shortfall in human rights is an obstacle to poverty reduction. The framework of human rights can be used to empower poor people to engage more effectively in their own development. As DFID’s paper on realising human rights for poor people states: “The Millennium Development Goals can only be achieved through the engagement of poor people in the development processes which affect their lives.”³¹⁷ DFID and the whole of the international development and human rights community must work hard to turn this vision into a reality. As Clare Short enthusiastically put it:

with the commitment of the Millennium Development Goals and these different ways of working to get the whole international system working with governments to secure them, we have moved towards a world that is organised to try and deliver the rights in those social and economic rights for all people and we need to drive it and popularise it and enthuse the world and embarrass anyone who is failing in their country to take measures or make their contribution.³¹⁸

Lessons

175. Historically, southern Africa has not been famine-prone. As a consequence, its early warning systems have been under-resourced at both national and regional levels. This emergency has served as a wake-up call; ideally it will result in a greater commitment of technical and financial resources to improved early warning systems, including a better understanding of the causes of vulnerability, and the incorporation of qualitative information from informal sources. On a related point, the crisis has exposed policy-makers’ neglect of agriculture and rural non-farm livelihoods in recent years,

³¹⁴ *Press briefing by Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa*, 8 January 2003. Available at www.reliefweb.int

³¹⁵ Q 209 [Clare Short]

³¹⁶ There is no right to a life free of poverty. The Universal Declaration on Human Rights includes a variety of rights which relate to poverty. None of them mention poverty by name, but “the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being of the individual and his/her family, including food, water and housing” perhaps comes closest.

³¹⁷ DFID (2000), *Realising human rights for poor people*, p. 7. See www.dfid.gov.uk/Pubs/files/tsp_human.pdf

³¹⁸ Q 209 [Clare Short]

something which has precipitated the descent into poverty and vulnerability of millions of southern Africans. The devastating contribution of the HIV/AIDS pandemic to this vicious circle of impoverishment has also been highlighted as never before. This should be factored into national and regional food security strategies that aim to install safety nets against short-term shocks while simultaneously promoting “opportunity ladders” for long-term poverty reduction.

176. Since the governments of southern Africa are now mostly democratic, the crisis has highlighted the complex links between governance and vulnerability. The simplistic argument that “democracy ends famine” needs to be revisited in the light of the fact that the trend towards more democratic and (in theory) accountable regimes in the region during the 1990s has evidently been associated with increasing vulnerability to food crisis. A first explanation is that in some of the countries of southern Africa, formally “democratic” regimes are bedevilled with corruption, poor governance and leaders who are not accountable to their citizens. Relatedly, many governments in southern Africa and their constituent ministries are desperately short of capacity. A second explanation is that domestic governance shapes the relationship between governments and the international community. When relations are good (as was the case during the 1991/92 drought emergency), the donor response will be timely and generous; but if goodwill is lacking and the relationship is clouded by suspicion or hostility (as in Malawi and Zimbabwe in 2001/02), fatal delays in mobilising relief assistance can occur. On the plus side, governments and donors will surely reconsider the way Strategic Grain Reserves are financed and managed, following Malawi’s experience; while the food crisis has highlighted the illegitimacy of Robert Mugabe’s rule in Zimbabwe, and could well contribute to his downfall. If these lessons are learnt and applied, the crisis of 2001-03 in southern Africa might be remembered for the benefits it produced, as well as the avoidable suffering it inflicted.