

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

This consultative assessment and analysis, falling under the wide umbrella of the National Disaster Taskforce, sets out a framework for planning and analysis based on relative vulnerability of geographic areas and socio-economic groups throughout rural Swaziland. The multi-organisational approach should enable agreement by stakeholders on the current vulnerability context facing rural communities. It is vital that the broad area conclusions giving early warning of vulnerability that are incorporated within this report are followed up by more detailed participatory community assessments by agencies that wish to intervene. This will ensure that vulnerability at the household level is properly understood and considered on a case by case basis, particularly when it comes to targeting of programmes.

A national disaster was declared by the Swaziland Government in February 2004. The response to this disaster declaration by Government, UN and NGOs has overall been muted. Credible livelihoods based information on the state of the rural economy has not been available for decision-makers. The humanitarian community has been looking to the Government to provide the lead in responding to the crisis that was declared.

Vulnerability analysis is not an easy task in Swaziland. Many of the sources used, especially when it comes to multi-sectoral information on agriculture, health, nutrition, water and education are either weak in their analysis or difficult to get hold of. Multi-sectoral analyses are desperately important for policy-makers to make effective decisions that take consideration of the complex patterns of rural (and urban) livelihoods in Swaziland.

Conclusions and Implications

Several factors affecting the vulnerability of Swazis underlie the current emergency situation. Economic growth has been quite limited since the mid 1990s with a significant fall-off of Swazis employed in South Africa as the decade progressed. Employment levels within Swaziland have been at a virtual standstill for several years in private and public sectors. The reduction of incomes and remittances in Swaziland has had significant implications for the ability of many households and communities to purchase food and other essential household items and access basic social services. In addition, the reduced disposable income of families has resulted in fewer casual employment opportunities being offered for less well-off members in the communities. Economic hardship and food insecurity has increased in the Lowveld because of a virtual collapse of the cotton industry – reducing incomes of producers and casual labour opportunities for many other households. Livestock condition has been poor countrywide for several years and overall numbers of cattle and goats have been declining, especially in the Lowveld, because of poor grazing conditions and water availability. Animals have had very little chance to recover their condition after each shock has hit.

The downward national production trends outlined in chapter 3 go somewhat towards highlighting the strain that rural livelihoods have been facing during the past three to four years in securing income and household production to ensure food security and other basic household requirements are met. Depressed agricultural production (yield and area cultivated) is clear compared to the five year average to 2001/2 following the below normal and erratic rains in 2003/4 season. Combinations of other factors apart from the weather have detrimentally affected agricultural production exemplified by increasing inability of households to afford the requisite inputs and also the inability to access tractors for land preparation at optimal times. Household income earning potential for poor and middle wealth groups has been negatively influenced by the overall production climate but just as importantly it has been dented by declining overall access to markets. Maize and cotton markets, both of which play key roles in rural household incomes, have been depressed by production conditions but also by marketing arrangements. The informal

maize market is large while official maize sales are small overall and recent price levels have not been sufficient to attract sale by farmers. It is fundamental to Swaziland to have a maize production industry with a supporting maize marketing infrastructure that maximises production and incomes. Maize production in 2003/4 represents the fourth consecutive year of below normal cereal production. The cereal balance indicates that even after planned imports are accounted for the cereal gap is almost 75% of current production. Low cereal production has large implications for the food security, well-being and assets of the rural Swazi population. A high maize price, caused by current and anticipated shortages is likely to compound the problem of poor people accessing available food in the coming months and throughout 2004/5. Monitoring of (informal and formal) maize prices needs to be improved and actions within the maize marketing infrastructure need to reflect the importance that maize prices play (as food and cash crop) in people's lives in rural and urban areas.

While there is considerable speculation about why the cotton industry collapsed, it is essential that an in-depth analysis take place to understand the precise reasons for the production and marketing failure between 2000 and 2003 and how the industry can achieve sustainable growth in future (without ending up with indebted farmers and companies). The growth of the textile processing industry in Swaziland (with associated AGOA benefits) clearly demonstrates that there is potential for Swaziland to cultivate and process smallholder and possibly large-scale (and even irrigated) cotton. However, first it is important to understand where exactly Swaziland's comparative advantage in cotton production lies vis a vis the world market and how best to exploit the advantages identified.

Sitting on top of the economic difficulties being faced by rural households previously described has been HIV/AIDS. The virus has increased morbidity and mortality rates, vastly reducing the viability of already weakened livelihood strategies, encouraging and entrenching poverty. Orphan numbers and other chronically vulnerable households are growing at a significant rate contributing to the growing levels of livelihood failure and destitution of many poorer groups throughout the country with an increasing inability of communities to cope. Women and children are taking the brunt of the disease. Regional health services report that they are struggling countrywide and greater levels of morbidity are anticipated in future. Regional health reports indicate that poor supervision of staff, shortages of drugs, overload of patient numbers and lack of support from specialists are resulting in a weakened and under-capacitated health system in many areas. From a more positive point of view, treatment for the disease is reaching greater numbers but the overall targets set for ARV provision (3 by 5) will only make a small impact on the overall number of people infected with HIV/AIDS. A more radical institutional agenda is required to meet the HIV/AIDS threat. Additional resources, institutions and systems are required if HIV/AIDS is to be tackled in Swaziland in a manner that will make a major difference to the population as a whole. ARVs are available and they need to be made accessible to the vast majority of the population or very difficult times may lie ahead.

Communities were consulted about what their priorities may be for community development action during the field interviews that were carried out as part of the assessment. The issues raised are highlighted for each zone in the livelihood zone reports (see chapter 4). Access to adequate water sources was described by **all** communities as the biggest impediment not only to household hygiene and sanitation but also to development and income potential – especially through production of cash crops for sale. Others highlighted earth dams as crucial to reduce the vulnerability of livestock during drought periods when water access (and grazing) is poor and cattle condition reduces.

Another topic that was regularly raised by communities was the difficult access to health provision they were experiencing. The combination of increasing morbidity and isolated communities means that, particularly in the summer rainy season, many people report that ill

people are unable to access health clinics and if they do make the trip they suffer heavy transport cost penalties because of the long distances involved. Several communities linked the health provision issue with a requirement to improve infrastructural development such as roads and bridges to enhance and quicken access to health facilities.

Many communities were keen to see an increase in employment opportunities, agricultural production and other income generation activities were also raised by several communities. It remains clear that Swazi communities continue to want to work for their incomes and have not become too dependent, thus far, on free hand-outs. Overall it is not surprising that communities desire enhanced access to water, improved agricultural production, increased employment and transport opportunities and superior access to health services. Not surprisingly these form the majority of the key tenets of human development. It is important that the communities' views are incorporated within any development or emergency initiatives.

A stakeholder meeting was held on the 6th May to present preliminary findings (of income/food deficits) from the assessment, national production trends and to discuss the reasons for increasing vulnerability among many sections of the rural population in Swaziland. A second main agenda point was to consult stakeholders about possible livelihood recovery interventions and stimulate discussion of relevant policies. The meeting demonstrated that among the VAC stakeholders (covering Government Ministries, NGOs and UN agencies) there was a fundamental lack of awareness of the existence of current national policies on health, education, agriculture, water and other key sectors. Furthermore, if current policies were known about few individuals were able to explain what the policies entailed and most doubted the extent of their implementation. For instance, there is clearly a need for agriculture and health technical staff, to have read and understood current policies. Lack of existing policies (i.e. not draft or statements or action plans) on key sectors such as agriculture and HIV/AIDS was apparent.

In the meeting stakeholders reviewed several topics including increasing agricultural production, HIV/AIDS response, access to basic services such as education and health and water, sanitation and hygiene. The following represent some of the key findings of group discussions at the meeting:

- Lack of a current HIV/AIDS policy
- Small Government budget support is given to HIV/AIDS
- Swaziland's ability to implement some policies or action plans e.g. psycho-social support for children, is severely limited because of capacity constraints with few psychologists available
- Weak coordination of HIV/AIDS service providers and lack of clear definition of OVCs among relevant agencies
- Weak physical and health infrastructure is hampering access to more remote communities
- Lack of reporting infrastructure among HIV/AIDS service providers means there is little monitoring and evaluation, learning and coordination – although coordination of these issues had improved since NERCHA was established but current capacity of NERCHA is a concern considering the scale of the HIV/AIDS pandemic
- More work needs to be achieved on gender equality in relation to Swazi culture to ensure that women are empowered
- Overall confusion was agreed about the current agricultural policy situation
- Irrigation policy was seen to be important particularly in relation to cash crop production in the Lowveld – but it was not known if explicit links were outlined in the policy
- Current initiatives to stimulate agricultural production were judged to be good but better coordination of WFP/FAO/NERCHA/MoAC/UNICEF initiatives is required
- Extension services at MoAC need a full review to evaluate their effectiveness
- Access to tillage needs to be improved
- Access to water needs to be improved for cash and food crop production

- Improved marketing arrangements need to be put in place for maize, cotton and other cash crops (e.g. vegetables)
- Poor coordination of current education interventions was identified (e.g. fees support for OVCs comes from several different institutions)
- If enrolment of children in schools increased (e.g. if primary education was made free) there is a distinct lack of adequate infrastructure and education staff
- A clear explicit education policy is required particularly in relation to vulnerable children
- Increased provision of out-reach services is required in order to meet the health needs of remote communities
- More resources are required to give additional incentives for Swazi health workers to remain within the kingdom
- Groups agreed that there was inequitable access to water and much of the current water act was not enforced, particularly in respect to pollutants
- The water policy lacks a clear action plan and rural people do not know of the existence of such a policy

Income / Food Deficits

The income/food deficits outlined in each zone represent the shortfall of income and/or food that is likely to be experienced by households during the 2004/5 consumption year because of declining food production, cash crop sales, trade, non-food production, livestock, gifts and wild-foods during the 2003/4 consumption year. The livelihood zone reports in chapter 4 outline the reasons for the current findings. High income/food deficits in areas not traditionally vulnerable e.g. the Timber Highlands should not be ignored. This report highlights early warning of vulnerability in such areas and before agencies begin rushing emergency interventions into these areas, more specific studies need to be undertaken to ensure that the outcomes presented in this report are indeed as serious as we expect them to be.

Vulnerability to food insecurity and livelihood decline can no longer be defined only in terms of the Lowveld. The VAC analysis points to increasing problems across larger sections of the country. The vulnerability of populations depends on the livelihood patterns employed in the different zones of the country and the wealth status of households. Most notably depressed conditions in the Timber Highlands, Lomahasha Trading and Arable and the Dry Middleveld areas are affecting households' income and food access. Further research is required in the Timber Highlands to confirm and explore the reasons for the employment difficulties being experienced. In addition Lowveld communities continue to face very difficult times. Analytical breakdown by socio-economic group demonstrates that in most instances the poor are facing the biggest income/food deficits. The populations in several of the zones previously mentioned are feeling the impact of cumulative shocks over a number of years covering several of the mainstay production sectors.

One valuable piece of data that would help to provide a stronger analysis of the situation is knowledge of the existence of household savings and other similar assets. Currently the Swazi VAC does not have detailed enough livelihood baselines to quantify the level of cash savings or similar that better-off or middle income households have that can off-set the deficits outlined in this report. Clearly the presence of savings increases the ability of households to cope with crises and reduces overall vulnerability. However, it is likely that poor households do not have a bank account with savings inside. It is important that in future such savings are factored into vulnerability analyses. Having said the above, few stakeholders are keen to see households unsustainably erode savings or assets (such as livestock) in order to meet immediate basic food needs. The Swazi VAC intends to develop much more detailed livelihood baseline profiles throughout Swaziland **if** the resources required are made available.

The broader level of vulnerability that has been identified throughout the country by the current

assessment is as a result of a combination of factors affecting rural livelihoods. Drought and failed household food production is only one impact that has been felt by the population. Other often more important reasons are outlined below:

- Increasing food (and especially maize) prices
- Reduced incomes due to falling cash crop production (e.g. maize, cotton, vegetables)
- Reduced incomes due to falling livestock prices (especially when livestock sold in times of stress when prices decline further)
- Reduced incomes from sale of non-food production goods (e.g. firewood, mat production from grasses, thatching)
- Reduced income from petty trading (e.g. kiosks) because more people have to focus on meeting basic food needs and cannot afford to purchase other non-food goods thereby reducing levels of trade
- Increasing competition for and decreasing supply of wild foods particularly because of below normal rainfall
- Reduced incomes from remittances as fewer Swazis employed in the mines and other areas of South Africa as well as urban Swaziland
- Depressed employment opportunities for casual labourers because of falling agricultural production (drought and market related)
- Increasing illness and death of household heads and members (HIV/AIDS related) reduces income for households and access to food

Table 5 (page 33) provides planners with more concrete ways of analysing the income/food deficit outcomes. Cash transfers (that households could use to purchase their food requirements) are incorporated in order to provide decision-makers with alternatives to (the sometimes automatic reliance on) food aid in order to off-set the income/food deficits being faced by the majority of the rural population. While food aid will continue to play an important role in the short to medium term to meet on-going food insecurity in the most vulnerable areas of the country it should **not** be the automatic and only answer for populations affected. Alleviation of chronic poverty will not be achieved by continuous distributions of food aid. Programmes that incorporate cash transfers may provide additional benefits by stimulating a multiplier effect within cash strapped communities across Swaziland. It is becoming increasingly evident in other African countries such as Ethiopia, Lesotho and Malawi that plausible ways, such as cash transfers through distribution of vouchers or other non-food welfare provision (e.g. public works programmes), may be more appropriate to support chronic poverty and chronic food insecurity. Increasingly donors and agencies are viewing these alternatives in a positive light. Table 5 is provided in order to give policy and programme decision-makers with ball-park figures so that the deficits can be understood in monetary/income terms (USD 21.5 million) as well as food tonnages (28,300 MT).

In summary, household deficits could be reduced by **all or a combination** of the following ways:

- **Reducing maize prices** (and making maize more affordable) mostly through more efficient maize marketing (possibly by decentralising maize purchase, milling and sale using strategic depots around the country to reduce transport costs)
- **Increasing household food or cash crop production** (for consumption or sale)
- **Increasing trade and non-food production** (to raise income levels)
- **Increasing livestock holdings** (particularly amongst middle and poor groups)
- **Cash transfers** (e.g. poverty vouchers or cash based public works schemes as part of a social/economic safety net system),
- **Creating paid employment** (to increase incomes)
- **Food transfers** (free or for work etc.)
- **Reducing other additional costs incurred by households** (e.g. health care and education costs)

There are no automatic answers to solve these problems and the most effective response is likely to be a **combination** of almost all of the options above. It is important that planners break down the results for each zone by socio-economic group for analysis because different wealth groups are affected in different ways. The livelihood zone reports in chapter 4 give the outcomes or results by wealth group.

Recommendations

Reduction of vulnerability is closely linked with poverty reduction. Vulnerability declines when households have diversified livelihoods (risk minimisation), and have resilience (e.g. access to livestock assets or savings and markets to sell products or increase income through employment). **Coherent livelihood promotion programmes need to be put into place led by Government that increase appropriate agricultural and livestock production and most importantly employment opportunities in order to raise household income levels in the most vulnerable areas of the country.** It is essential that marketing arrangements for crops are conducive for farmers to risk increasing their production levels. Many crops grow well in the Lowveld especially if irrigated (e.g. cotton, water melon, vegetables) but restricted access to markets to sell the produce limits production, sale and household incomes. Livelihood promotion programmes (with requisite policy/marketing support) are essential if vulnerability is to be reduced with an increasing number of people reversing their livelihood decline and moving above the poverty threshold thus reducing the requirement for free hand-outs that commonly increases the dependency of communities on external support.

The recommendations below combine viewpoints from communities across the country, VAC stakeholders and logical outcomes from the analysis presented earlier on in this report.

- **A Government led comprehensive disaster response strategy is required** that will meet short and medium/long term needs as a natural development following the disaster declaration by Government to provide leadership to the humanitarian and development community that takes on board the income/food deficits outlined in this report, the reasons for them and the numerous responses that may be utilised to off-set them. Programmes, with supporting policies are required that will re-build rural livelihoods and reduce vulnerability of households to future shocks. A Government consultation process is important including the UN, NGOs and donors to build strong consensus for agreed action linking together and building on current initiatives.
- There is increasing evidence for the need of **a centralised and integrated social and economic safety net system** in Swaziland in order to provide adequate basic welfare provision and economic sustenance to poverty stricken and increasingly destitute households. The combination of the shocks described above, particularly on poorer households combined with HIV/AIDS, is reducing the potential for sustainable livelihoods and improved living conditions in Swaziland. It appears that an increasing number of households can no longer be described as 'vulnerable to' factors such as food insecurity and poverty or are at 'risk' of such problems, but indeed are 'in' livelihood failure, 'are' food insecure and 'are' destitute. These households need social safety net provision, ostensibly from Government, preferable through cash (e.g. coupon / voucher scheme) or possibly food provision – the former may be more effective and efficient especially in the medium term. Targeting of such support requires assessment on a house by house basis.
- **Improving and increasing agricultural production** is important for rural livelihoods.
 - Policy support in the area of maize marketing is required. **A full study into the declining production levels and marketing arrangements of the maize**

industry (possibly as part of the Comprehensive Agricultural Sector Policy) **is recommended.**

- Many farmers are unable to access/afford agricultural inputs to support production. **Serious consideration needs to be given as to how inputs (especially seed and fertiliser) may become more affordable possibly through subsidies.** In some instances free distributions of inputs may be appropriate – however revolving community seed banks, particularly of traditional varieties, may make such efforts more sustainable. Voucher systems that give people choice about the types of inputs they choose are likely to be more effective than distribution of pre-selected kits. However, any distribution system requires a good quality information component from MoAC/FAO and relevant agencies to support implementation.
 - **Diversified crop production** (as pointed out in the February MoAC/FAO assessment report) is important for the drier areas of the country. These include short-season sorghum and millet varieties, sweet potatoes, cassava, and short-term legumes such as mung beans, haricot beans and oilseed crops such as sunflower should be introduced or expanded. If these crops are destined for more than just household consumption, strong marketing arrangements need to be fully thought through and put in place to support farmers. Initiatives to increase cash crop production without appropriate marketing support can be more damaging than worthwhile to households.
 - **A full study into the viability and comparative advantages enjoyed by the cotton industry** vis a vis global cotton production – with development of plans to boost Swazi cotton production and rural incomes in a sustainable manner that boosts rural smallholder incomes.
 - **Water usage in the Lowveld should be reviewed in order to explore the possible options for more diversified crop production** using current or expanded water consumption possibilities. Reliance on heavily irrigated sugar cane production leaves Swaziland very exposed to problems in the sugar markets and few small holders have the resources to take part in such schemes.
- Livestock figures from around the country suggest that there is **scope for the development and restocking of cattle and goat populations** as part of a livelihoods rehabilitation initiative – especially in the Lowveld. Proposals and initiatives taking this forward clearly have to balance restocking and rangeland management and rehabilitation objectives. Furthermore, cattle productivity from traditional systems is low. Livestock can produce much more income or capital formation if managed in a more commercial manner. Year round feeding systems and access to water are essential if cattle productivity is to be maintained year round.
 - **Access to water services around the country need to be reviewed and clearly prioritised** for health and economic development reasons. All communities visited clearly expressed their desire to see water access as a top priority for Government.
 - **Creation of appropriate employment opportunities** need to be central within all Government plans. Wholly subsistence agricultural production has not and will never be viable in most areas of the country. Swazis do not grow enough from their farms to sustain themselves with food year round. While household agricultural production will always have an important role to play, employment opportunities (both formal and informal often related to cash crop production) all around the country have carried households out of poverty and into a situation of relative wealth. It is important that policy-makers and programme decision-makers increasingly understand the patterns of rural livelihoods so that policy-making, interventions and marketing support are

increasingly effective because they actively support employment initiatives in rural and urban areas.

- **Combating HIV/AIDS** will be central to the development prospects of Swaziland in the coming 10-20 years. Ways to combat HIV/AIDS should be mainstreamed within all Government activities with gender issues and women's empowerment being central to the approach taken – not least because more women at younger ages than men are being infected with HIV/AIDS. A systematic approach incorporating Government and the humanitarian sector is required to prevent new infections through appropriate behavioural change and availability of relevant drugs (e.g. to prevent mother to child transmission). More resources need to be made available as significant new health infrastructure delivery systems are required to ensure a strong and appropriate ARV (and associated medical) response should occur when considering the large percentage of the population judged to be infected throughout the country.
- Government and civil society need to work harder to ensure that **current policies are widely disbursed, fully understood and implemented**. Sectors that do not have policies such as HIV/AIDS and agriculture require national policies and long-term implementation plans.
- Swaziland needs **to develop a sustainable vulnerability monitoring system** nationwide that builds on commitments made by Ministers at several regional SADC FANR Ministers fora since 2000. In order to achieve this:
 - **A vulnerability monitoring system needs to be established** that links with relevant Government and non-Government information systems for analysis and dissemination
 - Additional effort and resources are required to **resurrect Ministries' information systems** and ensure that analytical outputs are made available and utilised in a centralised and coordinated fashion.
 - The VAC needs to be **adequately housed and linked in with present monitoring and other national surveillance systems** (e.g. health, nutrition and poverty). The VAC **requires resources and a small commitment of staff** from MEPD, MoAC and NDTF (DPMs office).
 - While the current analysis is good – it could and should be **greatly improved by developing new more detailed national livelihood baselines** to enable humanitarian agencies and Government Ministries to effectively plan development and emergency policies and programmes that benefit from a full understanding of livelihoods and household income/expenditure. These baselines will cost approximately USD 60,000 and will take 3-4 months.