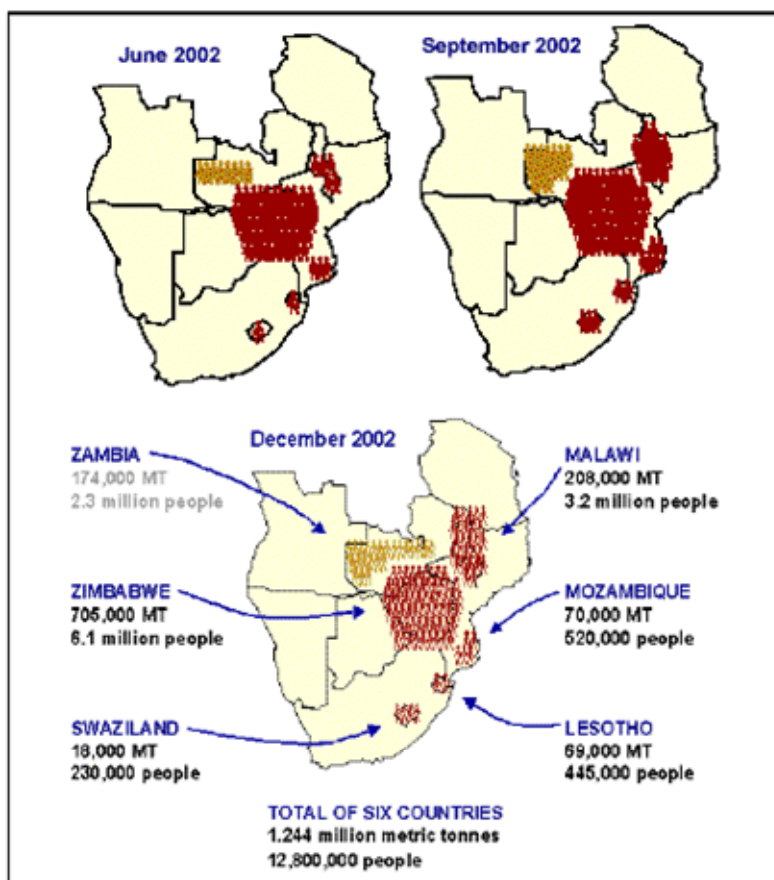


# *Roles of and Alternatives to Food Aid in Southern Africa*



(From Fewsnet Southern Monthly Report 6/26/2002)

## *A report to Oxfam March 2004*

Humanitarian action is not an exact science. Any comment or feedback will be welcome and appreciated at [fred.mousse@laposte.net](mailto:fred.mousse@laposte.net)

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<sup>i</sup> Note: While Oxfam commissioned this study the opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and are not necessarily shared by the organisation.

## **Acknowledgements**

I wish to warmly thank all organisations and individuals who have opened their door, shared their records and thoughts, for the benefit of this work.

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I hope this work will be helpful for Oxfam and others to face the forthcoming complex challenges that are rising today in this part of the world.

## Acronyms

ADMARC	Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation
ARV	Antiretroviral
CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere, Inc.
CAP	Consolidated Appeal
CFW	Cash For Work
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CFSAM	Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission
C-SAFE	Consortium for the Southern African Food Security Emergency
CSB	Corn Soy Blend
DEC	Disasters Emergency Committee
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
EMOP	Emergency Operation
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations
FEWSNET	The Famine Early Warning Systems Network
FFW	Food for Work
FFP	Food For Peace
FRA	Food Reserve Agency
GAM	Global Acute Malnutrition
GM	Genetically Modified
GTZ	German Cooperation
GMB	Grain Marketing Board
HEA	Household Economy assessment
HBC	Home Base care
HIV/Aids	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
JEFAP	Joint Emergency Food Aid Programme
Kcal	Kilocalorie
Kg	Kilogram
Kw	Kwacha
MSFF	Medecins Sans Frontieres – France
MT	Metric Tonnes
MTCT	Mother To Child Transmission
ODA	Overseas Development Administration
OGB	Oxfam GB
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme
PWAS	Public Welfare Assistance Scheme
PWP	Public Works Programmes
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SCF	Save the Children Fund
SFP	Supplementary Feeding Programme
SGR	Strategic Grain Reserve
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAC	Vulnerability Assessment Committee
WFP	World Food Programme
WVI	World Vision International
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organisation
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union, Patriotic Front
ZNFU	Zambia National Farmers Union

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## PRELIMINARY NOTES

The present report was commissioned by Oxfam's regional office in South Africa to document the lessons learnt from the food security crisis in Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe and the implications for Oxfam's future food security strategy in Southern Africa. While the focus was the role of and the possible alternatives to food aid in the region, another work, undertaken by Scott Drimie, from HSRC in Pretoria, was conducted in parallel to analyse the underlying causes of the food crisis. Consequently, apart from an introduction on the 'maize economy', this report does not present a comprehensive analysis of the roots or the dynamics that have led to this crisis.

Some level of knowledge of the Southern Africa context is nevertheless advised before looking at these programming issues, especially considering their relationship with broader dynamics such as the current social and economical trends in the region. A number of remarkable studies have been conducted over the past year in the region and may provide this insight. More particularly, CARE International's research documents on livelihood trends in Malawi and Zambia as well as the Theme Papers commissioned by the Forum for Food Security in Southern Africa are valuable contributions to a better understanding of trends and challenges in the region.

In the light of what has happened in Southern Africa in these past two years, including the response to the food crisis, which is revisited in this report, reaching a common understanding appears indeed paramount for all the stakeholders who wish to proceed on new pathways in the future.

This work was conducted in January and February 2004. It is based on a number of interviews conducted in France, UK, South Africa and in the course of the three country visits. Field visits were conducted in Oxfam's programmes areas in Malawi and Zimbabwe and included a few focus group discussions. The Food Aid Review conducted in March-April 2003 in Zambia did also participate greatly to the findings of this fresh report.

This report is structured in four distinct parts:

- The first one revisits the response to the food crisis, with a specific consideration to the genesis of the crisis in Malawi in 2001-2002.
- The second part discusses the different roles that food aid plays in the region and the resulting challenges for humanitarian action.
- The third looks at some of the effects of food aid on the way developmental and humanitarian issues are addressed in Southern Africa.
- The last section considers future food aid programming as well as potential alternatives.

Considering the broad scope of work given by the Terms of Reference (attached in Annex), all aspects of food aid in Southern Africa could not be studied as

comprehensively as wished. The consecutive choice for prioritising the issues addressed by this report was driven by its initial objective: to contribute to reflection and help decision making around food security strategy and programming in the region.

## INTRODUCTION

### THE “MAIZE DROUGHT” OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

For the past few decades, agriculture in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi has been characterised by two main features, inherited from the colonial time and generally perpetuated since independence:

- The maize ‘mono-cropping’: maize represents the main crop for a large majority of small scale farmers and the main staple food for consumers
- The duality of the production system, in short shared between an estate-based commercial sector and a smallholding sector predominantly subsistence oriented

In terms of food production and consumption, with some variations between countries, this system has shaped and impacted both the agro-ecologic environment and the socio-economic landscape in various ways that we could describe as follows<sup>1</sup>.

\* A fragile agro-ecologic environment marked by:

- Soil degradation and decreased fertility, due to intensive use of chemicals, and increasing in turn the requirement for fertilisers and hybrid seeds
- ‘replanting’ patterns and a related several months duration of the planting season due to the rain pattern, which rely on the readily and cheap availability of agro inputs, provided by the State or the private sector
- Estates and commercial farms occupying a large part of the arable land, generally the most fertile and disposing of adequate sources of water for irrigation
- Subsistence farming on less fertile soils, more reliant on rain fed agriculture, with limited access to land: 60 to 80% of the population are smallholders, with less than 2 hectares / household.

\* A socio-economic landscape dominated by:

- A milling industry playing a key role in the State controlled and supported marketing system, receiving price-controlled grain and ensuring the distribution of maize meal in a national -private or public- marketing system
- Central and pivotal role of parastatal entities<sup>ii</sup> in charge of the purchase of maize to farmers, sale to millers and resale of subsidised food (maintaining pan-territorial and pan-seasonal low food prices )

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<sup>ii</sup> National Marketing Board for Zambia, Grain Marketing Board for Zimbabwe, Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation for Malawi

- The dual system maintaining many smallholders in a situation of high dependency on labour in other farms, estates and mines to complement their income and sustain their livelihood<sup>iii</sup>.

A very integrated system maintaining low prices and limiting fluctuations on food and inputs markets is both a condition and a result of the above. Farmers, consumers, estates, traders, the State and the milling industry are bound in a strong interdependence. This system is costly and depends on revenues from other sectors such as mines, industries or cash crops. It relies also on the fragility of the livelihoods of the poorest who have been kept dependent on off farm labour.

A number of factors have disrupted or weakened this system for all three countries: drop in the international price of certain products, decline of the mining income (especially for copper in Zambia), inappropriate or unsuccessful Government policies, failure of the market liberalisation and political instability for the specific case of Zimbabwe.

In 2000-2002, the food production was reduced because of another combination of factors: the scarcity or the high costs of inputs for smallholders resulted in reduced areas cultivated and yields; it also prevented replanting while it would have been required by erratic rainfalls and also floods in parts of the region. At the national level, the drop was also due to the tendency of commercial farmers to shift from maize to cash crops in the recent years. Price volatility also increased the need for small farmers to access alternative sources of income with off farm labour, with as a result less manpower and less area planted. Simultaneously, opportunities for off-farm labour reduced because of regional evolutions and negative markets trends for some products such as tobacco.

Outside the agricultural sector, the economic decline mentioned above also results in an impoverished urban or peri-urban working class, more and more affected by unemployment and less and less able to cope with seasonally high levels of food prices.

The food crisis in Southern Africa is therefore and before anything else the crisis of a system in which maize plays a central role: a "maize drought".

Today, a number of policy options are being discussed as ways forward: turning back to / maintaining the system (e.g. reinstalling some forms of price controls, modernising and maintaining a strong role of parastatals) or moving towards some new paths (continuing market liberalisation, cash crops and crop diversification, developing new farming methods, land reform,...).

Relief interventions and development programmes come in this broad debate and we will see that they participate to it, voluntarily or not.

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<sup>iii</sup> See for instance, for Malawi, the Special Crops Act of 1972 restricting smallholder involvement in the lucrative tobacco trade and in Zimbabwe, the Land Apportionment Act 1930, the Maize Control Act 1934, the Land Husbandry Act 1951, restricting black farmers access to arable land and cash cropping.



## **PART ONE**

### **REVISITING THE CRISIS AND THE RESPONSE**

#### **A MALAWIAN STORY: GENESIS OF A MISUNDERSTANDING**

In July-August 2001, the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation of Malawi requested donors' assistance to help meeting the 600,000 MT food deficit of the country. Some NGOs were already reporting abnormal maize prices, first signals of an impending food crisis in Malawi<sup>2</sup>, but donors were apparently reluctant to launch a large-scale assistance to Malawi. They were sceptical about the severity of the situation, assuming that the food deficit would be partly covered by other crops, including tubers (they may have also been influenced by initial forecasts of a production 25% higher than average<sup>3</sup>). However the need for a safety net was identified as the European Union started planning a Supplementary Feeding Programme for 15,000 MT of locally produced food.

Save the Children UK (SCF) became concerned after a Household Economy Assessment conducted in two districts, Mchinji and Salima, in October 2001. SCF's concerns over the food situation at the national level was based on the finding that "even in Mchinji, which is traditionally a bread basket area, the population was facing the potential for a significant shortfall well before the next harvest in March 2003"<sup>4</sup>. A strong indicator was the unusual 340 % reported rise in maize prices.

At the same time, other organisations such as Oxfam started reporting internally on the alarming level of a number of indicators such as prices and food availability. However, only a few of them were able to take any clear position on the severity of the ongoing crisis in late 2001-early 2002.

SCF backed up its initial assessments with the results of two nutrition surveys that were conducted in the same Malawian districts in December and showed Global Acute Malnutrition rates of 11.8% and 9.3% in Mchinji and Salima respectively. The organisation also started to make the situation known by western media who became progressively interested in the crisis in the first half of 2002.

In early 2002, the situation became critical in several districts and malnutrition related deaths began to be reported. Church organisations were actively involved at that stage asking for donors support in Lilongwe and some received food for SFP from the delegation of the European Union. In February, the Government declared a disaster and appealed the international community for assistance.

SCF conducted a follow-up nutrition survey in late February in the same two districts, which showed an increase in global acute malnutrition, 12,5% and 19% in Mchinji and Salima respectively.

These results –clearly indicating a serious increase of malnutrition in Salima- were presented in a meeting held in Rome in March 2002 on the Southern Africa food crisis. For SCF, by February "intensive lobbying of donors and the international community commenced to support a wide-scale intervention in Malawi"<sup>5</sup> and indeed,

a first WFP EMOP was decided for April-July 2002, followed by FAO/WFP missions and SCF assessments in April-May 2002 in 6 affected countries in the region.

The British government had already pledged 1.44 million USD in food aid and sent 145,866 tons of food to Malawi<sup>6</sup>. SCF started the first large scale food distribution programmes in March 02 with this support from Dfid.

USAID was also reacting by sending an initial consignment of 17 000 MT<sup>7</sup> and initiating in April the creation of an NGO consortium for food aid, the JEFAP/WFP<sup>8</sup>.

By May-June 2002, a number of relief organisations started flowing into the country and all around the region; most of those already present scaled up their offices and operations.

In June 2002, SCF submits a fresh HEA report to the VAC that identifies 2.1 to 3.2 millions people in need of food. The range reflects two possible scenarios but the worst one is said to be the most likely. Using the Sphere Standards of a balanced 2100 Kcal<sup>9</sup> ration, the worst case corresponds to 580 000 MT of requirement.

This figure is very close to the Government's shortfall estimate of 600,000 MT<sup>10</sup> that had been announced 9 months before in August 2001, and against which almost none assistance had been pledged until March. In May and June, after the new harvest, this estimate was still referred to<sup>11</sup> as a key element of justification for this emergency intervention.

In July, the regional WFP EMOP is eventually launched, as part of a UN Consolidated UN Appeal (CAP) for July 2002 to June 2003:

- 12, 7 millions people in 6 countries in need of food aid
- 1,2 millions tons of food requirement
- 507 millions USD required for food

This review of the chronology brings two questions as regards the mid-2002 need assessments and the subsequent design of a massive regional intervention:

1. Was the -late- intervention designed for Malawi consistent with the new, i.e. post-harvest, situation mid 2002?
2. Was the regional intervention adapted to the level of humanitarian needs in the other countries?

## **THE RESPONSE TO THE MALAWI FOOD CRISIS: BETTER LATE THAN NEVER?**

### **The central question of prices and purchasing power, the razor edge**

In Malawi, an average year around 40-60% of the food needs would be covered by farmers' own food production whereas the drought increases their food expenditures from 40-60% to 70-90%<sup>12</sup> of total households expenditures.

In late 2001 – early 2002, food prices had skyrocketed to exceptionally high levels that were making the food unaffordable for a major part of the population. The problem was not only their exceptionally high level but also that this increase started much earlier than usually (by August 2001), creating a durable stress for the major part of the agricultural year.

After the harvest, prices did decrease but remained remarkably high, still around twice of a normal year in this period of the year.

The purchasing power was at the same time very much affected by an other factor, the 50% fall in tobacco revenues since 2000<sup>13</sup>, affecting both tobacco smallholders and farm workers in big tobacco estates. This fall occurred in a broader trend of decline in off-farm labour opportunities, especially in neighbouring countries such as Zimbabwe and South Africa.

The reduced purchasing power during most of the year resulted in an exceptional stress affecting a large part of the population. Negative coping mechanisms were reported, including turning to sexual and economic exploitation, depletion of assets, migration and debts.

In such circumstances, an immediate response including significant food imports was definitely required to reduce the pressure on prices and make food available for the most vulnerable segments of the population.

### **Food is coming ... But how much is needed?**

#### The elasticity of food mathematics

The calculation of food deficits is the result of a comparison between production (crop assessments) and the national consumption. The consumption is estimated by multiplying the total population by the per caput cereal consumption in kg/year. It is for Malawi 135 Kgs / person / year, slightly more than the average consumption of developing countries (132 kgs)<sup>14</sup>.

In April 2002, the FAO's CFSAM estimates a cereal production of around 1,9 Millions tons and a food deficit of 125 000 MT, anticipated to be covered essentially by commercial imports (118 000 MT). The shortfall to be met by food assistance is estimated at 7 000 MT<sup>15</sup>.

Four months later, the revised FAO analysis<sup>16</sup> reviews downward the production estimate to 1,7 millions MT and upwards the import requirement to 510 000 MT, including 302 000 MT of commercial imports and 208 000 MT of food aid needs.

In four months, very surprisingly, FAO has changed the per caput cereal consumption from 137 kgs/year to 164 kg/year, an increase of nearly 27 kgs, which put the food consumption in Malawi at the average of developed countries (166 kgs/year)<sup>17</sup>. It is even more astonishing when we compare this figure with Zambia, reputed for its very similar maize based diet (the maize porridge, chima is for Zambia what Nsima is for Malawi), having a consumption estimated at 110 Kgs/year, and stable over this period.

The per caput food consumption is not something that varies much from a year to another, unless there is a shock -like a drought for instance- that brings it downwards for a given period of time; but it cannot just jump up by 27 kgs in a few months!

Reported to the total population, this 27 kgs jump makes an artificial increase in needs of 309 000 MT, whereas the food aid requirement was estimated at 208 000 MT.

#### Four parallel channels for a flooded market

In May 2002, the Government of Malawi ordered externally 250 000 MT of food<sup>18</sup>. Deliveries rapidly started in the following months. Government's plans were to sell the food at subsidised prices, within the framework of the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility.

The NGOs and JEFAP/WFP pipelines imported and distributed around 280 000 MT of food between July 2002 and June 2003<sup>19</sup>.

Formal commercial imports were expected to be within a range of 200,000 to 300,000 MT. A significant volume of informal and unrecorded trade of cereals, from Zambia but predominantly from Mozambique, has been estimated to a range of 150-200 000 MT for 2002<sup>20</sup>.

Lastly, there are today serious allegations on the fact that a part of the 170,000 MT of food sold by the National Food Reserve Agency in 2001 had actually risen to the surface in 2002, after having been hoarded by unscrupulous speculators<sup>iv</sup>.

Early 2003, there was no doubt that the market was flooded with food. From an initial food deficit estimated, as seen earlier at 510,000 MT, the amount of imports may double this figure. In December 2003 -one year later- FAO explained "no imports of maize will be necessary in the 2003/04 marketing year because of the satisfactory production and unprecedented levels of maize carry-over stocks"<sup>21</sup>.

While relief food was distributed free and of course did not face demand shortfall, this over-supply affected both the Government budget and the private sector business, with an heavy cost for the national economy (see page 12).

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<sup>iv</sup> According to Devreux, 60 000 MT have never been exported.

## Assessments in question

The food aid requirements for Southern Africa were determined by the Crop and Food Supply Assessments (CFSAM) conducted jointly by WFP/FAO and the VAC rolling assessments conducted by the same + a number of experts from Governments and NGOs.

The CFSAM are based on estimates of a number of variables: crop, imports and exports, food consumption and other uses of food (animal feeding or industries) and stocks. A calculation is then made to estimate the food deficit, which is generally considered to be the food aid requirement.

Their methodology and results can be questioned on a number of arguments.

- The food consumption is based on a per capita consumption estimate that is not always realistic and reliable (see the experience of Malawi page 7)
- Once the commercial imports have been estimated, the food deficit becomes automatically a food aid requirement and never suggests other sources of assistance (alternatives could be for instance cash support or investment in winter cropping or livestock)
- They often ignore the non-cereals crops although they may represent a large part of households' food consumption (often more than 50% in drought years)
- They ignore informal trade and cross border exchanges that are frequent in countries with poor road and market infrastructures (in 2002, estimates were 60,000MT for Zambia-Tanzania, 120000 MT for Mozambique-Malawi in 2002).
- They do not consider the decision making of traders and commercial producers who take into account the plans for relief and governmental interventions when deciding for commercial imports or crops.
- They ignore the patterns of speculation and hoarding, which have massively increased since the price liberalisation.

Even with reliable results, the CFSAM must be taken with caution for a more fundamental reason when assessing humanitarian needs: it does not assess the spatial and social repartition of the production. A good surplus situation in a given country may provide good export incomes but also hide the vulnerabilities and limited production in some outlying small-farming communities.

## THE REGIONAL CRISIS

### A regional response

As recalled by WFP, "the CFSAMs determined that there would be a 4,071,300 MT cereal deficit for the six countries combined up until March 2003. After accounting for

anticipated government programmes and commercial imports, the missions determined that approximately 1.2 million tonnes of emergency cereal food aid will be required between April 2002 and March 2003 to assist 12.8 million vulnerable people. National Governments, SADC, the USAID-funded FEWS NET, SCF-UK, donors, NGOs, and a variety of other organizations were active contributors to the CFSAMs, resulting in a high-degree of consensus in the conclusions."<sup>22</sup>

The response started on a regional scale by July 2002. Food distributions were to start in July for 6-7 Million people and to peak from December to March at around 11 millions. Zimbabwe represented half of the needs, with 46 % of the population requiring food aid, while the range was 20-30% for the other countries<sup>23</sup>.

The main food channels were WFP and C-safe<sup>v</sup>, with respectively 70% and 30% of the pipeline.

The GM issue has slowed down the arrivals of food in the region<sup>24</sup>, particularly for C-safe, which contrarily to WFP had no resource for regional purchases, and had to get all its food from the United States. C-safe first shipments eventually arrived, but often too late to make a difference (first distributions only started in April in Zambia, i.e. at the harvest time). In reaction to the shortfalls, some donors, NGOs as well as governments bought additional food regionally.

The performance in terms of food distributed against initial requirement ranged between 40% and 75%. It is significantly more when considering the food that arrived and was distributed after the lean season, i.e. after April.

According to a number of programmes evaluations, food distributions were carried out with professionalism and relative success in most countries, and succeeded in bringing an urgent relief to millions.

The massive investment for scaling up the capacity of international relief organisations in the region that occurred from mid-2002 is certainly one of the key reasons for efficient food deliveries and distributions. It obviously goes with an exceptional level of donors' support and funding that comparatively not many African countries have experienced before.

A worth noticing form taken by this investment is the apparently durable scale up of the international humanitarian presence in Southern Africa:

- Creation of a regional NGO food consortium, C-safe, with a 3 years plan supported by a US food pipeline
- Set up of regional offices for UN, donors and a number of NGOs
- Increased NGO presence in the region, especially in Zimbabwe where there were not many NGOs in the past.

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<sup>v</sup> The C-safe, Consortium for Southern Africa Food Security Emergency, was initiated by USAID/FFP mid 2002 with three organisations, WVI, CRS and CARE. The initial plan for C-safe was a three-years food pipeline that would allow linking relief with recovery activities.

## **A revised needs assessment**

Early 2002, most countries in the region were facing increased vulnerabilities due to both long-term trends and recent specific evolutions.

Malawi, with serious levels of acute malnutrition in some district and deep structural vulnerabilities was certainly presenting the most critical needs.

Zambia was affected by its second year of food deficit. WFP and the Government had already called for assistance in late 2001 for more than 40 000 MT of food aid to assist 1,3 million people for the 2001-2002 season.

The deep political and economical crisis affecting Zimbabwe was heavily disrupting markets, leading to food deficits and high inflation to an extent that was threatening livelihoods of millions.

However, it is clear today that both the VAC assessments and the CFSAMs overlooked the other crops and other sources of food that were available in Zambia and Zimbabwe apart from maize. The April 2003 VAC assessment in Zambia<sup>25</sup> explored the reasons for stable malnutrition rates during the 2002-2003 season (when Zambia received only 51% of the food aid requirement<sup>26</sup>). According to its findings, initial assessments had underestimated the role of remittances, wild food and tubers, fish, milk consumption and livestock sales. Threats of famine and emergency food aid requirements were apparently overestimated.

While high levels of malnutrition in parts of Malawi motivated the onset of the relief intervention, nothing similar could be identified in the region. Out of 58 nutritional surveys conducted in twelve months in the region (another record), high rates of acute malnutrition (above 15%) could only be found in late 2001 and early 2002 in Salima District in Malawi, from where everything started, and Angola (only 7 surveys present GAM>10%)<sup>27</sup>.

## **Lumping different contexts together in a late response**

As rightly analysed by Devereux, "having reacted too late to the first phase of the emergency in 2001/02 the donors overreacted to the second phase in 2002/03"<sup>28</sup>. He could have mentioned NGOs and UN agencies, fully actors of the response.

It is indeed obvious that SCF's findings for two districts in 2001/2002 were extrapolated, by SCF<sup>vi</sup> and others, to the rest of Malawi and to the other countries in the region for 2002/2003. Without any doubt, this extrapolation largely influenced overall perceptions of the food security and nutritional situation in the region. It must be noted however that SCF had presented evidences of the crisis in Malawi on the basis of nutritional surveys and Households Economy Assessments. At the same time, the ability of the other organisations to produce serious situation analysis was weak and often non-existent both for the other parts of Malawi and the other countries.

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<sup>vi</sup> See for instance Evolution of a Crisis, A Save the Children UK Perspective, Sept.2002

Considering the fragility of livelihoods and the acute vulnerabilities prevailing in the region, it would be understandable that assessment teams, prepared by the terrible picture given by medias and some NGO reports, found critical conditions when they got sent around the region in the first half of 2002, especially at the time of the hunger gap of a bad season. They have however often failed to understand some key characteristics of people livelihood in the region, such as the reliance on other food than maize and the role of Ganju.

As it has been highlighted by several reports, unethical and unprofessional ways of describing the situation must be questioned and duly rectified. It is today necessary to re-emphasise this point and to recognise the share between misinterpretation and deliberate misrepresentation. Indeed, the same patterns are still going on in the region by organisations that are apparently anxious to keep a food pipeline going. A good illustration comes from the C-safe report of September 2003: "CRS conducted nutritional surveys in 22 hospitals and clinics during the month of August. The major objective was to assess malnutrition rates in the area where the project is to be implemented, evaluate impact of programmes [...]. Wasting rates average 5% for children under 5, a high level enough to warrant continued targeting feeding in the areas."<sup>29</sup> Nutritional surveys in hospitals are a real nonsense and can in no way justify any food programming.

Lastly, donors and Governments, all having their own agendas in the region, have certainly played a role in the misinterpretation of the crisis and the design of the responses. We will discuss this point in the Part II.

### **Any harm at the end of the day?**

For Malawi, and its debt service, consequence of the flooding of the market is at least a net financial loss of 15 millions USD<sup>30</sup>, difference between a sale price of 100,000 MT at around 100 USD/MT on a depressed market in August 2003 and the purchase at 250 USD paid mid 2002. As a matter of fact, the cost for the country is much higher as on the one hand, the Government food had to stay for nearly one year in store, with significant extra costs (it was starting to spoil when the Government decided this last resort sale). Furthermore, considering the duplication between Government imports and relief aid (see page 8), it is the whole cost of around 62 millions USD<sup>vii</sup> that can be considered as an unnecessary expenditure.

For the private sector, this review could not explore the loss of earnings, but it is obviously expectable, even if private traders may be more perceptive and rationale than the Government.

Interestingly and quite cynically, Government's food imports have been criticised because of their lack of consideration of the private sector imports<sup>31</sup>. Nothing similar has been said about NGOs, WFP and donors, who could have also considered these imports and maybe supported the Government efforts in its attempts to implement

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<sup>vii</sup> Government's purchase of 250 000 MT at 250 USD/MT; WFP's food value for June 2002 to March 2003 was estimated at 59,7 Millions USD by WFP in its Study on the Effects of WFP Intervention, June 2003



subsidised sales. NGOs may have then been more efficient and useful focusing on targeting feeding and recovery activities.

There is a real challenge in trying to compare the harmful effect of a flooded market on the Malawian Economy, local production, trade and debt, to the immediate benefits of food aid on people's livelihood. Compared to Malawi, the Zambian economy was certainly preserved by the GM issue that has reduced the imports to half of their requirement. Government's reaction in May 2003 to interrupt relief distributions demonstrates also its responsiveness in this matter.

In general, the role of food aid in protecting livelihoods and preventing malnutrition was crucial for many households and the problem was certainly more the scale and the lack of coordination of the response rather than the response itself.

A major harmful effect of the 'misunderstanding' may actually relate to the wrong focus that was taken by most stakeholders. In Malawi, some international NGOs and the local civil society may have had a better impact by looking immediately at policy issues such as management of the reserves and pricing policies (at a time prices were very high). Similarly, acknowledging that the peak of the crisis was early 2002, more immediate responses focusing on recovery and rebuilding of assets would have been more appropriate. Governments' funds may have also found better uses in other activities than food (see Part III page 22 about the significant share of food expenditures in Malawi national budget).

Earlier recognition of the extent of the problems would have served pertinence and cost effectiveness. The Starter Pack<sup>32</sup> provides solid evidences for that as it shows that an initial investment in seeds and fertilisers can have drastic impact the future food availability. Winter cropping, which were more used the following year for recovery, could have also achieved a lot as an alternative to food aid. It is worth mentioning here that such programmes would have not required this large scale relief operation and regional offices for international procurement as they could have used locally or regionally procured inputs and the functioning agricultural extension services for distribution.

Lastly, a ripple effect of the overreaction lies today in the loss of confidence by several donors and organisations: some NGOs such as WVI, currently ringing the bell on a current food crisis in Lesotho and Swaziland feel a lack of interest and donor support.

## **PART TWO**

### **THE DIFFERENT USES OF FOOD AID: NEW CHALLENGES FOR HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA**

#### **POOR AFRICA**

Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi are less and less able to cope with their economic decline, structural adjustment's pressure and conditionality. It has resulted in the past few decades in a spectacular drop in expenditures for all public services, and particularly the basic services such as health, education and welfare. Paying civil servants has become a permanent struggle as demonstrated in the recent long and repetitive strikes affecting these countries. The largest part of the population has fallen below the poverty line and most people have been struggling in the past decades against increased unemployment, drop in purchasing power and relative increase in education and health costs. The simple acquisition of food has become an issue, felt more acutely since price liberalisation.

Hence, the discussion about whether or not people needed food aid may sometimes sound outrageous when considering the actual living conditions of many today. Food is not wasted, as indicates the fact that almost no food was sold by beneficiaries in the region in the past two years. If not always a direct support to nutrition, it is at least a short term additional resource that protects livelihoods.

However, as it has been recently recalled<sup>33</sup>, poor Africa doesn't necessarily result in poor Africans and regimes in the region have kept resources to protect State elites from the effect of austerity, directly through corruption or by maintaining high level of 'sovereignty expenditures'<sup>viii</sup>, or indirectly by allocating resources in a way that guarantee political support (e.g. towards certain constituencies).

The amount of food aid that was called for the region was estimated jointly by the SADC's VAC assessments and the international community. In their call for assistance, governments have sometimes participated to draw a picture that appears today exaggeratedly dark. In April 2002, when Zambian President declared the farming season a National Disaster, his description of the situation was that 4 millions Zambians were at risk of starvation due to food shortage<sup>34</sup>.

The most probable explanation is that the previous call by Zambia, already affected by a food deficit the previous year, did not catch much donor interest. It is worth noticing the parallel with what happened in Malawi, unsuccessful in its first appeal for foreign aid in August 2001. Apparently, as with the fundraising department of some international NGO, African Presidents have also to raise the spectre of famine to raise some international attention – and funding.

However, what may appear a desperate call for assistance in a deeply impoverished country that cannot face a disaster led seven months later to suspicion when the

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<sup>viii</sup> Defence, international diplomacy, government offices and forms of conspicuous consumption by state elites

Government bought 20 000 Mt of maize from a local large scale commercial farmer, in October, at a time prices were close to their highest annual level.

The incredibly corrupt management of the grain reserve in Malawi demonstrates even more clearly the lack of commitment of certain elites towards the alleviation of suffering and hunger among their people. A lot has been said about the sale of the reserve in 2001 and the 'disappearance' of 60,000 MT of maize. What happened the following year is generally less known. Mid 2002, the Government bought 250 000 MT at 250 USD/MT. In August 2003, 100,000 MT were sold at 100 USD, making a loss of 15 millions USD. 73 000 MT of -expensive- maize were kept in the strategic reserve but what happened to the rest, some 80 000 MT, for a value of 20 millions USD remains unclear.

The above illustrates a very legitimate suspicion over the goals pursued by political elites in upholding control on trade, production, distribution and pricing of maize. They will certainly be found somewhere between their self-interest and true national food security and social concerns.

The role played by food aid is therefore complex. It represents a stake and an instrument for donors, local and international private interests and also NGOs, which, in the above mist, get sometimes lost between their humanitarian principles and imperatives, their development goals and their own funding and structural constraints.

## **MEETING EMERGENCY NEEDS**

The primary role of food aid in the region has been the prevention of acute malnutrition and the protection of livelihoods. Facing a combination of long-term trends and recent shocks, including food deficits and skyrocketed prices, the emergency operation has been a relative success in 2002-2003. It is clear however that the humanitarian community failed to address the acute needs in 2001-2002, especially in Malawi, with a consecutive cost in lives lost and damages to livelihood. Apart from Malawi in 2001-2002, there are serious doubts about the existence of immediate direct risks in terms of increase in malnutrition during 2002-2003.

The prevention of negative coping mechanisms such as turning to sexual and economic exploitation, depletion of assets, migration and debts makes great sense when recognising the razor edge on which many are struggling today. Even if there is no immediate malnutrition threat, preventing these mechanisms can play a critical role in helping people to face the shock and to rapidly recover from it. The 1992 drought is reported to have durably impacted livelihoods (collapse of the credit system in Malawi due to a high number of defaulters; several years before restocking of cattle to pre-drought levels)<sup>35</sup>.

Furthermore, they must be considered under the new HIV/Aids lens: coping mechanisms such as migration and sexual exploitation are "only" damaging in psychological and socio-economic terms in a traditional conceptual framework such as UNICEF's causal analysis of malnutrition. In Southern Africa, especially in areas of high HIV/Aids prevalence, they can be seen as immediate threats on lives because

of their immediate effects on virus transmission. Studies may still be necessary to scientifically demonstrate this point but there are already a number of anecdotal evidences that may be sufficient for decision making in the time being. Then, as suggested by Harvey<sup>36</sup>, there may be a need for a new conceptual framework that would better integrate the dynamics and effects of HIV/Aids.

Given the above, it is sometimes tricky to criticise the overstatement of food aid needs or food aid as an inadequate response. It may be nevertheless relevant to consider and be aware of the other dynamics involved around food aid; the following will therefore review other uses and implications of food apart from this direct intervention on livelihoods and nutrition.

## THE FOOD BUSINESS

The box below highlights the nature and the dimension of the relationship between grain trade, food aid and the food crisis: out of four million tons of food deficit to fill, one million was food relief and the rest to be covered by commercial purchases. The main source of food aid is also the main supplier of commercial food, the United States. We can see also that, considering the role of Safex<sup>ix</sup>, a Food Exchange based in South Africa, what may have the appearance of regional purchases is actually to a significant extent re-exported imports from the US and other countries.

### **The international grain trade and the Southern Africa food crisis**

*(Abstracts from Southern Monthly Report, fewsnet, June 02)*

The maize deficit countries will need to import a combined estimated total of 3,180,000 MT during the current 2002/03 marketing year. With an estimated maize surplus of over 2.0 million MT, South Africa will be able to fill a substantial portion of the import requirements. [...] The remainder of food imports will need to be sourced from outside the region. East Africa is reporting surplus availability of 180-220,000MT of white maize, [...]. Outside of Africa, the United States could have as much as one million metric tonnes of white maize to export this year. At current parities, white maize from the US is competitively priced for the SADC region. South African traders have already begun importing some 80,000MT of US white maize, and recent reports indicate that South African traders may procure as much as 450,000MT from the US, most of which is likely to be exported to neighbouring countries. In addition, South Africa is expected to import 280,000MT of yellow maize from Brazil and Argentina this season, while Zimbabwe has reportedly placed an order for an additional 20,000MT from Brazil. Zimbabwe has also reported purchasing 25,000MT of yellow maize from China.

The GM story is another illustration of the trade stakes around food aid in the region. Indeed, one reason initially put forward to justify the rejection of GM food was a public health concern but the Minister of Agriculture of Zambia expressed later on his fear that a suspicion over Zambia growing GM crops may just close the attractive European export market<sup>37</sup>.

As a matter of fact, it has been said about the maize imported from South Africa that “part of the imported maize was US GM maize, and with no guarantee that all the GM maize was distributed milled, Malawi has lost the chance of being certified GM free for the next few years (risk of export ban to EU countries for agricultural products)”<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>ix</sup> South Africa Food Exchange

The rejection of GM food by a number of Governments in the region obviously played a role in the overstatements around the crisis. While Zimbabwe and Malawi eventually accepted milled cereals, Zambia kept a strong position rejecting any kind of GM food in August 2002. Pressure that USAID and WFP put on the Zambian Government was clearly overstating the impact of such a measure. "This famine is very dangerous and it's going to kill a lot of people if decisions are not made quickly" warned USAID in July 2002<sup>39</sup>. USAID may not be only concerned by the fate of people -who were actually far from starvation in Zambia- as they strongly support the development of biotechnologies worldwide, including Southern Africa where several local research projects are supported by the institution in the region.

USAID implements US policy on trade and this includes the promotion of biotechnologies. It is supposed to be different for NGOs and UN agencies. The intrusion in the debate, and the additional pressure that WFP and some NGOs have put on Governments must then be questioned. While cash was available for local GM-free purchases<sup>40</sup>, WFP's Executive Director, James Morris, clearly denied it when he stated that "there is no way that WFP can provide the resources to save these starving people without using food that has some biotech content"<sup>41</sup>

The rejection of GM food, either total or partial (accepting milled maize) has resulted in a significant amount of relief food being eventually purchased in the region. This was felt positively by the private sector and SADC Governments, because of direct business opportunities but also as it enhanced regional trade by building up new ties between producers, traders and carriers around the region.

However, in the light of what happened in Malawi in 2002-3 (see Part I, page 8), it wasn't yet benefiting to all as imports from South Africa and US came to Malawi at the expense of local trade from neighbouring Mozambique and Zambia.

## **FOOD AID AND THE MITIGATION OF THE EFFECTS OF MARKET LIBERALISATION AND STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENTS**

In the region, one contributing factor to the food crisis was the removal of price subsidies that has resulted in a high volatility of prices. The prices used to be maintained by parastatal entities such as ADMARC in the case of Malawi. The status of these entities is now changing, under the pressure of donors, in order to continue on the path of market liberalisation. In Malawi, "the IMF, USAID and World Bank argued that the 'agreed' time table for full commercialisation of ADMARC by end 2002 should continue regardless of the food crisis, whereas Government and many NGOs believe that ADMARC's 'social market' function is vital for safeguarding basic food security and should be retained, even if this requires subsidisation"<sup>42</sup>.

The same donors who promote market liberalisation and the removal of public safety nets are those who determine the amount of food aid to be provided and the modalities of the assistance. In fact, this point should not surprise since the Marrakech decision taken in 1994 by WTO did commit donors to compensate low-income food importing countries affected by trade liberalisation with some kind of food assistance. Nevertheless, the situation is unclear as donors don't recognise

today the structural adjustments as a cause for increased vulnerabilities and food aid needs in Southern Africa. They are usually keener to blame 'bad governance'.

## **FOOD AID AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO NATIONAL WELFARE SYSTEMS?**

A number of welfare programmes have been running in the region for many years and even decades for some of them. The Public Welfare Assistance Scheme in Zambia -dating back to Second World War- is considered to be effective and equitable and in a good position to target the most vulnerable households<sup>43</sup>. It relies on a decentralised structure going down to district and village levels and to a community based and participative targeting system. In 1992, this system received a large injection of funds to help destitute people to cope with the drought conditions. Since, its effectiveness and geographical coverage has been limited by the lack of adequate funding.

In 2002, the NGO and UN response was largely set up in parallel to -and generally in perfect ignorance of- this existing system and it is only in 2003 that a pilot cash transfer scheme was reactivated by PWAS with financial support received by GTZ.

In Malawi, the Public Works Programmes are part of the National Safety Net Strategy and are supposed to provide employment and income to the poorest segments of the population through Cash For Work. The main limitation of the scheme so far has not been funding but technical and management capacity at local level.

There is a room for discussion around the fact that emergency relief might be complementary rather than in competition with such schemes, which may not have the capacity to address large-scale needs. However, they may be the only sustainable option to care for the poorest on the medium and long term, as long as they receive timely, technical or financial support. Emergency relief can certainly participate to that.

## **THE USE OF FOOD AID IN ZIMBABWE**

In Zimbabwe, the arm-wrestling match around the land reform process that has been going on for a few years between the Government and some Western countries has consequences in the use of food aid today.

SCF has recently called "donors and humanitarian agencies to apply the humanitarian principle of need and impartiality in implementing their programmes, and [to] include resettlement areas in their activities."<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, donors have been opposed until recently to support programmes in these areas, in line with their opposition to the land reform process. Apparently, NGOs were also reluctant to intervene because of their fears around the highly political and controversial nature of the land reform programme. On the other hand, the Government seems reluctant to give free access and allow assistance to former farms workers communities. This allegation is consistent with what Human Right

Watch has denounced recently on the politicisation of the Government's subsidised sales of food (ex-farm workers being felt as anti-ZANU PF)<sup>45</sup>.

In early 2004, three years after the beginning of relief operations in Zimbabwe, a few 'pilot' food relief projects were just starting in some of the resettlement areas. First needs assessments in some of the former farm workers communities may only start in 2004<sup>46</sup>.

Yet, according to the information available so far, populations concerned by the Fast Track programme, some of the resettled farmers but above all former farm workers, are the most vulnerable and affected by the current crisis. The former have been resettled with a very limited support to start production and lack inputs, infrastructure and technical expertise. Most ex farm workers have lost their job following the land reform and do not have anymore access to formal employment. In addition, most of them do not own any land that they can cultivate<sup>47</sup> as an alternative source of food. The worst case seems to be the situation of farm workers from foreign origin, who have often lost their ties with their country of origin and find themselves with nowhere to go.

All major donors and financial institutions curtailed most of their cooperation and development support to the country while they have concentrated their support on humanitarian assistance. Food aid represents more than 80% of this assistance and should continue to be distributed to 5 millions people (nearly half of the population) in 2004. Although the Government used to channel large amounts of food for subsidised sales through the GMB, supply has become erratic due to its financial difficulties. Unlike Malawi and Zambia who received significant financial support for food imports from donors and financial institutions, Zimbabwe remains on its own to address the crisis and has apparently no other choice than to let a foreign food relief effort take place in parallel to its own structures.

The fresh 2004 UN Consolidated Appeal describes the situation as follows: "humanitarian assistance has effectively contributed to save lives and mitigate the impact of the crisis on most vulnerable groups, through food and nutrition programmes as well as emergency health and education interventions. However, little has been achieved to arrest the social and economic decline, due to weak policy environment and insufficient financial support both nationally and internationally. As a result, the cost of the humanitarian situation escalates and the recovery potential is undermined."<sup>48</sup>

Apparently, the role of food aid -and of NGOs- in Zimbabwe today is to ensure a minimal safety net whereas the country is collapsing. While internal policies but also external retaliation by donors -the same who finance humanitarian assistance- participate to the rising level of needs, the difficult challenge for NGOs is to find ways, through programming and advocacy, to maintain their principles of impartiality and non-discrimination in relief and recovery activities.

## 1992 TO 2002: THE EXTERNALISATION OF THE SAFETY NETS

In 2002, one major difference with the response to the 1992 drought relates to shifts in the respective role of the various actors and their relation to one another. Not only Governments and local civil society had a much greater role and ownership of the intervention but also cooperation with donors and international organisations was much closer and appreciated by all stakeholders.

In 1992 in Zambia, the PWS was channelling cash assistance to the most vulnerable households while NGOs were providing food relief. A national NGO, the Programme Against Malnutrition (PAM) was created as a secretariat in charge of the coordination role of the relief response and a part of the distributions.

With the exception of war-torn Mozambique, donors provided significant balance-of-payments supports to finance drought related imports and for ODA, it was actually the largest single form of support. According to their own evaluation<sup>49</sup>, “these actions were found to have been important positive actions by ODA and exemplary in their implementation”. In Zambia, donors assisted with the importation of 1 million metric tons of food, of which 10% was designated for humanitarian purposes and 90% for commercial sales<sup>50</sup>.

K. Pushpanath<sup>51</sup> also describes very positively the synergy between the different stakeholders, including civil society, in Zambia: “For many Zambian NGOs, the experience was one of remarkable co-operation and co-ordination, including innovative relations with the government. Most commentators and politicians agree that the experience of collaboration between the Zambian government and the NGO community in Zambia was very positive indeed, and quite unprecedented.”

Ten years after, even if Zambia remains a country where a good level of collaboration is still enjoyed between the Government and external players, generally in the region, the environment doesn't sound anymore conducive to such descriptions and indeed, a number of factors have played in favour of changes during the past decade.

The weakening of local administration and civil society by the effect of HIV/Aids is one. In his opening speech of a Food Security and HIV/Aids workshop in March 2003, the Minister of Agriculture of Zambia, Mr. Sikatana expressed his discomfort of attending this nice gathering in a big five stars hotel while most of the Ministry's resources were being spent on funerals for the staff rather than on Zambian farmers. In 2003, K. Pushpanath, back in Zambia after ten years, found also that most of Oxfam's local partners he used to work with had died in that period<sup>52</sup>.

A second factor is the mutual mistrust between donors and Governments. ‘Bad governance’ may take a number of forms in the eyes of donors: land reform in Zimbabwe, partial application of the SAP, corruption, mismanagement or even positions taken on biotechnologies. These factors have undermined donors' confidence in local Governments. Mistrust is an euphemism in the case of Zimbabwe where assistance by US and UK is expressly concentrating outside of any governmental structure.



On the other hand, with some reason, Governments see donors' policies and the SAP as compounding factors of their difficulties. The economic decline along with the subsequent SAP measures have indeed reduced the ability of the civil society and Governments, including local administration, social and agricultural extension services to deal with disasters. As identified in several field interviews, it has reached an extent where local administrations are sometimes anxious to see the continuation of foreign aid as a way to get access to scarce resources such as cash per diems and transport

Indeed, the recent crisis has seen a boost in NGO and donors' relative involvement and responsibility over the design and the implementation of relief and recovery assistance. For USAID, one of the justifications for the creation of the imposing JEFAP/WFP food consortium in Malawi was the lack of Government capacity<sup>53</sup>. We have seen also (see Part I page 10) that this crisis has led to an unprecedented scaling up of an apparently durable foreign humanitarian presence in the region.

The fact that Governments are increasingly reliant and dependent on foreign aid to meet their safety net requirements brings three critical questions for States: sovereignty, responsibility and accountability. An illustration is what happened with the Grain Reserve in Malawi: Malawi blamed the IMF for forcing her to sell the reserve while the latter was at the very same time subject to large scale misappropriations by Government connected individuals.

A challenge and fundamental question for NGOs, UN agencies and donors is to go ahead with a critically needed immediate assistance while acknowledging and deciding their role for today and tomorrow: accepting to be this alternative or investing into some forms of capacity (re-) building and empowering for basic public services. Obviously, this question will have also implications as regards the role that the civil society can be expected to play in this new context.

## **PART THREE**

### **EFFECTS OF FOOD AID ON SECTORAL PRIORITIES AND POLICIES**

#### **FOOD FOCUS AND POLICY MAKING**

For the past three decades, most development policies and programmes have failed to address the socio-economic decline affecting the region. In Zambia, chronic malnutrition has increased from 40 to 47% during the 1990s<sup>54</sup> and in all countries, more than 60% of the people have now fallen below the poverty line.

Asked about its position on food aid and vulnerabilities, the Ministry of Agriculture of Zambia has recently recalled to the International Development community that the worst affected districts in terms of chronic malnutrition are actually located in the Northern Province and not in the South where were implemented the relief and recovery interventions in the past two years<sup>55</sup>. During the crisis, the prevalence of chronic malnutrition was indeed often mentioned in NGOs/UN's proposals and releases<sup>x</sup> but programming was more determined by crop failure than by vulnerability levels. Nothing can be done in an emergency food programme against chronic malnutrition and chronic poverty, one of its underlying causes, except maybe acknowledging and highlighting the problem and redirecting future focus and resources.

In Malawi, the sum of Government and WFP expenditures on food aid in 2002, respectively 65 and 60 millions USD represented 23% of the country annual budget<sup>56</sup>, and at least half of this amount was simply wasted (see Part II page 15). 83% of the 611 millions USD called by the CAP was food.

The focus on food and emergency issues, may result in overlooking the underlying causes of food insecurity and socio economic decline. While C-safe organisations had an initial plan to bridge relief with longer-term actions, USAID, their main donor rejected their proposition for non-food programming, preventing them to work in agricultural recovery and the rebuilding of assets of the drought affected farmers.<sup>57</sup> Yet, insufficient investments in recovery activities will certainly result in deeper vulnerability and food insecurity on the long run. And then more need next time for imported emergency food...

While recognising the efforts made in advocacy to donors by some organisations, it must be also admitted that their positions are not always clear in this matter. As a matter of fact, promoting concepts such as the 'developmental relief', an old paradigm revived for Southern Africa using food for development purpose, may not help in promoting changes in the current position of some donors. Indeed, would it exist if food was not the principal resource available? Then, can it be promoted without an implicit acceptance of a policy that may be in contradiction with development goals and principles?

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<sup>x</sup> for instance the CAP strategy document, in July 2002, explains about the food shortage "chronic malnutrition, impairing physical and intellectual development, may increase beyond the baseline figure."

## EFFECT OF FOOD AID ON AGRICULTURE AND TRADE

We have seen in Part I the effects of a flooded market in Malawi: huge losses for the national budget, disincentive to local and neighbouring production and trade. Malawi is frequently in food deficit but exports tea and tobacco and, unless Government and donors make serious steps to encourage commercial food production, what happened last year is not going to encourage farmers to expand food production.

As mentioned by Fewsnet in 2002 about the region, "Government subsidies, anticipated food aid flows and high interest rates are discouraging private sector participation in filling the food gap"<sup>58</sup>. It was clearly the case in Zambia: traders and commercial farmers report<sup>59</sup> that combined Government's interventions on food imports and international relief food were strong disincentives to produce maize in the agricultural season 2002-2003. Indeed, according to ZNFU, the shortfall in Zambia in 2002 was not caused by climatic conditions but was rather due to this disincentive to the production. Farmers have been affected in the past by sudden drops in maize prices due to unexpected subsidised or relief imports. In an uncertain market, they rationally minimise their risks and may prefer to grow non-maize crops such as paprika or flowers or to wait for counter season production of irrigated maize that will be sold more surely at a good price. They also feel that there is room for discussion and business opportunities with WFP and relief agencies in general.

Traders and commercial farmers have the same rationality in their decision-making: minimising their risks and maximising their profit. Consequently a bad harvest in April may actually represent an incentive for respectively realising imports and producing winter maize.

This question is primarily in the hands of the policy makers, who – especially in Zambia – have often been unclear and unpredictable in their interventions on imports and subsidies. Nevertheless, food aid could also play a significant role in promoting food production, notably through some form of pre-buying system that would guarantee both producers and buyers, with profits for the former and food for the latter (174,000 MT of the WFP appeal for Zambia in 2002-3 corresponded almost exactly to the potential increase of 170,000 MT of grain that ZNFU considered possible under irrigation). A need is recognised in the region for permanent safety net systems to assist a significant part of the population (see Part IV, page 26). If food aid is considered appropriate, developing sustainable ways of procuring food locally should be considered. It would have a twofold effect: supporting local production and trade as well as delivering food to those who need it.

The assessment conducted in Siavonga, Zambia, in March 2003, illustrated another negative effect of food aid. Similarly to what happened with the Government of Malawi at a national level, individuals who had seen a business opportunity in that time of food scarcity lost all their investment in a small scale food business when the relief food came and "took over the market". .

The above highlights the contradiction in the policy implemented by USAID in the region: they officially expect trade to bring growth and development but don't allow it to take place in practice with massive amounts of imported food. Less food imports

and more direct support to both production and safety nets would have obviously more positive impact.

The above discussion was based on assessments in Malawi and Zambia. Considering that Zimbabwe is by far the country having received and still receiving the largest amount of food aid in the region, it would obviously deserve specific consideration in order to consider appropriate policies and interventions in food.

## **FOOD IN THE HEALTH SYSTEM**

The Safety Net National Strategy for Malawi document<sup>60</sup> has expressed concerns about a WFP programme targeting food aid to 100,000 households identified on the basis of having a malnourished child. "The programmes have depended on workers at health facilities being involved in identifying under-5s who are undernourished. This raises a concern over the capacity of already overstretched and understaffed health facilities to cope with the extra burden of screening for and channelling food transfers".

The high death toll among health staff, the brain drain and the effects of structural adjustments (which is seriously compounding the brain drain: still in 2003, the IMF stopped the PRSP for Zambia on the argument that too much funds were going to the wage bill of civil servants) contribute to the continuous weakening of health structures at a time they would need to be boosted to face the challenge of the 3 by 5 WHO plan. Food aid, including Supplementary Feeding Programmes, should not represent an additional burden, and even less with interventions that will not have any effect on chronic malnutrition.

## **FOOD AND HIV/AIDS: THE HUMANITARIAN IMPERATIVE IN FIGURES**

Between 500 and 3000 malnutrition related deaths have been reported in Southern Africa in 2001-2003. In the same period, according to UNAIDS estimates, more than 4 millions people died of HIV/Aids in the region.

The heavy death toll results in a high number of people unable to look after themselves such as orphans, who require some kind of immediate support, direct transfer of resources but also social, psychological and educational care. Prevention is also fundamental but treatment remains the only way to rapidly bring down the mortality rate.

Funds are now coming for ARV treatment. However, most commentators raise serious doubts over the capacity of the health services in the region to cope with a rapid scaling up of the access to treatment. All feel that this limited capacity is the main limitation of access to treatment today. Actually, the practical aspects of scaling up the capacity of health services are not even yet discussed in some of these countries.

Meanwhile, the 'New Variant Famine'<sup>61</sup> has led to refocus the food security problems in the region on the question of HIV/Aids and most NGOs have integrated HIV/Aids in

their food security programming. Apart from MSF, none is seriously involved in the issue of access to treatment or the critical question of the capacity of health services. Food still represents the main resource available to the humanitarian community, and therefore a major part of its actions; is it acceptable from a humanitarian standpoint, even if there is still no evidence that food alone is helping the Aids affected people to survive longer?

In February 2004, the second bibliographic reference listed on C-safe's web site, was an IFPRI paper, "Rethinking Food Aid to Fight HIV/Aids"<sup>62</sup> that identifies six different ways to fight HIV/Aids with food: Food for Assets/Work, Food for Training, Food for Education, Food for Health, Food for Care and Food for Life.

The only exit strategy -"criterion"- that the authors consider for the food distributions to HIV/Aids infected people is the "death of the PLWHA" (Persons Living With HIV/Aids).

Every 15 seconds one person dies of Aids in the region. Some of them will have a full stomach.

The supply-driven focus on food and HIV/Aids is dangerous in the sense that it hides and accepts as given the terrible reality of the unavailability of treatment for most of South Africans. Rather than food aid, it has become critical to rethink -and to apply- the Humanitarian Imperative to fight HIV/Aids.

## **PART FOUR**

### **FOOD AID AND ALTERNATIVES TO FOOD AID IN A HUMANITARIAN PERSPECTIVE**

We have seen before that food aid in Southern Africa cannot be regarded as a single response to a single disaster or to a sudden threat on people's nutrition and livelihood. The qualification of 'food' crisis is even arguable when taking into account the various dimensions of the high level of stress in 2002-2003. The question is therefore much broader than food or alternatives to food aid.

Hence, food aid or possible alternatives must be integrated into broader strategies. Two distinct but interrelated angles will be considered in the present section:

- I. Strategies towards the protection of livelihood: implementing safety nets
- II. Strategies towards improved long term food security and resilience

This section will first discuss the integration of food aid and alternatives into these strategies; then, alternatives to food aid will be approached under the angles of agricultural programming and policymaking on food security.

#### **STRATEGIES TOWARDS THE PROTECTION OF LIVELIHOOD: IMPLEMENTING SAFETY NETS**

The Malawi Safety Net Strategy identifies four target groups for safety net programmes:

1. Selected people unable to look after themselves (poor elderly, poor infirm and disabled, poorest female headed households)
2. Poor orphans, orphans without family support, or those in families that are unable to adequately support them
3. The rural landless
4. The transient poor and those who have found their situation worsening as a result of shocks and/or losses in their entitlements and who need a short term measure to assist them

Attempts made to quantify the number of persons corresponding to these criteria present a range of 20 to 40% of the population<sup>63</sup> in Zimbabwe and Malawi. Numbers are already high, and will continue to increase until ARV treatment is made available (already four millions orphans estimated for Southern Africa<sup>64</sup>).

Some specific groups are also related to the particular case of Zimbabwe:

- 130 000 resettled farming families
- 370 000 former farm workers families

Besides, in this time of economical instability and increased unemployment, the urban population is also said to be very affected: the September 2003 ZIMVAC assessment reports 2,5 millions urban food insecure.

Two groups of vulnerabilities emerge from the above:

- 'Structural' vulnerabilities that require long term and sustainable strategies. They are related to HIV/Aids but also structural problems such as those affecting landless in Malawi or former mining communities in Zambia, as well as those affecting unemployed urban communities.
- 'Transitory' acute vulnerabilities to shocks that require adequate preparedness and immediate responses, which must be strongly linked to the strategies discussed before for improved long term food security and resilience.

We will discuss in the two following pages the use of food aid and alternatives to protect livelihoods for each of these groups:

- Weaving sustainable safety nets to meet structural vulnerabilities
- Spreading out the nets to address transitory food insecurity

### **Weaving sustainable safety nets to meet structural vulnerabilities**

#### Community based welfare systems: Home Based Care (HBC), orphans homes, ...

Initiated by the Government, in the 1990s, Community based organisations such as the HBC groups in Malawi have enjoyed a revival thanks to the relief effort, mainly food, of these past two years. These structures are felt critical to meet the needs of individuals and households affected by HIV/Aids such as the sick persons, the orphans and elderly lacking adequate support.

The main support that they have received so far was food, felt crucial for the vulnerable households at a time of stress. Some organisations such as Oxfam have provided more than just food (basic drugs, first necessity items, training,...) but this is relatively marginal compared to the bulk of the relief intervention.

One cannot expect on the short-medium term any improvement in the currently high levels of vulnerabilities in Malawi, the impact of HIV/Aids and the strong needs for care, prevention and counselling.

The role of food aid on the short run, especially in periods of stress, plays apparently a great role in supporting these groups and the guardians who care for the most vulnerable within the community. Indeed, in addition to the direct necessary support to nutrition and livelihoods, the food relief channelled through them has apparently allowed also better recognition and appraisal of their work by the rest of the community.

However, if food is acknowledged as the most valuable external input received so far, people recognise that alternative forms of support would help them reaching some level of autonomy for their group.

As long as some longer-term support is also provided, timely injections of food or cash that can be channelled by these groups may be an option to maintain in order to reach the most vulnerable.

One question that may be reconsidered relates to the principle of volunteering in areas with high HIV/Aids prevalence: the increasing level of work that is required to care for increasing numbers of orphans, to care for the sick, bathing them, distributing the food, cooking, might become difficult to combine with the necessity to carry on one's own activities. Relying only on voluntary work may not be realistic anymore in cases where volunteering becomes such a burden for individuals that its effectiveness may be undermined. Hence, options that could be complementary to or supportive of voluntary work may have to be explored for more sustainable responses.

### Public Welfare Schemes

As seen in Part II, several welfare programmes have been running in the region for years and even decades for some of them. Apparently unique in the region, the Public Welfare Assistance Scheme in Zambia, felt effective, equitable and in a good position to target the most vulnerable households<sup>65</sup>, has been lacking adequate funding for the past decade. The current GTZ funded pilot programme aiming at reactivating the PWAS is promising. The principle is to target the 10% most needy and incapacitated households. Each of the selected households will receive monthly K 30, 000 in a bank account. This is the equivalent of the average price of a 50kg bag of maize<sup>66</sup>.

This kind of set-up and the impact of such a programme is however limited to countries enjoying economical stability, limited inflation and prices volatility. Besides, even if these conditions are there, outlying areas that may be marginalized in terms of access to banking and food marketing may not be equally served.

In case of shock such as droughts resulting in high inflation and problems of food availability, an option to consider could be to temporarily complement the programme with food assistance.

### Public work schemes, CFW/FFW

For a number of years, NGOs and Governments have implemented a number of Public Works Programmes in the region, using cash or food with support from different donors. These programmes provide employment and income to the poorest categories of the population through the application of a self-targeting principle, based on a wage rate below the prevailing minimum rural wage rate. The Governments have generally preferred cash whereas most if not all programmes ran by NGOs in the region were using food.

The experience of PWP's programmes tends to demonstrate that even with appropriate funding it has been relatively difficult and complex to identify and implement productive projects. It has apparently been the main factor of limitation for



such projects that have generally not reached their target in terms of number of beneficiaries. The Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF) is said to have the capacity for the management of large-scale programmes (the initial objective was set at five million worker days per annum) but limitation seems to be due to the lack of implementation capacity at district levels, including technical and management skills. Zimbabwe's 1992 experience in FFW led to the abandon of this type of response for the same reasons of poor capacity by the leadership and administration to design, plan and supervise such projects at local level<sup>67</sup>.

In line with the 'developmental relief' rhetoric, FFW seems to have become an after-free-food option for NGOs in the region for 2004. In Malawi, considering the pre-existence of a large-scale Public Works system and the political will to make it permanent and sustainable, these interventions may consider supporting this local capacity in the course of their coming projects rather than setting up completely new structures that will disappear at the end of the relief effort. Indeed, FFW/CFW as a means to meet structural vulnerabilities seems relevant in the case of Malawi where a policy and a national structure are in place. The role of NGOs can be then to complement or support it. On the other hand, it is arguable to run such programmes in the absence of a permanent framework, unless it is a temporary response to transitory food insecurity, an option that will be discussed in a coming section (see page 30).

#### Food and nutrition programming for HIV/Aids infected people

Apparently, the only identified food and nutrition needs as regards HIV/Aids infected people are:

- Nutritional treatment to malnourished individuals
- Nutritional support for MTCT prevention
- A balanced and upgraded food ration for people under ARV treatment for the first six months of their treatment<sup>68</sup>

The two first cases represent interventions in nutrition that are currently under investigation by a number of organisations and require specific research. They may represent adequate options to complement and support the huge task of expanding ARV treatment.

Two main options could be considered for the third case:

- System of food vouchers allocated by the organisation or the institution in charge of treatment, allowing the patient to collect the food in a shop / a depot managed by a distinct organisation or institution (in order to remove the burden of food distribution and management from health staff and structures). Attention must be given to confidentiality and this is why it must be the organisation in charge of treatment that allocates vouchers (an agency in charge of food distribution in Malawi has asked MSFF for a list of patients under ARV to include them in their food distribution lists. This is obviously unacceptable as regards patients' rights).

- Direct support in institutions providing care and treatment for those who are hospitalised. The generally poor capacity of health staff and structures in the region to cope with the delivery of ARV treatment must be recognised and solutions must consider lightening the burden that is or is going to be on them.

Both of these options necessitate further study and discussions with the organisations / institutions concerned. If the investigation confirms the pertinence and feasibility of such interventions, there could be a good opportunity for number of organisations interested in food and HIV/Aids to act effectively in this field.

### **The Strategic Grain Reserve in Malawi**

Following the problems of mismanagement in 2001-2002, the SGR in Malawi has been reactivated early 2004 with the support of the European Union. The quantities of food in stock have now been reduced to 73 000 MT, which is considered to be adequate to cover the needs of 30% of the population for two to three months<sup>69</sup>. The functioning of the reserve has been reviewed to allow NGOs, WFP and Malawian institutions to use it to meet emergency and targeted / safety nets food needs in their respective programmes. The new system sounds interesting, as it allows both a more rigorous management and a better flexibility in the releases. The SGR has to be replenished, using local or regional procurement, as soon as any food is taken out with the very same quantity.

### **Spreading out the nets to address transitory food insecurity**

The development of temporary responses to meet increased needs due to a transitory period of food insecurity shall as much as possible consider, be articulated, or integrated, with the permanent safety nets that may already be in place and the on-going development programmes.

#### Expanding and implementing CFW/FFF

“Oxfam increasingly promotes CFW in response to a loss of employment or labour opportunities, specially when waged labour is a dominant livelihood source”<sup>70</sup>.

We have seen before that the high level of vulnerabilities in Malawi requires a permanent Public Work Scheme that provides a minimum income to the poorest. In time of stress, food scarcity and increased prices, expanding temporarily such programmes can be an option.

A frequently reported pattern for Malawi is the increased exploitation of farm workers in estates, through the indecent salaries given in plantations. This pattern is exacerbated in crisis times<sup>71</sup>. Similarly to what happens with the depreciation of the terms of trade for farmers selling their livestock at drought time to buy food, many smallholders sell their working force at a price that varies according to the labour market.

CFW may be then appropriate and investigated more in depth in the region as a way to support the labour market in favour of the poorest workers. The high level of economic exploitation in Malawi requires further investigation. If confirmed, CFW programmes may be appropriate, including at the times of stress but also could be part of a longer term commitment to promote some social progress in the estate system (where the minimum salary has been kept at an extremely low level by law for years).

In Zimbabwe, the Government seems to privilege today the FFW option for the urban poor who are highly affected by the present rate of 70% unemployment in the country. Considering the food scarcity and the high inflation rates experienced in 2003, it might be indeed an appropriate temporary solution. The emergency needs of ex-farm workers -currently only assisted for some of them with emergency food aid- could be also met with similar interventions, as temporary alternatives to their previous employment.

### Market interventions

In all countries, parastatals used to play a key role in offering pan-territorial and pan-seasonal low food prices for consumption throughout nation-wide systems of subsidised sales. The GMB in Zimbabwe and ADMARC in Malawi are still active in implementing subsidised sales, but their activities have been drastically reduced<sup>72</sup> and also, in the case of Zimbabwe, criticised on allegations of discrimination<sup>73</sup>. If equitable and properly run, such systems still appear to protect the consumers from price volatility and food scarcity. Hence, interventions on markets can be seen as alternatives or complementary interventions in this period of partial withdrawal of these structures. They may be implemented at both micro and macro levels.

Intervening at the micro level on grain banks or with subsidised sales appears to be a relevant intervention that can easily be articulated with existing programmes (see page 35).

At the macro level, C-safe is implementing a monetisation programme in Bulawayo, consisting in the injection of some 40,000 MT of sorghum in the local market throughout private sector. In a situation of food scarcity, this intervention may have positive outcomes in terms of relaxing the pressure on cereal prices. It might also bring a longer term positive effect in terms of enhancement of the private sector, for both trading and small-scale milling sector<sup>xi</sup>. However, such programme may be questioned because it participates to the externalisation of the national food policy (instead of providing the State with adequate resources, donors privilege the NGOs channel for political reasons rather than a question of capacity).

Another intervention at macro level, could consist for NGOs in monitoring and going into advocacy on the management of grain reserves, import/export and national pricing policy. A common feature in the region relates indeed to Governments' various forms of mismanagement on the cereal market: misuse of the food reserves (sale of the grain reserve in Malawi at the wrong time in 2001, maintaining reserves

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<sup>xi</sup> The experience of monetisation in 1992 in Mozambique was said to be successful from that point of view, see note 79.

during the last lean season for Zimbabwe in 2004), mismanagement of the reserve in Malawi<sup>74</sup> and also mismanagement of information (e.g. announcements of planned public food imports that do not eventually materialize).

Market interventions must rely on a good understanding of the dynamics involved in speculation, imports and exports, formal and informal (an affordable subsidised price somewhere may result in exports to a neighbouring country as it has been the case in Malawi with exports to Mozambique).

### Food Distributions

Food distributions still represent an adequate response to a number of situations in the region. However, large scale distributions should remain a last resort option as long as other interventions are initially implemented. Then, targeted interventions could be appropriate as complementary actions to tackle the specific needs of the most vulnerable segments of the population in situations of transitory food insecurity. Again, it is manifest that food relief would not be necessary if governments' marketing structures along with public welfare systems were ensuring the social role they used to play.

As regards the specific case of Zimbabwe, the accusations of politicisation and inequity of the Government's subsidised sales may represent a strong argument in favour of the continuation of free food distribution by foreign NGOs as it could avoid or balance discrimination in the access to food. The extent of this discrimination may however require more investigation considering the difficulty to access objective information in the current tense political environment.

Though Oxfam promotes a community-based approach to food programming and livelihood support interventions, the experience in the region has not always been in line with the underlying principles of this approach.

Assessments conducted in the course of this work have demonstrated for instance:

- The difficulty and often the inability to link emergency assistance with ongoing so-called 'development' interventions. The grain banks experience in Ekhamunu is symptomatic of the problem (see box page 35).
- The insufficient consideration given to people's views in implementing food distributions: for instance the ration provided in Zimbabwe did not take into account the unavailability or the very high cost of certain commodities such as salt and soap that were not included while people felt these items were much more critically needed than the beans or the CSB being distributed.
- The poor consideration given to people's actual needs in implementing food distributions: the contents of the -full and balanced- ration did not take into consideration other sources of food available, such as locally grown food and livestock (8 to 10 cattle heads as an average per household in one village visited). Besides, as most organisations did, Oxfam apparently docilely applied the percentages for targeting that had been fixed beforehand by 'higher authorities' (WFP and VAC assessments).

- In the recent crisis, the above may reflect the sometimes too passive acceptance of WFP's standards and directives. A counter-example to be noticed is the Zambia experience where Oxfam did buy pulses to complement a ration felt to be too weak.

The community based approach used in the distributions seems nevertheless very positive as regards people's empowerment and promotion of gender equity within communities. It is without any doubt important in countries where the civil society and the communities are sometimes felt to be weak confronted with poorly committed, corrupted or excessive leadership. The above points highlight the need to identify appropriate ways of linking food distributions to the other interventions and the necessity to better listen to and understand the beneficiaries of the programme in order to respect Oxfam's commitment towards people's rights and empowerment.

#### Food or Cash ?

The potential for the region to be self-sufficient and even net exporter of food must be recognised and integrated in the design of relief responses. Cash has been found to generate a range of benefits not normally associated with food, including income and employment multipliers, investments of earnings and non-farm enterprises, stimulation of trade and food price stabilisation<sup>75</sup>; inversely food would tend to have 'divider' effects in situations where food is available. Food interventions may still be appropriate in times of food scarcity but in the light of what happened in Malawi, it is worth noticing that a bad harvest around April may not necessarily result in food scarcity later in the year as the food may be made available throughout winter cropping, public or commercial imports.

Opting for food may actually reduce the amount of commercial imports and of commercial production of food, as traders and producers are likely to see relief food pipelines as a risk for their future benefits. It seems therefore that in case of food deficit and foreseen food insecurity, the best option should be cash in most cases.

For all programmes, a critical question will always be the capacity of the structures and organisations to deal with food or cash. The developed banking system in some of the countries in the region may be an incentive for cash programmes while food may be more appropriate for communities relying on a low monetary economy. There may be no use to bring cash into the outlying areas, marginalized in terms of access to roads and markets, as it is for instance the case in some remote parts of Zambia and Zimbabwe. Lastly, food may be the appropriate response in situations of high inflation such as Zimbabwe in 2003 where dealing with cash is definitely unmanageable, for the organisation as well as for the beneficiaries of the project.

## **STRATEGIES TOWARDS IMPROVED LONG TERM FOOD SECURITY AND RESILIENCE**

Among the development policies and strategies implemented towards improvements in food security and resilience, a strong focus appears to be on interventions that will increase productivity and resilience over time. Taking into account the vulnerability and limited potential of the mono cropping of rain fed maize, the following directions have been mainly considered so far:

- Crop diversification and improvements of farming methods
- Building assets and promoting sustainable sources of income

Moreover, the States marketing structures for cereals do not play currently the social role they had in the past by offering adequate quantities of food at affordable prices. Discussions are underway between Donors and Governments to decide of their future, but meanwhile the problem of food availability and access must be addressed at community level. They must also integrate resilience to shocks that would otherwise undermine any progress made towards improved food productivity.

### **Are Cash for Work / Food For Work (CFW/FFW) programmes appropriate to improve farming methods?**

So-called 'developmental relief' programmes have been extensively experimented in Zambia in 2002 using FFW as a way to develop conservation farming methods. They are about to be massively introduced in Zimbabwe in 2004 as a way to phase out free food distributions.

These projects bring a serious ethical question as they mean food as a carrot for development and... no-food as a stick, especially in time of hardship and food scarcity.

For a number of organisations and development workers, the approach of such programmes appear to be in conflict with their efforts towards people's empowerment through the promotion of voluntary work, participation and ownership in development activities. Furthermore, the donor-recipient relation that is then created does not pave the way for common understanding, empowerment and partnership in future development activities.

If food is considered needed for the community, it should be channelled differently and in disconnection with this kind of development activity.

## **CFW/FFW and assets building**

There is a rationale for CFW/FFW programmes aiming to build productive public assets:

- Many parts of the region suffer from weak market and road infrastructures
- Investments in irrigation and rain harvesting are promising for significant gains in farming productivity and reduced vulnerability to droughts
- States have a limited capacity and have not always shown commitment to invest in these fields in the past

## **Grain banks and community management of the food**

The system of grain banks appears to be one of the most suitable experiences in terms of food programming in the region. It is based on the necessary adaptation to the current partial withdrawal of States' intervention in the grain pricing and marketing. It relies on initial individual investments in a collective project which is supposed to provide both personal and collective gains: lesser vulnerability to the volatility of prices and benefits that can be reinvested in community projects (education, irrigation, roads,...).

Furthermore, it exploits and promotes local production and trade capacity while thwarting speculation and hoarding by individuals and traders.

Contrarily to what happened for Oxfam Malawi in 2002 (see box below), it can also be used and articulated with relief interventions in times of stress. For instance, in a period of tension on prices that may make the food unaffordable for a part of the community, a relief intervention could seek to provide free food to the most vulnerable segments of the community or alternatively, subsidise the sales, making then a cheaper price that is affordable for all.

### Grain bank in Ekhamunu, Shire Islands, Malawi

The grain bank was created in May 2002 with the support of the District Assembly and Oxfam ('development') who provided a loan to purchase the food and financial assistance to build a store (community participated through manpower and supply of bricks). The rationale of the programme was to address the instability of the maize market and the related household seasonal food insecurity.

In June 2002, the Village Development Committee (VDC) purchases 468 bags of 50 kg of maize at the unit cost of 750 Kwacha (7,5 USD). Food is stored and the plan is to sell it between August 02 and March 03, during the next lean season. The price of 750 kw was high compared to the previous year as it was just after a lean period that had seen increases up to 1300 kw (price for the same period in an average year was about 700kw). Sales start in August at a price of 850 kw.

A humanitarian team had arrived in June, and since, had been preparing a free food distribution programme. Using the community-based approach for targeting and distribution, the team had organised the election of a Relief Committee in Ekhamunu through an open public meeting. No contact was made between the Relief Team or the Relief Committee and the VDC during that period (and actually for the whole duration of the programme).

In September, a monthly free food distribution of the following items (per household) could begin: Maize 50 kgs, beans 10 kgs, CSB 2 kgs, Oil 5 l

As soon as the distribution started, the sales by the VDC slowed down and were eventually completely stopped by December. Food had then to be stored during the rainy season, with 26 bags that got rotten in the store. Insecticides had to be bought and used to protect the grain.

Free food stopped by April 03; sales resumed the following month at a price of 500 kw, reduced market price as a result of both the relief effort and the good 2003 harvest.

	quantity	unit price	total
purchase august 02	468	750	351000
sold Aug02-dec02	221	850	187850
losses	26	0	0
sold May 03-feb04	221	500	110500
<b>Financial loss</b>			<b>-52650</b>

*"Food relief was appropriate as 850 kw was a high price compared to the purchasing power and the limited food availability in September for a large number of people here."*

*"Grain bank represents a good way to improve food security. It maintains food availability in the village and avoids going long distances to access maize, which is costly and time consuming."*

*"Future plans? sit down with the committee and prepare a strategy in case another relief intervention comes; may start later in the year and reduce the quantity of food."*

From the interview notes with Endrisson Chimwele, Chairman of the Village Development Committee (VDC), on 16.02.2004.



## **Reactivating / supporting local hammer mills**

Although often neglected, an important aspect of food security at community level in Southern Africa is related to the capacity of the community to dispose of locally milled maize.

An interesting research conducted in Zambia shows some of the advantages of 'Mugaiwa'<sup>xii</sup> for households food security<sup>76</sup>: its much better nutritional value compared to industrial maize meal (it contains much more micronutrients and vitamins) and its price, 20 to 40% below maize meal.

In Zimbabwe, a large part of the current food security stress is actually related to the disruption of a very centralised and very integrated maize marketing system that was in place up to recently: farmers used to sell their maize to the Grain Marketing Board, which resold the grain to large industrial milling companies. Farmers had then to (re)-buy their maize meal back in supermarkets shelves. The instability in Zimbabwe has simply cut off this chain without leaving many alternatives for consumers apart from buying at skyrocketed prices maize meal, when available, in supermarkets. The Zimbabwe experience shows an additional, nowadays crucial, advantage of the local hammer mills: the flexibility and autonomy that they provide to rural communities compared to the heavily centralised system that was in place so far.

Assessments in the region show the uneven repartition and availability of local hammer mills, with some communities reporting going long distances to reach the first hammer and others that have lost their hammer under the strong competition of big milling companies (benefiting by the way of subsidised prices).

## **AGRICULTURAL INTERVENTIONS**

### **Starter Pack**

One well-known experience of agricultural programme that has been put forward as a good way to avoid food aid is the Starter Pack/TIP programme running in Malawi since 1998. By supplying massive quantities of seeds and fertiliser, its goal is to ensure food security at both national and households' levels.

This experience over the past few years shows that the 'universal' distributions of SPs in 1998-99 and 1999-2000 (for 2,8 million households while the population in Malawi is around 11 – 12 million people) have provided a significant contribution to the national food production - around 20% increase in maize production for the two seasons. The 2000-01 and 2001-02 agricultural seasons (the food crisis period) coincide with the scaling down of the programme to fewer inputs to fewer farmers (1,5 millions in 2000 then 1 million in 2001)<sup>77</sup>.

The Starter Pack is certainly a way to avoid food aid as it boosts food production. One cannot actually see the difference with a strong State support to maize cultivation, apart that the inputs are given free and not subsidised. The other noticeable difference is that the quantity of inputs, and therefore national food

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<sup>xii</sup> locally maize meal, used for Chima (porridge)

security, depend on donors' good will to support the programme; this is something that has varied over the past years.

As regards cost effectiveness and achievements in food security, it is without any doubt more appropriate to invest in such a programme than to import food and run food aid interventions. On the other hand, it is not more sustainable than relief food as long as it is not integrated into a multiyear strategy on agriculture, or alternatively into a revived re-institutionalised Government system of input subsidies.

### **Winter cropping and cassava cuttings**

Distributions of inputs for winter cropping are interesting programmes as they achieve both long-term (i.e. diversification of agriculture and diet but also resilience) and short-term objectives (harvests begin at the beginning of the lean season, when people start running out of maize). In a bad maize year, early signals can come as soon as January and allow adjusting programming accordingly.

Cassava production cycle takes longer (around one year) than the few months required for vegetables, potatoes and other pulses and constitutes a more medium-term resource that would then reduce the needs for food aid the following year.

### **Agricultural Recovery**

As demonstrated after 1993<sup>78</sup>, a year of food stress usually results in lesser availability of cash, inputs and draught power the following season. Hence, timely agricultural recovery activities addressing these problems minimize the duration of food assistance requirements the following year.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMANDATIONS FOR OXFAM PROGRAMMING AND ADVOCACY

### UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT / RETHINKING THE INTERVENTIONS

#### **From context analysis to policy making: redefining the place of the States and the role of civil society and NGOs**

The second part of this report concluded on a question for NGOs and Oxfam in the region: accepting to be an alternative to the Public systems that are being withdrawn or investing into some form of capacity (re)building and empowering for basic public services. Today, Oxfam's position is unclear in this matter: whereas Oxfam advocates in Malawi<sup>xiii</sup> for ADMARC to retain a social role through the marketing of subsidised food, in Zimbabwe, free food distributions are implemented in parallel and apparently without consideration to the GMB subsidised sales. Distributions of food or agricultural inputs cannot pretend to be neutral and to ignore the question as, as such, they constitute alternatives and a potential way out of these systems.

**It appears consequently critical that the design of future programming and advocacy options starts with a redefinition of the -expected- respective role of NGOs, civil society and States in the region.**

#### **Need assessments, vulnerability mapping and food security analysis**

As seen in this report, Oxfam and the humanitarian community at large have failed to correctly recognise the dynamics involved in the recent regional crisis. Today, early 2004, a common understanding on the food security situation and the strategies to be developed is still to be sought. Yet, it sounds that for many, the priority is now to improve the Early Warning Systems in place, i.e. basically systems that will predict in time and more correctly future food aid needs. It is certainly critical, especially when considering what happened in 2001-2002. However, a wider understanding of food security and vulnerabilities in the region remains dramatically required. Analysis should also better understand and integrate how markets, national and international policies influence food security in the region.

**Oxfam should continue to upgrade its capacity in that field, not only in order to improve its ability to design and implement appropriate programmes but also to find a louder voice in food security debates and policy making.**

### PROGRAMMING OPTIONS

#### **Public Welfare Systems**

A direct financial support to systems such as the PWAS in Zambia may constitute a good option to address the needs of the most vulnerable. The pilot project supported by GTZ is promising and needs to be monitored. If it confirms the present positive

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<sup>xiii</sup> See the research conducted on ADMARC by OXFAM, note 72

appraisal of the system, it may be critical to expand it and to make it sustainable, with obviously a need for Governments and donors' long term commitment.

**The enhancement of PWS may require advocacy actions but also monitoring and follow-up to ensure the response is sustained over time. In periods of transitory food insecurity or high inflation, temporary direct interventions may be also appropriate to provide complementary support, with cash or food.**

### **Community based welfare systems (CBWS)**

CBWS such as the Home Based Care in Malawi seem very relevant in the region, especially in countries where no public system is in place to provide welfare services. CBWSs empower communities to address chronic problems and represent adequate vectors to channel relief to the most vulnerable in times of crisis.

Such programmes need to be properly monitored and critically evaluated, but they present a potential for adequately identifying and addressing 'structural' vulnerabilities as well as transitory needs.

**After adequate review and evaluation, the pursuit of CBWSs, appears to be a good option to reach the most vulnerable households through community based mechanisms of solidarity. Throughout such scheme, food or cash assistance can constitute adequate transfers of resource towards the poorest individuals, as long as they are integrated in longer-term strategies.**

### **Support to Public Work Programmes**

It has been recognised that the main limitation for PWP's relates to the capacity of local administrations for designing, planning and implementing this sort of programme. Recognising that for some vulnerable groups, PWP's appears to be a relevant option on the medium term, and also that such programmes can be expanded in time of acute stress, it seems appropriate to support the local capacity in this matter.

**Support may be provided to PWP's in both management and technical expertise (reforestation projects for instance require specific skills that may not be available in countries). Preparedness may include building up the capacity to expand the programmes for temporary periods.**

### **Direct CFW/FFW interventions**

Direct interventions in CFW/FFW may be appropriate in situations where livelihoods are affected by losses of labour opportunities or unfavourable employment conditions. As temporary programmes in period of transitory food insecurity, they must take into account and if possible be combined / coordinated with pre-existing PWP's, if any. Besides, they can promote the fluidity of the food flows, as long as properly planned, publicised and coordinated with other interventions.

As longer-term programmes, they must be linked with longer term objectives and activities, which would promote alternative sources of employment or improved employment conditions, while simultaneously aiming at maintaining or building assets and infrastructures.

**Direct CFW/FFW interventions can represent appropriate responses to both transitory food insecurity and structural problems around employment. They**

**can be optimised when articulated with longer-term strategies and interventions.**

### **Grain banks and community management of the food**

The appropriateness of this kind of intervention depends again very much on the national policy on food. If the Government maintains a strong control on prices or a significant role in food marketing, implementing grain banks might prove to be difficult at the community level (given for instance that the Government would still fix the purchase and sale prices, or organise subsidised sales competing with grain banks' sales).

The principle of such programme remains relevant in this period of partial removal of State's interventions and also considering the imperfections of these interventions in the past.

**Grain banks may indeed be complementary to the States' systems, either spatially, targeting areas and populations not properly covered, or quantitatively, i.e. providing a complementary amount of food to what is made available by States' structures.**

### **Reactivating / supporting local hammer mills**

As mentioned before, local hammer mills present a number of advantages compared to the industrial maize meal: better nutritional intake, lower cost, flexibility and autonomy of the production and marketing structures. It also creates income generating opportunities at the local level. Influenced by various factors, their geographical repartition and their effectiveness vary from an area to another in the region.

**Consequently, a comprehensive review of the current status of the different milling systems in the region would be required before contemplating interventions in this sector.**

### **Market interventions**

Governments in the region are used to implement large scale programmes of food monetisation. The sale of the food is then operated by the public or the private sector, or both. Given that the countries have apparently the capacity to buy and resell the food, the only rationale for NGOs to intervene in this field would consist in filling the potential gaps related to an inadequate coverage of the Government's subsidised sale programme.

**A review of Government's programmes, their capacity and their coverage would be necessary before going into any form of subsidised sales. Support to Government capacity or complementary actions, for instance in favour of marginal communities not receiving the assistance, could then be undertaken.**

### **Targeted food distributions**

Oxfam is currently involved with food distributions in Zimbabwe with a form of general food distribution and in Malawi with food distributions targeted in Home Based Care programmes.

**The situation in the region, including the feasibility of a number of alternatives to general food distributions, should generally confine this type of intervention to targeted distributions, complementary to other interventions. General food distributions may however remain relevant in situations of acute food deficits, and contexts of high economical instability as today in Zimbabwe.**

### **Food and nutrition programming for HIV/Aids infected people**

Considering the number of organisations interested and capable in food and nutrition, direct interventions for Oxfam may not represent the optimal way of intervening in the field of HIV/Aids. However, it sounds paramount for the humanitarian community and Oxfam to re-assess the epidemic and to design a proper strategy of response based on an *objective* assessment of the needs and of the capacities that are in place to meet them.

**Oxfam could play a key role in influencing donors, Governments and the humanitarian community to re-focus their actions towards the actual needs.**

### **Agricultural interventions**

Oxfam is already very active in various types of agricultural support in the region. CFW/FFW programmes can constitute means to build assets but seem questionable as ways to improve farming methods.

The support in inputs can represent an appropriate instrument to tackle food deficits without resorting to large scale food imports. However, similarly to what was said above concerning the social role of parastatals in food marketing, supplies of inputs such as the Starter Pack programme should be integrated in a broader strategy and policy in agriculture that integrates the present and future role of parastatals in support to agriculture.

**In predominantly agriculture based economies, an active role in both programming and advocacy in agriculture is critical to prevent acute food insecurity and to participate to rural development policies.**

### **Coordination and information**

Given what happened in Malawi and Zambia in 2002-2003, but also recalling the very similar experience in Mozambique in 1992<sup>79</sup>, it appears paramount to consider more comprehensively the actual and potential roles of various actors (formal and 'informal' private sector, Governments, NGOs and UN) in response to food deficits. Both experiences show that the lack of information and co-ordination of the efforts leads to duplication and results in a negative cost on local capacities and national resources. Better articulated interventions, for instance CFW programmes that would increase the market flow of food, if well planned and publicised, could have positive effects on enhancing market mechanisms. Similarly, targeted feeding combined with subsidised sales or sales by grain banks would allow more effective relief responses and strengthen public or community capacity to manage food and tackle deficits.

**Proper information leading to a more broadly shared understanding of the contexts, and coordination that will create synergies and optimise the different capacities in the region are paramount for the success of future responses.**

## **POVERTY REDUCTION AND FOOD SECURITY POLICY**

Concerns have been raised earlier in this report about the commitment and the capacity of Governments in the region to assume alone their responsibility towards their citizens. The financial stakes around food and current patterns of corruption, especially in Malawi, result in questionable Governments interventions in the food sector. The present mistrust with donors is another handicap for any future attempt to address the underlying causes of food insecurity and to efficiently intervene in case of shocks.

With some differences between countries, the civil society is generally weak in the region, and not always in a good position to participate to policy making and even less to promote more Governments' accountability. This weakness may be explained by some of the following elements:

- Strong and sometimes dictatorial political leadership
- Urban based and sometimes corrupted elites
- Urban working class focus of civil organisations (mainly unions)
- Historical patterns of migrations to foreign countries rather than rural areas-main towns flows (specially for Malawi) that have failed in creating ties between rural populations and urban elites.
- Similar patterns of estates work that have resulted in a worker-farmer relationship (as opposed to citizen-State) that have not encouraged a sense of empowerment and democratic rights for the poorest.
- The HIV/Aids pandemic combined with the brain drain have also dramatically affected the capacity of representation by an educated class.

As discussed in this report, the humanitarian and development community can be biased by the food focus. In practice, it is feared that apart from emergency food responses and food-based safety nets there are poor chances to see any strong and collective commitment to address the underlying causes that have led to the current critical situation. The food based 'developmental relief' that is being promoted shows actually quite well the dilemma where stand today a number of organisations and development workers: we are doing what we can, using what we have at our disposal, i.e. food.

As reported in the Valid International<sup>80</sup> evaluation report, advocacy opportunities are not always taken by organisations. It is problematic that SCF was almost alone in its first attempts to raise awareness about the crisis in 2001, not only as regards the initially limited effectiveness of their advocacy work but also because it eventually resulted in a very partial understanding of the regional context. In 2004, SCF appears to be alone again when trying to raise awareness about the humanitarian situation of certain communities in Zimbabwe.

For the future, there is a strong need to design and advocate for more appropriate emergency and recovery responses. Then, on a more medium-long term perspective, a number of issues must also be addressed, including the future of food reserves and States' intervention in the food sector, investments on safety nets, policies on agriculture and public works.

**A clear comparative advantage that is attributed to Oxfam and widely recognised among the humanitarian community, Governments and the civil society in the region is its advocacy capability. Also known for its approach in favour the empowerment of the people and civil society, Oxfam can make a difference in this field tomorrow. It might be however uneasy without enhancing some forms of food security programming that will provide better field and people based knowledge and along with access to the relevant forums.**



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# TERMS OF REFERENCE

**What are the lessons to be learnt from the food security crisis in Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique and the implications for Oxfam's future food security strategy in Southern Africa?**

## **Overall aims and scope of the work**

The main aim of this 2 month piece of work is to make **recommendations** for Oxfam GB's:-

1. **current food security programmes**
2. **emergency preparedness strategy** (i.e. food security programmes which will be implemented in the event of a sudden & severe deterioration in the food security situation in the future).

The focus should be on **the role of food aid** and **alternatives to food aid** (rather than other types of food security programme) in both of the above contexts.

## **Geographical focus**

The report will provide an overview on the region with country focus on **Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique**. The report will describe to what extent the findings could be extrapolated to other countries in the region.

## **Rationale**

Oxfam GB's current **analysis** is that the food security situation in Southern Africa can broadly be characterised as follows:-

- increasing vulnerability (reduced ability to cope) to potential shocks due to the impact of factors such as economic liberalisation, agricultural policies, HIV/AIDS
- sudden and severe deterioration in food security situation in 2001/2002
- some improvement after this acute crisis but...
- increase in % of the population: finding it difficult to recover from the crises, experiencing longer-term vulnerability, i.e. chronic, severe food insecurity.
- Increase in % of the population experiencing periods of acute (transitory) food insecurity with greater regularity and severity
- High risk of future large-scale food crises

The implications for **OGB strategy** appear to be:-

- Need to address the underlying chronic problems of HIV/AIDS, economic and agricultural reform policy, social safety net provision through advocacy and programmes.
- Need to consider the role of "humanitarian type" responses in tackling chronic problems, e.g. the role of food aid or alternatives in response to severe, chronic food insecurity (i.e. as a safety net for HIV affected households)
- May need to be responding to both development and humanitarian needs in the same country at the same time.
- Need to have a clearly defined emergency preparedness strategy
- Need to build local capacity of country programmes and partners to respond to future food crises.

We need to gain a clearer understanding of the **role of and alternatives to food aid** within this strategy as ways of dealing with both chronic and acute food insecurity. OGB promotes the use of food aid as both a nutritional support and a way of protecting livelihoods. However, we have concerns about:-

- whether the food is imported to the region or locally procured
- the over-estimation of food aid requirements (for political reasons)
- the possible negative impacts of food aid (although more empirical research is required on this)
- the under-utilisation (funding) of (possibly more effective) food aid alternatives
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The paper should address these issues and consider the implications for OGBs advocacy and programme strategies in response to both chronic and acute food insecurity.

### **Specific objectives**

In order to achieve the aim stated above, it will be necessary:-

- to refine our analysis of the food security situation, in particular defining future scenarios that can be used for planning purposes
- to review the appropriateness of OGBs food security response over the last 2 years
- to make recommendations for current and future food security strategy

### **Revised analysis of crisis and future scenarios**

In late 2001 / early 2002, the consensus appeared to be that there was/would be an acute crisis caused by drought and loss of crop production. However, there were different perspectives on the extent of an acute crisis right from the beginning, e.g. AAH (USA) concluded that there was not a need to intervene in Zambia, MSF concluded that there was not a need for a scale-up in either country, the EU were very critical of the consensus – saying that there was not a production problem (and too much food aid was being distributed). In terms of causes, in Malawi where most of the media reports came from, more attention appeared to be given to drought than to the sale of the SGR and increase in market prices.

**BUT** what was the evidence for an on-going and imminent crisis? (in terms of **rapidly** deteriorating trends in mortality, morbidity, nutrition and food security)

If it is concluded, that the consensus was inaccurate and not entirely based upon evidence.... How was the consensus reached? What other factors determined the description of the situation and subsequent response, other than an understanding of humanitarian need? e.g. US policy on surplus food, the interests of the Malawian and Zambian governments within the context of the SADC agenda and policy, the role of the media in possibly sensationalising the situation?

Analyse the extent to which and why the views of different actors have changed and assess whether there is a revised consensus? Many agencies have recognised that the impact of drought leading to an acute crisis was perhaps over-stated whilst the chronic effects of HIV were not adequately recognised and therefore understated, a long with a range of other chronic factors.

Most importantly, in terms of analysis **we need a good analysis of how the food security situation is likely to evolve in the future**, based upon different scenarios. This is essential for our strategic planning and emergency preparedness.

- Extent of the crisis in terms of number of people in need of food aid?
- Were the number of beneficiaries estimated correctly and what was the prognosticated impact of not receiving food aid?
- How is the situation likely to evolve?

- What are the main risks to food security? What is the potential for different “shocks” in the future?
- What is the potential impact of these different shocks?
- Come up with different planning scenarios

### **Review of humanitarian food security response at different stages of the crisis**

There has been a lot of criticism from donors (including USAID), NGOs and others that there was an over-estimation of the need for food aid and hence over-distribution. Food aid was certainly dominant in the CAP. Why was this? Was it just because of the analysis of the situation? Or was an understanding of humanitarian needs overridden by other factors in decision making?

There have been anecdotal reports of the negative impacts of food aid but what is the empirical evidence for this?

What might have been alternative, more appropriate responses given a revised analysis of the situation? What were the possibilities for market based responses and more funding going towards livelihoods interventions?

- How and why were decisions made on the type, scale of response?
- To what extent were responses appropriate?
- What were the pros and cons of “imported” versus “regional” food aid?
- Was the potential for the regional procurement of food aid fully exploited during the recent crisis?
- What were the positive and negative impacts of food aid?
- Were there any negative impacts? (e.g. loss of income for traders and producers in northern Mozambique)
- How and why did the response differ from previous humanitarian responses in the region (e.g. 91/92)?
- To what extent were responses appropriate from a perspective?
- Would alternatives (cash interventions, monetisation of food etc.) to food aid have been more effective/ appropriate?

### **Implications for Oxfam future strategy in Southern Africa**

- What are the implications of a revised analysis of the situation for Oxfam's response to both chronic and acute food insecurity?
- What are the programming and advocacy priorities?
- In terms of chronic food insecurity... in particular what are the best approaches (including food aid) we can adopt to improve the food security of HIV/AIDS affected households? ... In terms of potential acute food insecurity... how would we respond to a future crisis? Food aid or alternatives? What do we and our partners need to be doing in preparation?