

## **OXFAM-GB POLICY RESEARCH PAPER**

# **THE UNDERLYING CAUSES OF THE FOOD CRISIS IN THE SOUTHERN AFRICA REGION – MALAWI, MOZAMBIQUE, ZAMBIA AND ZIMBABWE**

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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.



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## 1. INTRODUCTION & OBJECTIVES

In the 2002-2003 period, Southern Africa experienced the worst food crises the region has encountered since 1992. Most assessments of this period of acute food insecurity and vulnerability have understood this phenomenon to be as much a crisis of livelihoods, or of development in general, as a simple food shock. The key difference between 1992 and 2002 is that the latter crisis can be attributed to a number of factors other than climate, among them structural imbalance, governance, economic and social decline, HIV/AIDS and to a lesser extent drought. The crisis produced a substantial emergency response but also drew attention to the overall plight of Southern Africa, where poverty and food insecurity are on the increase and which have been compounded by a worsening HIV/AIDS situation.

A number of reviews and reports have attempted to shed light on this complex mix of factors and to gauge appropriate policy responses. Although the worst aspects appear to be waning in parts of the region, its causes are still largely in place. Nearing a major policy review and assessment, Oxfam-GB has taken the opportunity to reflect on the experiences of the past three years to better understand the underlying causes, to re-assess what needs to be done to mitigate its recurrence, and to look back at the livelihood strategies in the region and evaluate the factors that affect these. A number of Oxfam-GB staff in both Oxford and within the regional and national offices of Southern Africa have recognised that increasing numbers of households are now less able to cope with even relatively small crop losses and food price increases. Questions around the definition of the crisis have been raised, debating whether this was a “food crisis” in the “classical” sense or a crisis surrounding people’s livelihoods with long-term implications for Oxfam-GB’s response and strategy. Indeed, unless the underlying causes of long-term vulnerability in people’s livelihoods are addressed, an increased frequency and severity of humanitarian crises in southern Africa will be inevitable, and particularly crises of unusually severe food insecurity which threatens people’s lives and livelihoods.

This paper sets out to inform the development of Oxfam-GB’s strategy to promote sustainable livelihoods in the region through programmes and advocacy, by providing an analysis of the different factors affecting people’s food and livelihood security. In particular, this research has been commissioned to “*identify the critical underlying causes of the food crisis in four southern Africa countries, namely Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique, in the 2002-2003 period and the short to medium term solutions required to address them and their relationship to longer term issues*”. Realising the broad nature of these areas, the research specifically sets out to:

1. Develop a brief outline of the extent of the crisis in the region over the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 periods;
2. Review the impacts of HIV/AIDS on people’s livelihoods, looking particularly at the effects of the epidemic on households and communities over time and recognising the critical role of gender relations in mediating effects;
3. Review the impact of the removal of agricultural subsidies on livelihood and food production in the region, with particular attention on how the removal of subsidies has affected food production and the livelihood situation of households and communities;
4. Review the impact of the removal of price controls on food crops and how this has affected the access of food for poor households recognising the ways gender mediates access;
5. Identify how drought has contributed to the crisis;

6. Review the impact of the land reform programme on food security especially in Zimbabwe;
7. Develop policy recommendations that are gender sensitive for governments, donors, regional bodies and other actors on the above areas on how to address the situation in order to prevent recurrence of the 2002-2003 situation, further decline in food security, to support any progress made on food security and to promote further livelihood security in ways that enhance gender equality within the next two to three years.

Using these objectives as a framework, the report has been structured in the following manner. Firstly, an outline of the extent of the food crisis in the region in the period 2002 to 2004 has been laid out. This is followed by sections focusing on the impacts of HIV/AIDS on people's livelihoods, the impact of the removal of agricultural subsidies on livelihood and food production, the impact of removal of price controls on food crops, the impact of drought on the region and the impact of land reform. *A summary of the key policy and strategy implications are then distilled from the analysis followed by a number of suggested policy recommendations.* Some key references have been referred to throughout the analysis, which are detailed at the end, as well as an interview list of individuals who provided insights into this recent crisis and volunteered recommendations for Oxfam-GB's future approach (see appendix one).

## **2. OUTLINE OF THE EXTENT OF THE CRISIS IN THE REGION, 2002 - 2004**

### *Introduction:*

The objective of this section is to develop a brief outline of the extent of the food crisis in the region over the 2002-2003 period in order to provide the context for the analysis in the paper. In 1992, the Southern African region's food security crisis was the result of an extreme global El Niño event, which triggered widespread drought conditions. The sizeable reductions in regional food production did not, however, lead to famine. A decade later, a food crisis in the same region has led to unparalleled levels of hardship for many southern Africans. This has resulted from a range of "entangling crises" such as rainfall failure, widespread disruptions in food availability, failures of governance, extreme levels of prevailing poverty and the continuing erosion of livelihood strategies through HIV/AIDS.

Ailsa Holloway of the Disaster Mitigation for Sustainable Livelihoods Programme of the University of Cape Town has argued that the recent emergency is a perfect reflection of disaster risk at its clearest (2003). Risk has been driven upwards by often silent but intensifying conditions of political, socio-economic and environmental vulnerability, which requires a modest external threat such as an unexceptional drought, to trigger widespread suffering. Oxfam-GB concurs with this perspective on increasing vulnerability recognising that as a result of the complex set of issues, including rapid economic decline, the erosion of traditional structures, and increasing poverty of the most vulnerable households over the past decade, the burdens on already near-exhausted kinship support are becoming intolerable (Cocking, 2003).

### *Chronology of the crisis:*

Southern Africa is a region not historically regarded as "disaster prone". Indeed, few practitioners working in the public health, education or social sector in Zimbabwe in the 1980s would have predicted the extent of the country's recent and ongoing humanitarian crisis (Loewenson, 2003), which is arguably the worst affected of the six Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries that have received humanitarian support over the past two years. It is therefore a crucial

question as to why an historically stable area needed such drastic support from the international community.

In October 2001, Save the Children-UK conducted a Household Economy Approach training session in two districts in Malawi, which raised the alarm that the population in these areas were facing the potential for a significant food shortfall (SCF, 2002). This result was validated by a follow-up study, which led the organisation to host a donor meeting in Lilongwe in November 2001 to alert relevant institutions and to elicit a response strategy. Nutrition surveys were conducted in the same Malawian districts in December to support the position, which confirmed the serious nature of the situation. Intensive lobbying of donors and the international community commenced to support a wide-scale intervention in Malawi. However, by February 2002 it had become clear that the food shortage was a regional issue and the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) issued a Special Alert warning of four million people at risk.

Simultaneously, other international agencies, including Oxfam-GB, were independently carrying out investigations into the extent of the problem. Initially there was no co-ordination amongst agencies until a meeting was facilitated in April 2002 to allow non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to share information and develop a joint Position Paper on the crisis, which was sent to the United Kingdom's Secretary of State for International Development. During this same period, national governments of the affected countries were slow to admit that the problems were serious and it was not until February that Malawi declared a State of Emergency. Zimbabwe waited until April once the national elections were conducted. The international community began to accept that a massive food shortage was a reality and the UN's Inter-Agency Standing Committee Policy Working Group set up a co-ordination of crop and food supply assessment missions to the region. The missions took place over April and May 2002 and led to the situation being described as a "crisis of enormous dimensions" (SCF, 2002). In order to streamline activities, the World Food Programme (WFP) launched a Regional Emergency Operation (EMOP) in July 2002, which superseded all existing WFP activities in the region<sup>2</sup>.

Despite the EMOP, the crisis still received insufficient attention with a slow response from some governments and donors (SCF, 2002). Throughout this period, individuals and communities experienced the erosion or collapse of their traditional livelihood strategies. Erratic weather since 2000 meant poorer farmers exhausted their coping strategies by 2002, which, combined with a general poor macro-economic situation across SADC, inappropriate government policies, some of which caused intense political instability in Zimbabwe, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic, drastically destabilised food security in the region. This range of "entangling crises" resulted in an inability for livelihood strategies to adequately support people's lives. Later in 2002 it was evident through reports and internal discussions that international agencies realised that it was not only a food shortage, predicated upon "traditional" causes, but a situation reflecting a widespread livelihoods crisis. Despite this realisation, agencies seemed unable to move beyond their emergency response procedures and engage coherently with the livelihood crisis in different ways.

By December 2002, the crisis was starkly evident in the figures produced by the Regional Vulnerability Assessment Committee. For the six countries covered by the formal emergency, 15.2 million people were considered to be in need, or 26 percent of the population of those countries, requiring food aid amounting to 735kt (000 tons) for the period December 2002 to March 2003. Although the general perception existed in early 2004 that the crisis was becoming something of the past, SADC confirmed that most southern African countries might not be able to meet their food requirements for the 2004-2005 marketing season as a result of poor rains (WFP, 2004). Indeed, during a Mid-season Strategic Assessment and Disaster Preparedness Meeting in Mozambique in

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<sup>2</sup> [www.reliefweb.int](http://www.reliefweb.int) Regional Humanitarian Assistance Strategy in Response to the Crisis in Southern Africa (US\$ 611 million appeal for 12.8 million people)

November 2003 it was concluded that the late onset and erratic rainfall during the first half of the 2003-2004 season in the sub-region has led to an overall reduction in area planted and reduced production prospects for the season. Thus the reality of the situation in the first quarter of 2004 was that many parts of the region were showing signs of acute as well as chronic food insecurity, which undermined claims that this was an one-off crisis and that affected countries would soon regain levels of security enjoyed in the past.

In late 2003 and in early 2004, Oxfam-GB recognised the implications of a long-term situation of acute and chronic food insecurity and embarked upon a process of detailed introspection of policy and strategy to ensure an adequate response in the future. Many other international agencies were also underway with such analysis in order to ensure their planning prepared them adequately to be part of what some have called a “new” paradigm of development engagement in the region.

*An analysis of the response:*

Despite widespread acknowledgement that the humanitarian response was a result of a complex web of “entangling crises”, in particular the undermining impact of HIV/AIDS, a general perception persists that this was a food crisis caused primarily by drought. Evidently there is also sensitivity that the situation was grossly exaggerated and that the rhetoric and imagery of famine were completely misplaced. As organisations consolidate and assess their response, it is evident that, generally speaking, many individuals were not adequately supported at the outset with an accurate analysis of the underlying causes to ensure a better response overall. As the wheels of a massive (and effective) humanitarian operation began to turn, individuals involved from international agencies to national governments concentrated on the situation at hand in order to save lives and mitigate immediate suffering. Debating a precise, accurate definition of what was unfolding was left to rapid appraisals or to academics based in distant capitals. A poor understanding of the nature of the crisis meant, however, that many of responses were weak at the onset.

The institutional weaknesses of national and international agencies, in particular government departments, responsible for stewarding the response to the crisis are essential to understand what transpired and, indeed, to improve future responses. Save the Children-UK noted that early warnings from household surveys in Malawi and Zimbabwe made by NGOs working in communities in November 2001 led to little response with a delay of three months before an United Nations reaction was triggered (2002). A related issue was that the old indicators of acute hunger were poor predictors of household collapse that occur due to chronic hunger. Save the Children-UK noted the harm that was caused for chronically poor households by waiting for such indicators to intervene and by structuring interventions outside the wider framework of public policy and accountability that defines how states are meeting the social needs of citizens (2002).

After the 1992 crisis, the concerted efforts of SADC structures, national governments, NGOs and international assistance partners successfully averted widespread loss and starvation during the 1990s, but ‘one unintended outcome of this prolonged international humanitarian assistance may have been to discourage local initiative for the ownership of and responsibility for disaster risk’ (Holloway, 2003). There is no question that the crises necessitated a concerted external response, but the duration and relief orientation of these responses has led to a dominant approach that is reactive and dependent on outside initiative and financial support. It is clear that many Southern African countries wait for irrefutable evidence of crisis and then seek international aid rather than building anticipatory capabilities that reduce disaster risk proactively, despite erratic rainfall patterns that are the norm (Holloway, 2003). Once the disaster is acknowledged national governments do not seem to take responsibility to be transparent about their ability and progress in accessing food, which is necessary to supplement that procured by the international community.

It is thus clear that some dependency has been created since 1992 and that strategies need to be evolved to help SADC structures and individual member states play a more proactive role in dealing with disaster and vulnerability. However, in the past the response was less about food delivery and more about national governments and agencies working with outside partners in order to engage with the problem collectively. In the recent response, a far less diversified and creative response was forthcoming, which looked at alternative uses of food aid. The provision of food was the dominant and over-arching intention. This will have further implications for ownership of future responses and other unintended consequences. Agencies involved in the provision of food need to evaluate the consequences of this approach and consider the reasons for a less diversified use and application of the food aid.

*Building resilience for mitigation:*

It is evident that livelihood strategies in the region have been steadily eroded over the past two decades. Remittances, particularly from mining, that underwrote consumption back in the home (usually rural) areas as well as for providing funds to buy farm inputs, hire farm labour and tractors, and to invest in cattle, dried up as the sector faced increasing economic pressures and restructured (see Wiggins, 2003a). This was compounded by a decline in formal jobs in many regional cities along with falling wages in real terms, which effectively cut back on the urban remittances flowing back into the rural areas. Economic stagnation in many of the regional economies left governments without the revenues to invest, to provide services, or to subsidise their economies. Coupled with this, inadequate agricultural policies, which favoured large-scale commercial enterprises, did little to underpin a small farmer sector ensuring that they marketed little if any produce and were largely net buyers of food, depending on farm labouring and non-farm activities to provide cash.

Regional agriculture faces major challenges including unfavourable international terms of trade, mounting population pressure on land, and environmental degradation. Over the past two decades there have been profound transformations in livelihood systems in Southern Africa, set in motion by Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes, the removal of agricultural subsidies and the dismantling of parastatal marketing boards (Bryceson and Bank, 2000). As a result of these and other issues, many African households have shifted to non-agricultural income sources and diversified their livelihood strategies. Despite the evident diversification out of agriculture, rural production remains an important component of many rural livelihoods throughout sub-Saharan Africa. 'African rural dwellers ...deeply value the pursuit of farming...food self-provisioning is gaining in importance against a backdrop of food inflation and proliferating cash needs' (Bryceson, 2000, cited in Cousins, 2001). Participation in "small-plot agriculture" is highly gendered, with women taking major responsibility for it as one aspect of a multiple livelihood strategy<sup>3</sup>.

Another issue that is related to increasing vulnerability in the region is the recognition that this is affecting some individuals and groups more than others. Vulnerability is not uniform across communities. Many papers reflecting on the crisis have repeatedly stressed the greater vulnerability of women and girls, of children — especially those orphaned by AIDS — of the elderly, the sick, the disabled, those without education or formal skills, the landless (including the former permanent farm workers of Zimbabwe), amongst others (Wiggins, 2003a). In order to understand the reality of vulnerability on the ground (in order to develop effectively targeted interventions) a disaggregated approach to rural communities is required and an understanding of power relations within these groups, with a commitment to reaching those who are most at risk. In particular, a focus on gender relations is crucial in this regard.

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<sup>3</sup> Access to land-based natural resources remains a vital component of rural livelihoods particularly as a safety net. In this context, land tenure becomes increasingly important for the diverse livelihood strategies pursued by different households.



Hence most countries have seen the bulk of their rural populations left dependent on rain-fed farming, barely managing to subsist at poverty levels in years without shocks, leaving them highly vulnerable to the vagaries of the weather, as well as to those arising in the economy and from government policy (Wiggins, 2003a). The increase in the number of vulnerable households meant that any crisis, whether it be due to climatic shocks, civil disturbance or economic mismanagement, becomes increasingly difficult for the communities to absorb (FAO, 2003). Devereux has argued that the recent crisis, caused in his view by three major factors – AIDS, market liberalisation and governance failures – suggest that new needs for social protection are emerging, which are different from the past (2003). These factors, which all impact negatively on informal social security systems, are generally compounding the poverty and vulnerability of people throughout the region. However, the likelihood of social protection being provided by national governments in the short-term is not promising, as major constraints exist such as fiscal austerity within state institutions. In addition, given the close linkages between chronic and transitory food insecurity, the challenge arises how best to support people through short-term crises while reducing their long-term vulnerability.

### **3. THE IMPACTS OF HIV/AIDS ON PEOPLE'S LIVELIHOODS**

#### *Introduction:*

This section sets out to review the impacts of HIV/AIDS on people's livelihoods, looking particularly at the effects of the epidemic on households and communities over time and recognising the critical role of gender relations in mediating effects. It will analyse the specific gender differentiated changing needs of households and communities affected by HIV/AIDS.

It is now well recognised that household food insecurity in rural and urban Southern Africa cannot be properly understood if HIV/AIDS is not factored into the analysis. Carolyn Baylies notes that HIV/AIDS can, on one hand, be treated in its own right as a shock to household food security, but on the other, it has such distinct effects that it is a shock like none other (2002). Livelihoods-based analysis of linkages between food security and HIV/AIDS show that the impact is systemic, affecting all aspects of rural livelihoods (Haddad and Gillespie, 2001); and that effective analysis of the causes and outcomes of HIV/AIDS requires a contextual understanding of livelihoods unique to a given area and/or social groups (SADC FANR VAC, 2003).

However, as the FAO have argued, despite the fact that the epidemic is now in its third decade in Africa, available analysis to date provides a very murky picture as to how HIV/AIDS is affecting the agricultural sector – its structure, cropping systems, relative costs of inputs and factors of production, technological and institutional changes, and levels of production and marketed surplus (Jayne *et al*, 2004). Much of the current “knowledge” on HIV/AIDS and food security is based upon a few empirical studies and a range of material that embodies “anecdotal recycling” (Gillespie, 2003). Most rigorous household-level studies have measured the effects of death *in their households* on household-level outcomes, typically over a two to five year time frame. Given the dearth of longitudinal household data over a long time period and methodological limitations, the longer-term effects of AIDS, and particularly the community-level effects, have yet to be rigorously measured. A greater number of empirical datasets and quantitative impact studies are necessary to have a clearer and more accurate understanding of what is going on in different countries. It is with these caveats in mind that the available empirical studies on the effects of HIV/AIDS on the agricultural sector and rural economy should be viewed.

This is not to understate the multiple impacts of HIV/AIDS on the rural economy in the region. This raises a wider and important point that the HIV/AIDS epidemic in southern Africa is taking place in

a context of already fragile economies. Disentangling the relative impact of HIV/AIDS on food security in Zimbabwe from the current economic collapse, for instance, would be difficult. Perhaps the more important point is that these issues are mutually reinforcing. The challenge for analysts, policy makers, and donors is to understand with greater precision how the rural socio-economy is being affected by the disease, and consequently how rural development policy should be modified to better achieve national agricultural sector objectives. Because of the long-wave nature of the AIDS epidemic, the full impact of the disease will not manifest until the next several decades (Barnett and Whiteside, 2002). For this reason, assessments of what is happening now do not provide a reliable picture of what will be happening in the future.

#### *HIV/AIDS and agriculture:*

The claim that the current Southern African humanitarian crisis is inextricably linked to the widespread HIV epidemic, which has deepened the crisis, is supported in much of the food security literature and current thinking (see Harvey, 2003). This claim is underpinned by the fact that the region has the highest prevalence rate in the world (Lesotho 31%; Malawi 16%; Mozambique 13%; Swaziland 33%; Zambia 22% and Zimbabwe 34%), with infection levels around 25 percent of the population, 58 percent of the affected being women (UNAIDS, 2002). All dimensions of food security – availability, stability, access and use of food – are affected where the prevalence of HIV/AIDS is high. As the current crisis in southern Africa has shown, those living with or affected by chronic illness have less labour, spend time caring for others, and have decreasing experience and skills. They may have to sell off productive assets, or leave them under-utilised, and probably have to adapt their livelihood strategies, which are sometimes risky in nature, in order to cope.

As indicated above, between 60 and 80 percent of the population in SADC countries depend on small-scale or subsistence agriculture for their livelihoods, so the impact of the epidemic on this sector is crucially important. While agriculture is central to many African countries, not least of all for household survival, there are marked differences among countries in terms of current economic conditions and agricultural and economic potential. Generally, however, this sector is facing increasing pressure from heightened levels of poverty, dwindling inputs and a lack of support services, amongst other issues. The additional impact of HIV/AIDS on these besieged agricultural systems is thus severe. The major impacts on agriculture include serious depletion of human resources, diversions of capital from agriculture, loss of farm and non-farm income and other psychosocial impacts that affect productivity (Mutangadura, Jackson and Mukurazita, 1999). The potential impact of HIV/AIDS on agriculture may include:

- A decrease in the area of land under cultivation at the household level (due to a lack of labour stemming from illness and death among household members).
- A decline in crop yields, due to delays in carrying out certain agricultural interventions such as weeding and other inter-cultivation measures as well as cropping patterns.
- Declining yields may also result from the lack of sufficient inputs, such as fertiliser and seeds.
- A reduction in the range of crops produced at the household level.
- A loss of agricultural knowledge and farm management skills, due to the loss of key household members due to AIDS.
- The resultant psychosocial impact of the AIDS death (partly through stigma) and the long-term implications of this on agricultural production.
- Decline in livestock production as the need for cash and the loss of knowledge and skills may force some families to sell their animals.

In largely agrarian societies, the HIV/AIDS epidemic is intensifying existing labour bottlenecks, proving a barrier to traditional mechanisms of support during calamities, adding to the problems of

rural women, especially female-headed farm households arising from gender division of labour and land rights, and deepening macroeconomic crises by reducing agricultural exports.

Difficulties with food production lead to poor nutrition: both protein-energy malnutrition and deficiencies in micronutrients such as iron, zinc and vitamins (Barnett and Whiteside, 2002). Poor nutrition leads to compromised immune systems, making individuals more susceptible to infection in general. Research has shown that the onset of the disease and even death might be delayed in well-nourished HIV-positive individuals, and diets rich in protein, energy and micronutrients help to develop resistance to opportunistic infections in AIDS patients (Gillespie *et al*, 2001). Barnett and Whiteside argue that for rural populations, the impact of HIV/AIDS on nutrition is potentially serious and an issue that has been largely overlooked in the focus on prevention (2002).

Apart from the multiple impacts on small-scale or subsistence agriculture, there is increasing concern that large-scale commercial agriculture is experiencing variations of the issues described above and, in particular, is losing to HIV/AIDS a significant and increasing proportion of its labour force – both men and women. De Waal and Tumushabe argue that this is not because rates of HIV are higher among workers in the agricultural sector, both commercial and small-scale subsistence, than elsewhere but because the structure of the agricultural sector, especially the smallholder sub-sector, is such that it is much less able to absorb the impacts of the human resource losses associated with the epidemic (2003). Similarly, HIV/AIDS is affecting food security through its multiple impacts on remittances and employment opportunities (casual labour and seasonal labour), outside of the subsistence and small-scale agricultural production.

#### *HIV/AIDS' effects on livelihood coping strategies:*

The HIV/AIDS epidemic is eroding the socio-economic well being of households and threatens the social cohesion of communities (See Lamptey *et al*, 2002). For households, the impact is different from that of other diseases. Those infected are most likely to be at the peak of their productive and income-earning years. Households feel the impact as soon as a member falls ill. This is associated with a decline in income as the member's ability to work decreases, while living costs increase, such as medical and funeral expenses.

The literature on the impact of adult illness and death on household livelihood or coping strategies suggests that individuals and households go through processes of experimentation and adaptation as they attempt to cope with immediate and long-term demographic change (see SADC FANR VAC, 2003). It is believed that households under stress from hunger, poverty or disease will be adopting a range of strategies to mitigate their impact through complex multiple livelihood strategies. These entail choices that are essentially “erosive” (unsustainable, undermining resilience) and “non-erosive” (easily reversible) (see SADC FANR VAC, 2003). The distinction between erosive and non-erosive strategies depends crucially on a household's assets (for example, natural capital, physical capital, financial capital, social capital and economic capital), which a household can draw upon to make a livelihood. As an example of the distinction between erosive and non-erosive strategies, the example of livestock sales is revealing (SADC FANR VAC, 2003). Sales of chickens, goats or cattle are classic coping strategies that households all over sub-Saharan Africa engage. Some level of livestock sales is normal and does not result in increased poverty. At a certain point, however, household livestock holdings reduce to the level where they are no longer sustainable. At this point, livestock sales become erosive.

Consumption reducing and switching strategies are generally the first line of defence against food shortage. Households may, for example, switch to “wild foods” or skip entire days without eating. Another option for households under stress is the removal of children from school in order to release them for household strategies requiring labour or to relieve costs associated with school

attendance (fees, uniforms, stationary). The “erosive” nature of such a strategy is the diminishing stock of human capital for future livelihood options. Another “negative” for food security is that these children may be removed from school feeding schemes and denied opportunities for nutritional balance.

Therefore what the literature on food security and AIDS suggests, is the possibility of substantially increased vulnerability to other shocks, such as drought or conflict, the emergence of new types of vulnerability, the erosion of some capacities and skills for coping with shocks and adaptation and emergence of new capacities in response to these threats (Harvey, 2003). In essence the relationship between HIV/AIDS and food security is bi-directional: vulnerability and food insecurity feed into the risky behaviour that drives the epidemic; and the impact of HIV/AIDS exacerbates food insecurity, which again feeds into risk.

### *New Variant Famine?*

In *extremis*, De Waal and Tumushabe argue, HIV/AIDS is creating a ‘new variant famine’ (2003). The advent of a generalised HIV/AIDS epidemic in combination with drought and food crisis threatens to create this ‘famine’ across many parts of southern Africa. This hypothesis posits that HIV/AIDS-affected regions are facing a new kind of acute food crisis in which there is no expectation of a return to either sustainable livelihoods or a demographic equilibrium. To the contrary, the impacts of HIV/AIDS on agrarian households mean that they are (a) more susceptible to external shocks and (b) less resilient in the face of these shocks. This “famine” also threatens a vicious cycle of increasing mortality from multiple causes.

De Waal and Whiteside highlight four new factors, which characterise those affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic; household labour shortages, loss of assets and skills due to adult mortality, the burden of care for sick adults and orphans and the vicious interactions between malnutrition and HIV (2002). The impact of these new factors is that the effectiveness of traditional strategies used to cope with famine are reduced and in some cases rendered impossible or dangerous. They conclude that in ‘new variant famine’ the prospects for a sharp decline into famine are increased, and the possibilities for recovery are reduced (Harvey, 2003).

It is important to recognise the position around ‘new variant famine’ although questions remain about the hypothesis. While the analysis is largely correct (for example, by the fact that AIDS is weakening and killing the productive age adults who usually survive famines), use of the term “famine” tends to lock people into discussion and conceptualisation of a relatively short-term event that can be overcome in a few years. The reality is that the high prevalence rates in southern Africa will ensure that many poor people will not “recover” easily, many others will die or become impoverished every year, and institutions will continue to be weakened. AIDS is a long-wave event, which requires different, long-wave responses (Barnett and Whiteside, 2002). There is also the risk, pointed out by Paul Harvey, that the hypothesis about the possible future impact of HIV/AIDS can get transformed into an explanation of the current food crisis in southern Africa (2003). Loewenson argues that it would be a mistake to attribute the depth of the current crisis purely to HIV/AIDS, and while mainstreaming HIV/AIDS interventions into current programmes is critical and necessary, it is simply insufficient if the underlying political, economic and social drivers of the level of household vulnerability are left un-addressed (2003).

There have thus been objections about the implied use of the ‘new variant famine’ to explain the 2002 southern Africa crisis when in fact a famine did not occur, in the conventionally understood sense of high levels of acute malnutrition and excess starvation related mortality (Harvey, 2003). For example a misrepresentation of the HIV problem risks causing inappropriate programming in response to HIV/AIDS and risks a neglect of equally important problems affecting rural areas. A

better conceptualisation is that HIV/AIDS is a correlation of the food crisis, not a cause. It is clear that HIV/AIDS will remain only one of a host of complex causes of food insecurity in sub-Saharan Africa and it is important that these are not overly marginalized in the new found enthusiasm on the part of the international aid community for addressing the links between AIDS and food security (Harvey, 2003).

### *HIV/AIDS and gender*

There are a number of interlocking reasons why women are more vulnerable than men to HIV/AIDS, which include female physiology, women's lack of power to negotiate sexual relationships with male partners, especially in marriage, and the gendered nature of poverty, with poor women particularly vulnerable (Walker, 2002). Inequities in gender run parallel to inequities in income and assets. Thus women are vulnerable not only to HIV/AIDS infection but also to the economic impact of HIV/AIDS. This is often a result of the gendered power relations evident in rural households (Waterhouse and Vifjhuizen, 2001)<sup>4</sup>, which can leave women prone to the infection of HIV. With increasing economic insecurity women become vulnerable to sexual harassment and exploitation at and beyond the workplace, and to trading in sexual activities to secure income for household needs (Loewenson and Whiteside, 1997).

As a result, women have experienced the greatest losses and burdens associated with economic and political crises and shocks (Collins and Rau, 2001), with particularly severe impact from HIV/AIDS. The epidemic exacerbates social, economic and cultural inequalities (economic need, lack of employment opportunities, poor access to education, health and information), which define women's status in society. Collins and Rau have considered a number of the linkages between gender inequalities and HIV/AIDS (2001), namely:

- *Breakdown of household regimes and attendant forms of security*: Decades of changes in economic activity and gender relations have placed many women in increasingly difficult situations. HIV/AIDS has accelerated the process and made "normal" sexual relations very risky. Women whose husbands have migrated for work are afraid of the return of the men knowing that they may be HIV-infected. Although poorly documented, the range and depth of women's responsibilities have increased during the era of HIV/AIDS. More active care giving for sick and dying relatives have been added to the existing workload. Children have been withdrawn from school, usually girl-children first, to save both on costs and to add to labour in the household. Thus HIV/AIDS is facilitating a further and fairly rapid differentiation along gender lines.
- *Loss of livelihood*: Whether women receive remittances from men working away from home, are given "allowances", or earn income themselves, HIV/AIDS has made the availability of cash more problematic.
- *Loss of assets*: Although poorly documented, fairly substantial investments in medical care occur among many households affected by HIV/AIDS. These costs may be met by disinvestments in assets. Household food security is often affected in negative ways. Furthermore, in many parts of Africa, women lose all or most household assets after the death of a husband.
- *Survival sex*: Low incomes, disinvestments, constrained cash flow – all place economic pressures on women. Anecdotal evidence and some studies indicate that these pressures push a number of women into situations where sex is coerced in exchange for small cash or in-kind payments.

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<sup>4</sup> Waterhouse & Vifjhuizen have edited a detailed account of gender, land and natural resources in different rural contexts in Mozambique, which rigorously addresses the power relations women face in the context of the rural household.

In rural areas, women tend to be even more disadvantaged due to reduced access to productive resources and support services. A number of studies have shown that women who are widowed due to HIV/AIDS sometimes lose rights to land, adding to an already precarious situation (see Drimie, 2002). In some contexts, if a widow does not marry her husband's brother she loses access to her husband's property. The issue of AIDS and inheritance is therefore particularly important in this context. Many customary tenure systems provide little independent security of tenure to women on the death of their husband, with land often falling back to the husband's lineage. While this may, traditionally, not have posed problems, it may create serious hardship and dislocation in the many cases of AIDS-related deaths. The practice of widow inheritance is often the only option open to a widow for retaining access to land, which contributes to the further spread of infection.

### *The impact on institutions and communities*

The main effects of HIV/AIDS at community level are through the health of community members, effects on demographic composition and structure of community, educational attainment, labour force and the quantity and quality of service providers, including those of organisations such as Oxfam-GB (Mullins, 2001). As has been emphasised by Wiggins, some of the more damaging impacts for farm households and communities may be those arising from wider processes, including the likely reduction in public services to support agriculture resulting from loss of key staff and pressure on budgets (2003a). The impact on Ministries of Agriculture will, in particular, raise significant challenges for Oxfam-GB when looking towards programming.

In service-oriented sectors such as Ministries of Agriculture, which generally comprise the largest staff components of governments, AIDS deaths reduce the quality and quantity of services. In addition to the direct loss of skill and institutional memory, financial costs increase for training of new staff, increased demand for health care, funeral payouts and pensions. This weakened government capacity obstructs its ability to not only meet its mandate, such as the provision of extension services and other agricultural support, but also to meet new kinds of demands that will be forthcoming from AIDS-affected communities. Critical examples include the growing numbers of orphans and vulnerable children who require a whole range of services; changing demographic patterns in communities that place more burdens on the elderly and children; and increased disease burden. Finally, the impoverishing effect of AIDS on households simply heightens the services demanded of the state and its partners (UN, 2003).

By killing productive adults who are key family providers, HIV/AIDS shatters the social networks that provide households with community help and support (Barnett and Rugalema, 2001; UN, 2003). Particularly in rural areas, where public services may be absent, traditional community support systems are crucial to impoverished households (UN, 2003). However, anecdotal evidence indicates that HIV/AIDS may be weakening this critical social and economic capital, as traditional knowledge may be gradually lost as working age adults die and leave children orphaned. Survivors are left with few relatives upon whom to depend sometimes compounded by gender and age, which are critical determinants of social exclusion in the face of HIV/AIDS. Orphans, widows, and the elderly find it particularly difficult to depend on other relatives for survival and the burden of caring for sick people and orphans may ultimately overwhelm the ability or willingness of households to do more. Households and communities with fewer adults have less surplus adult-time to help others, undermining community resilience. In rural areas, increasingly impoverished communities may receive fewer visits from traders, or suffer a reduced availability of services and consumer products (UN, 2003). Just as HIV/AIDS-affected households may ultimately disintegrate, so too may HIV/AIDS-affected communities through the loss of significant numbers of their members, economic collapse and social breakdown.

*“New” Responses to HIV/AIDS – as an underlying cause of the crisis:*

Thus HIV/AIDS can be seen to be a “creeping emergency” that progressively erodes the lives and livelihoods of those affected by the epidemic. Barnett and Whiteside describe HIV/AIDS as a ‘long wave event’ the impact of which takes place over many decades and see HIV/AIDS impoverishment as an event that will last as long as a century (2002). They point out that; ‘by the time the wave of HIV infection makes itself felt in the form of AIDS illnesses in individuals, the torrent of the epidemic is about to overwhelm medical services, households, communities’ (Barnett and Whiteside 2002). For these reasons, the developmental effect of HIV/AIDS on agriculture continues to be absent from the policy and programme agendas of many African countries. Many studies on HIV/AIDS that have focused on specific sectors of the economy such as agriculture have been limited to showing the wide variety of impacts and their intensity on issues such as cropping patterns, yields, nutrition, or on specific populations.

It is vital that agencies develop an understanding of how the impact of the epidemic interacts with other factors and therefore the HIV/AIDS epidemic reinforces the need for humanitarian systems to interact more effectively with long-term development assistance, particularly with development actors engaged in responses to food insecurity and HIV/AIDS. The report by Harvey finds that HIV/AIDS acts at many different levels (2003):

- HIV/AIDS is one of many factors contributing to underlying vulnerability (including the little known phenomenon of psychosocial impact).
- HIV/AIDS undermines the ways in which people have traditionally coped with famine and acute crisis.
- HIV/AIDS may increase mortality in famines, as people with AIDS will be less able to cope with reduced food intake and additional disease burdens arising from social disruption.
- Issues associated with crisis may exacerbate the risks of transmission of HIV/AIDS and contribute to the spread of the epidemic.

Agencies responding to crises have a responsibility to understand the ways in which HIV/AIDS is impacting upon livelihoods and to address these issues in their response. Thus issues relating to HIV/AIDS should be considered in all sectors and across the programme cycle. The HIV/AIDS epidemic reinforces the existing need for humanitarian programmes to be gender sensitive: to involve both men and women in decision making, for risks of sexual violence and the need for protection to be recognised and for agencies to strive for empowering approaches where possible.

#### **4. THE REMOVAL OF AGRICULTURAL SUBSIDIES**

##### *Introduction:*

As iterated above, most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have, for a quarter century or more, experienced disappointments in agricultural development with particular problems concerning economic and crisis mismanagement, a decline in extension and social services, budgetary constraints and, most recently, HIV/AIDS, which exacerbates almost all of the problems and challenges currently facing agriculture. The removal of agricultural subsidies, such as for fertilisers and tractor hire services, has also had a profound impact on the total production levels of basic foods, especially maize (FAO, 2003). Agricultural subsidies are defined in this context as a transfer of income to farmers, which comes about as a result of government actions, and would not occur if domestic and international trade were unrestricted.

##### *Economic liberalisation and the withdrawal of subsidies:*

The rapid pace of economic liberalisation in the SADC region has ensured the removal of agricultural subsidies on the premise that they are unsustainable, distort the efficiencies of the market and therefore impact negatively on economic development. Their removal, however, has not been accompanied by adequate safety nets with the result that this has been a major underlying cause of the recent livelihoods crisis in the region. Mbaya has argued that the stringent agricultural reforms instituted under the umbrella of Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (ESAPs) in order for countries to receive loans from international monetary organisations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have largely led to the growing insecurity of the poor in the region (2003). The withdrawal of agricultural subsidies was an important component of ESAPs as part of a strategy to cut back in public sector employment, to implement cost recovery programmes in the health sector and to facilitate the liberalisation of the market, which reduced the safety nets previously enjoyed by poorer people and thus exposing them to the harsh realities of a liberalised economy.

Lambrechts and Barry argue that in Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, maize harvests have declined over a number of years as farmers have experienced a virtual collapse of all essential support mechanisms including state credit, subsidies for agricultural inputs, public investment in agricultural marketing and the provision of government extension services (2003). According to the FAO, in 1980s the area under maize cultivation in Zambia was about one million hectares accounting for about 70 percent of the total cropped area (2003). In 1999 this area had been reduced to 585 000 hectares, a decline of 43 percent largely due to the removal of fertiliser subsidies. The withdrawal of government distribution and procurement agents did not lead to the emergence of dynamic private entrepreneurs servicing remote rural areas and consequently depressed production. It comes as a small surprise that the *Zambian Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)* acknowledges that the 'initial impact of liberalisation on Zambian small farmers has been negative due to the limited opportunities to access both agricultural inputs and credit (Lambrechts and Barry, 2003).

The recent experience of Southern Africa indicates that a lack of agricultural support services often results in food demand far exceeding the supply, as the population increases beyond the region's food production levels, largely through the impact on input prices and food prices. Indeed, economic reforms in Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe have left in their wake a collapse in staple food markets and the inability to balance supply and demand in remote rural areas as state marketing arms and rural depots have closed. In these countries private traders have not materialised to fill the vacuum left by state marketing agents, leaving farmers with no market for their produce (Lambrechts & Barry, 2003). While the withdrawal of guaranteed producer prices in these countries, with the exception of Zimbabwe, has led to price increases for some farmers, others, especially farmers in remote areas, are receiving lower prices than before.

It has been widely recognised that state intervention in staple food markets, including the provision of agricultural subsidies, may encourage corruption and inefficiency. However, as an IMF evaluation of its Zambia programme showed, the withdrawal of public subsidies and marketing support can leave remote producers without buyers and thus increase their vulnerability and poverty (Lambrechts & Barry, 2003). In Malawi, the removal of all forms of maize subsidies resulted in sharp increases in prices for hybrid seed and fertiliser for farmers with a corresponding drop for the purchase of these inputs. The removal of fertiliser subsidies thus restricted farming families from accessing fertiliser technology that had been the key to Malawi's agricultural development strategies as they dealt directly with the country's poor soils (Mandonsela, 2002). Although farm gate prices for maize also rose dramatically during this time, fertiliser prices doubled. In 1992, it took 10 kilograms of maize to pay for one kilogram of fertiliser; in 1996 it took 22 kilograms of maize to obtain that same quantity of fertiliser (Frankenberger *et al*, 2003). Thus as a result of the elimination of subsidies in fertilisers, hybrid maize production declined. The problem with



privatising the fertiliser market and removing control from the Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC) is the highly seasonal nature and risky business of the agricultural production due to a single and highly variable rainfall period. The liberalisation of maize prices and the cost associated with private trade had created a substantial rift in maize values from the start of the harvest season to later in the year. Poor farmers were negatively affected by the increased prices because they were forced to sell maize immediately after harvest at low prices to meet cash needs and then repurchase maize later in the year at substantially higher prices to meet consumption needs (Lambrechts & Barry, 2003).

#### *Agricultural subsidies in the North:*

This situation has been further compounded by the massive subsidisation of agriculture by developed countries. The European Union (EU) is the world's largest subsidiser of agriculture and thus causes the greatest harm to the livelihoods of the world's poorest people in developing countries. Through a combination of high subsidies and high tariffs, EU policies stimulate agricultural overproduction in Europe, fuel artificially low world prices, and constrain and often prevent the access of developing country products to its markets. Similar policies characterise United States agribusiness, which, in 2001, exported wheat for 3.50 (United States) dollars a bushel, which cost American farmers 5.31 dollars to produce (Moseveni, 2003). These developed countries are subsequently flooding developing countries with subsidised goods and thereby creating imperfect competition. This prevents farmers in developing countries from expanding into their own domestic markets and from selling their produce at a fair rate, as they are undercut and sometimes pushed out of the business. For example, the EU imposes quotas on the amount of non-European sugar that can be brought into Europe, which costs Mozambique 61.4 million dollars a year in lost exports (Hari, 2003). There also exists a perception, particularly within developing countries, that food aid, although an imperative to save lives and livelihoods, is in reality legalised dumping in that heavily subsidised countries with massive surpluses can off-load their excess produce.

This is clearly against the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) where developed countries have agreed that in implementing their commitments on market access, they would take into account the particular needs and conditions of developing countries. The subsidies imposed by developed countries have distorted trade and must be phased out in accordance to the WTO agreement. The collapse of the WTO talks in Cancun has clearly been a missed opportunity to make trade fair through changing world trade rules so that they work effectively for the poor. Earlier, at the so-called Development Round of the WTO talks in Doha, it was recognised that agricultural reform was an imperative, which led to developed countries promising to reform their sectors in order to put a stop to the damaging practice of export dumping. This agenda is crucial for Oxfam-GB to help facilitate the enabling environment in which both long and short-term projects are implemented.

#### *Concluding comments:*

Thus, in many ways, market liberalisation encompassing the withdrawal of agricultural subsidies has accelerated the processes of rural economic differentiation and threatened the food security of the poor. In the rural economies of southern Africa, agriculture remains the main potential motor for economic growth as well as the main potential origin of decline. It is this challenge, within the reality of an increasingly liberalised economic terrain that Oxfam-GB must engage. Increasingly options must be found as to how best to address the structural defects and chronic vulnerability of small-scale and subsistence producers who are facing the vagaries of the market and weather without adequate state support. Certainly an important risk reduction measure, which should be articulated by Oxfam-GB, is the improvement of access to agricultural inputs for such farmers. This

will continue to be complemented by the international campaign to reform the very rules in which the imbalances between developed and developing countries are operating.

## **5. THE REMOVAL OF PRICE CONTROLS ON FOOD CROPS**

### *Introduction:*

This section will review the removal of price controls on food crops and how this has affected the access of food for poor households. It is evident from both the general theory behind price stabilisation and price controls (Baulch, 2001) and recent experiences in Southern Africa that food price fluctuations have an important impact on food security, which organisations like Oxfam-GB should take cognisance of when developing livelihood and development programmes. Food price policies and food price volatility have a very real effect on the general welfare of populations and particularly that of the vulnerable, especially in lower income countries and communities.

### *Food price controls:*

Unstable crop prices hurt producers, especially small farmers who may be risk averse, and who are discouraged from producing more than they need for their own consumption by uncertainty caused by changes in crop prices between planting and harvest (Baulch, 2001). Unstable food prices also hurt consumers who rely on frequent purchases of staples, usually white maize in Southern Africa, to meet their calorie needs. The poorest segments of society, especially the urban and landless poor, tend to spend the largest proportion of their income on food and therefore when food price increases take place over a medium period of time, during which incomes are unable to adjust upwards, the impact can be devastating. High food prices had tended to force households to reduce the number of meals per day and change the composition of their food consumption, which was the case in South Africa during the winter of 2002 (Aliber & Modiselle, 2002) and in a number of other SADC countries in the period 2001-2003 (SADC VAC, 2003).

Many governments have therefore attempted to stabilise food prices for a range of welfare objectives and more overt political reasons. Some of the macroeconomic considerations that are linked to food price stability include secure investment through overall economic and political stability:

- Price stabilisation is important in developing countries as instability in prices leads to reduced investment in infrastructure and other public goods needed for an efficient marketing system. Such reduction in investments will affect economic growth adversely.
- Price stability also contributes indirectly to political stability. A sharp price in food prices tends to cause unrest in areas where low-income food consumers are politically organised. Similarly a significant fall in food prices may cause discontent among farmers and lead to conflict. Price policies that avoid such sharp price fluctuations contribute to political stability and in turn have a positive impact on investors' expectations.

Recent modelling of Malawian rural livelihoods has emphasised these issues through suggesting that influencing the mean level of food prices within a country over time is one of the more effective policy packages for promoting growth and poverty reduction (Dorward, 2003). In the short to medium term, a combination of public storage and subsidising consumer prices is often utilised in order to achieve price stability. A price subsidy on selected food items has two positive effects on household food security: it reduces the price of the item relative to other food and non-food goods, and it increases the household's overall purchasing power (Devereux, 2001).

Both these approaches have, however, significant problems of over-inclusion (beyond the most vulnerable), put strain on government budgets and the fiscal position in general, and require timely and technical management decisions. Throughout Southern Africa, with the exception of South Africa, there is considerable experience in holding effective agricultural price ceilings below import parity. A number of countries have, through urban-biased policies, kept downward pressure on agricultural producer prices. In many cases this has created disincentives to produce thereby exacerbating domestic shortages, causing upward pressures on retail prices and creating the need to import. Similarly, effective ceilings on wholesale and retail prices send strong signals to processors to carry the minimum of stocks.

To give an example from the current regional situation, the problems of basic food shortages in Zimbabwe have been compounded by price controls that have seriously disrupted food markets and supply chains across the industry. Government price controls have led to serious shortage of basic commodities and an informal market where the staple maize, if available, sells for more than sixteen times the controlled price. These price controls on staple commodities have resulted in uncontrolled markets. High profit levels have been made by unscrupulous traders both within and between countries due to price differentials, and have served as disincentives for food crop production. However, government interventions in food prices can have a positive impact as well. In Zambia, for example, the re-introduction of government subsidies on food contributed to an improved food security situation in early 2003 (Oxfam-GB Lylayi Lodge Report, 2003). This was despite food price increases over the lean season prior to the harvest being identified as a potential threat to food security.

Thus there is a need for a careful and refined assessment of price controls and their benefits for the poor. Food price controls have become unfashionable in many parts of the developing world with dominant ideological arguments emphasising that they distort markets and therefore create inefficiencies and unsustainable demands on government budgets. The practical argument related to this is that African economies are more open and less regulated now than ever before, as a consequence of economic liberalisation measures, so that any attempt to subsidise food prices in one country will be subverted by traders who can simply buy up this artificially cheap food and sell it in neighbouring countries at market prices (Devereux, 2001). Over the longer term, improvements in agricultural production and the development of market institutions might be expected to reduce the need for this kind of intervention (FFSSA, 2003).

Most of the options for relieving the impact of food price increases that do not involve interventions in fundamental food pricing mechanisms revolve around increasing the income of the poorer segments of society. In terms of the relatively neutral impact that they have on the operation of markets, this approach would appear to be preferable in principle, although targeting and administering them poses major challenges. The most commonly used stabilisation schemes in developing countries are either buffer stocks or a combination of buffer stock and trade policies. Nonetheless, more research is needed in this area particularly as these types of interventions affect the people targeted in Oxfam-GB programming. In addition, these interventions have remained popular with key constituencies with the result that their removal is politically controversial and have led to food riots as prices rise, more recently in Zimbabwe and Malawi in the late 1990s.

#### *The role of Strategic Grain Reserves:*

State holding of stocks addresses very real current problems in Southern Africa related to difficulties of assuring timely importation of food from within the region or further afield and the impact of this on food availability and food prices (FFSSA, 2003). The appropriateness of this type of intervention may be relevant for the medium term, particularly with a number of new ways of holding stocks that are emerging.

With the liberalisation of agricultural marketing and trade in South Africa over the past two decades, effective public policy generally ensured that food prices did not fluctuate out of control and impact too negatively on the poor. During the same period, the private sector responded with its own accommodating and enhancing initiatives. Arguably the most important of these was the development of futures markets (SAFEX's Agricultural Markets Division) to help manage price risk for key locally produced agricultural commodities, in particular yellow and white maize (HSRC, 2003). Not only have these facilitated better risk management, more competitive price formation and more efficient resource allocation in the private sector, but they have, in effect, relieved the public sector of any responsibility to hold strategic stocks, at least in respect of the various major agricultural staples traded (mainly yellow and white maize, sunflower seed and potatoes), since the market now generates the price signals needed to allow the private sector to manage the risks of holding stocks both during and between marketing years.

However, the acid test of the current agricultural pricing and marketing framework will come *when* there is a serious supply shock for white maize in South Africa. There are a number of mechanisms by which the market can be expected to prepare for shortages – partly through hedging on local and international markets and partly through carrying physical stocks – and to respond to them when they do happen – chiefly through substituting yellow for white maize and through importing white maize from elsewhere (production would probably rise in response to the price premium) (Bayley, 1998).

If there is indeed a case for carrying strategic grain reserves, it is likely to be strongest in the instance of white maize, which is most vulnerable to supply shocks. Clearly, having a physical stock on hand in times of shortage has substantial advantages: security, time and shipping cost saving and price cushioning. However, a number of negative factors must be weighed (HSRC, 2003): storage costs; opportunity costs (difficult to estimate because of the unpredictability of price movements subsequent to the purchase of the stock, but at least including the interest payable annual); the pressures of managing the stock efficiently and impartially in the face of powerful lobby groups whose demands are likely to vary from month to month and year to year, depending on market conditions; the disincentive signalled to the private sector to perform a task that almost every international study indicates it does more cost-effectively than the public sector; and the inability, ultimately, to prevent severe price fluctuations in times of severe shortage.

It is interesting to note that in Malawi, following concerns regarding the management of the strategic grain reserve during the recent crisis, which auditors ultimately concluded were the result of poor management arising from appointments not based on merit, the country is currently experimenting with increasing openness and accountability in its SGR management through various interventions including the appointment of a management board representing a wider range of food security stakeholders (FFSSA, 2003). In 2000, the Malawian government commissioned a study to inform future food security policy and to include recommendations that the size and management of the SGR. The study recommended that the size be reduced from its existing level of 167,000 Metric Tonnes to between 30,000 and 60,000 MT, arguing that this would be sufficient to deal with a localised crisis and would also reduce operating costs (Wiggins, 2003b). During 2002 the SGR was replenished to more than 200kt (000 tons), at a cost much higher than the price of earlier sales, resulting in a number of allegations being directed at the government.

It may be concluded that some public holding of stocks to allow government to intervene in the market to reduce price spikes (by selling off public stocks when prices rise), and to insure against running out of stock. It is also usually argued that the stocks have to be held nationally, since this allows sovereign governments to respond speedily to local problems (Wiggins, 2003b). As indicated above, there are arguments as to whether physical reserves should be held or rather to rely

on access to a foreign exchange fund to finance imports when needed. Holding physical reserves eliminates the risk of high international prices for gains or hold-ups in delivering food imports, but they tie up resources in inventories and are subject to potential mismanagement, waste and losses. Recently the SADC Ministers of Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources indicated that the use of futures and options should be considered as an alternative to holding physical stocks by member countries (Wiggins, 2003b). Another important issue is the benefit of holding substantial reserves or smaller stocks that can be supplemented from elsewhere. It is also important to assess who operates the stock and to what regulations. There is currently increasing pressure, particularly after the Malawian experience, for SGR to be managed by largely autonomous agencies, operating to stated objectives and rules, with a regular disclosure of operations.

## **6. THE IMPACT OF DROUGHT ON THE REGION**

### *Introduction:*

This section will identify how drought has contributed to the recent crisis and consider the benefits of utilising alternatives to rain-fed agriculture. Without doubt, the immediate crisis was partly triggered by the drought throughout much of the region during the 2001–2002 crop season, but also included the impact of flooding (Mozambique, Malawi), as well as frosts and hailstorms (Lesotho). All told, the weather during that season was, in many parts of Southern Africa, the worst for farming since the severe drought of 1991–1992 (Wiggins, 2003a).

### *Regional assessment*

As emphasised throughout this paper, agriculture is the mainstay of the majority of the population living in Southern Africa - and is also probably the most weather-dependent of all human activities. In the SADC region agriculture is largely rain-fed with only six percent of arable land under irrigation, which is largely situated in South Africa. Therefore the effects of drought are direct and large on a sector that is increasingly undermined by economic and political factors. When drought begins, the agricultural sector is usually the first to be affected with hydrological and agricultural droughts having been the principal source of fluctuations in the region's food production levels for decades. A single drought has a temporary detrimental effect on food access and availability in rural areas, as well as urban areas with strong rural linkages. A succession of droughts can have a devastating impact on food security and the viability of livelihoods. Thus the late start to the season in 2001 and continuing poor and erratic rains since then has led to a reduction in potential yields and overall crop production throughout the region. Large areas received less than sixty percent of normal rainfall in the 2003/2004 growing season, a situation that will further exacerbate food availability of the region.

In Zambia, a prolonged dry spell during the 2001/2002 growing season in five of the nine provinces sharply reduced yield and production of cereals. Most of this production shortfall in Zambia was attributed to poor rainfall, both in amount and distribution, which have mostly affected the southern half of the country. Similarly, Zimbabwe was hit by an erratic rainfall pattern during 2002/2003 cereal growing season, following on the heels of a severe drought and the collapse of cereal production the previous year. Both these are examples of the seriousness of successive rainfall failures on rural economies based upon agriculture.

A more recent example of erratic rainfall patterns is found in southern Mozambique, which is likely to continue to affect the country's current cropping season in 2004. Despite increased rains early in the year, the cumulative rainfall across the country has been below normal. The rains in January also masked the very poor rains during the most important part of the growing season, from October

to December. In addition, the very hard rains have damaged lowland planting through flash flooding and increased the likelihood of poor harvests in the upcoming season. Thus although rainfall figures may be high overall, the erratic nature of the rain during core agricultural periods is continuing to impact heavily on crops. Central Mozambique has experienced better rainfall although it is crucial that the crops receive adequate water during March. The season appears to be promising in the north, thus revealing the diversity of climatic factors within a country like Mozambique.

The environmental shock of drought will bring collapse only to systems that are already weak owing to poor governance (Lambrechts and Barry, 2003) and other factors such as HIV/AIDS impacts. Despite the recognition that parts of South Africa, Zimbabwe and southern Zambia may have suffered a decline in rainfall, the FAO claim that there is no evidence of major climatic shift (2003), which has been raised within arguments around global warming. The FAO believe that probably more important is the continuing level of decline in the fertility of many soils, as periods of fallow have become shorter or been eliminated entirely, as with growing population density the possibility to open up new lands has decreased (2003). Whether one agrees with this argument or not, it is evident that other environmental factors other than just climate are equally, if not more significant.

It is clear that erratic weather conditions triggered the livelihoods crisis but it would have not reached the recent and ongoing scale if there had not been widespread poverty, poor governance, ill-advised economic policies, failed markets and the compounding force of HIV/AIDS. It is therefore essential that the response cannot be to simply address immediate humanitarian needs but to support long-term recovery and sustainable development.

## **7. REVIEW THE IMPACT OF LAND REFORM**

### *Introduction:*

The relationship between land reform and food security is a complex one, firstly because land reform itself involves a number of distinct programme areas; and secondly because land reform has a variety of different types of impacts on the commercial agricultural sector, both at micro and macro-levels. The simple answer to the question as to the impact of land reform on food security is that household-level food security is enhanced by land reform in proportion to the number of additional households that gain access to land through it (HSRC, 2003). This is an extension of the argument that access to land is part of a multiple-livelihood strategy that is particularly important for poorer households in the region. Moreover, even where agriculture contributes only a modest share of overall household income, it plays an important security role, not least in making households less reliant on purchased food, which can vary greatly in price.

### *Types of land reform:*

Modern theories of land reform derive from, on the one hand, perceptions of the previous structure of land tenure and production relations; and the other, the new pattern to be established, intentionally or otherwise. The transition between the two systems can generally be held to involve the central elements of both the stabilisation of the rural areas and rural population and the redefinition of agriculture within the country's development model. Martin Adams, a key land policy advisor in the region, has distinguished three principal types of land reform (2000):

1. **Imposed redistributive reforms** are those which have controls or prohibitions imposed by law on property rights. Examples include nationalisation, restitution, and redistribution policies

involving expropriation of land on grounds of excessive size, under-utilisation, or ownership by absentee landlords and/or foreigners. The latter is a recent type of land reform adopted in Zimbabwe, which intends to redistribute land defined by these characteristics to small-scale farmers from poor, landless and disadvantaged communities.

2. **Induced redistributive reforms** or "market-based" incentives are those offered by government for social and economic reasons and lead to the restructuring of existing property rights or the creation of new ones. This includes the privatisation of state farms, the redistribution of public lands, and state expenditure on land reclamation development with the subsequent redistribution as private property.
3. **Land tenure reforms** refer to a planned change to adjust or correct the reciprocal rights between proprietors and users, in response to changing economic needs. Examples include the establishment of statutory committees or land boards to organise and supervise the use of common rights and other interests, and tenancy reform to adjust the terms of contract between landlord and tenant. This reform may include confirmation of title, which is set up in order to verify and secure land titles for those who have already a demonstrable claim to the land.

Land reform and agrarian reform are often used interchangeably. Land reform is, however, only one component of agrarian reform. An agrarian reform is a broad term used to describe the attempt to change the agrarian structure, which may include land reform, land tenure reform, and other supportive reforms as well. The intention of agrarian reform has been for the state to move beyond land redistribution and tenure reform and for support for other rural development measures to be implemented. These include the improvement of farm credit, co-operatives for farm-input supply and marketing, and extension services to facilitate the productive use of the land reallocated. The cause of agrarian reform will not be helped if land reform is overemphasised at the expense of other rural development programmes that would benefit a larger number of rural residents.

#### *The benefits of land reform:*

The economic arguments for land reform are complex and contentious (Aliber & Drimie, 2003)<sup>5</sup>. Probably the most widely cited economic argument in favour of redistributive land reform is that smaller-scale producers are more labour using and more productive per unit of land. Therefore, land reform that entails carving up large estates into smaller units promises to increase labour absorption generally while also contributing to greater aggregate production. However, the empirical literature suggests that smaller farms are by no means always more productive, particularly in environments where prospects for intensification are modest.

A more convincing, or at least widely applicable, economic argument is that redistributive land reform can increase the economic self-sufficiency of poor rural households. Even if such redistribution fails to boost, or even leads in a modest sacrifice of, aggregate production, it may be one of the few measures available to government to reduce the incidence of economic marginalisation and associated social problems. However, two questions often vex governments in this regard. First, what is the *net benefit* after taking into account displaced farm worker jobs? And second, *which poor* should benefit, and in terms of *what kind* of agriculture? Redistributive land reform in Southern Africa, for example, has struggled to find a satisfactory balance between very poor households for whom land redistribution realistically offers only a hope of augmenting semi-subsistence production, and less poor households for whom land reform promises the opportunity to become fully-fledged, medium-scale commercial farmers, but of whom relatively few can be helped.

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<sup>5</sup> This section draws heavily on Aliber, M and Drimie, S (2003) 'Land Reform: No Easy Answers', *The Commonwealth in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, December, Abuja, Nigeria.

Arguably the economic rationale for redistributive land reform is clearest where the reform is of the 'land-to-the-tiller' variety, that is, where the land of an absentee landlord is vested in the tenant, as has been the case in some of the land reforms in East Asia. In these situations there is a continuity of the system of production, but with the former tenants enjoying better incentives and more operational control.

In contrast to redistributive land reform, tenure reform is generally expected to contribute to agricultural development in four main ways: i) by encouraging more investment in the long-term productive potential of the land; ii) by increasing the access to and use of credit; iii) by facilitating the emergence of a land market, thus encouraging the movement of land to more efficient users; and iv) by reducing the occurrence of land disputes. That tenure reform favours these effects is not in doubt; however, the extent to which a tenure reform does in fact have these effects depends largely on the presence of complementary reforms, including the liberalisation of input and commodity markets, and the improvement of land administration systems. Another consideration is whether tenure reform may have certain negative consequences, not least the possibility that the increased marketability of land may result in the consolidation of land away from poorer households, whose decisions to sell their land rights may later prove to be to their own – and society's – detriment.

#### *Zimbabwe "fast track" land reform:*

Concerns have been expressed that land reform, unless it is conducted "properly", could imperil the commercial agricultural sector and even national food security, if agricultural land is redistributed to beneficiaries who make less productive use of it than those from whom it was acquired. This has been an argument levelled against the recent Zimbabwe "fast-track" land reform, which began in 2000. The suggestion is that an ill-conceived land reform could negatively affect the rural economy, aggravate poverty levels that are already unacceptably high, and even work to the detriment of the very people who benefit. In Zimbabwe, the fast-track resettlement of the large-scale commercial farms has disrupted production on commercial farms and led to large areas remaining unplanted (as much as 38 percent in the 2002-2003 season), partly since the resettled farmers have not had access to inputs. The land reform programme has not only reduced the total amount of maize available in Zimbabwe, but has also led to a reduction in foreign exchange reserves from tobacco and cotton exports, putting pressure on food imports. Recent reports from the resettlement areas indicate asset stripping, the destruction of farm machinery, environmental degradation, the breakdown of animal health controls particularly because fencing has deteriorated or disappeared, the breakdown of services and a pending crisis around ownership and tenure. These issues raise the spectre of a continuing humanitarian crisis in these areas, or the possibility of the new settlers deserting these farms, which raises significant challenges for future Oxfam-GB programming.

The opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in Zimbabwe, in their recent critique of the government's Land Review Committee and Land Acquisition Bill, argued that one of the reasons why the Committee had been established was because 'the country had plunged into shortages of food especially the staple diet and that this was being linked to the Land Reform Programme' (2003). The MDC believed that the link 'between the current hunger plaguing the country and the haphazard implementation of the Land Reform Programme...made it necessary for the President to commission a study that could show that there were other causes for the agricultural down-turn' (2003). A commission set up by President Robert Mugabe to review his four-year campaign appropriating white-owned farms called the reforms 'an overwhelming success', but statistics provided by the commission indicated the opposite (UN Foundation, 2003). Of the 300,000 peasant families supposed to have been given new land for small-scale farming, only 123,000 had been resettled. Similarly, while the Zimbabwe government has claimed that 50,000 new commercial black farmers were resettled, the commission found that only 4,800 had moved on to the property provided for them.



Lloyd Sachikonye of the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Zimbabwe has written extensively about the plight of farm workers on land reform farms after the “fast track” process began (2002). The research, commissioned by the Farm Community Trust of Zimbabwe, highlights the rapid deterioration of farm worker livelihoods and increased vulnerability of farm workers in face of the redistribution. A large number of farm workers, about 50 percent, have lost employment and are relying on charity of the previous owner and their relatives. Coping mechanisms for this sector have been greatly eroded and opportunities for access alternative sources of income have dried out. Pressure is increasingly being placed upon these farm workers to work for the new settlers, often below the minimal wage, which is creating conflict. The future of these workers is uncertain given the present environment where the political leaders of the new settlers impart contradictory messages to the farm workers.

## **8. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES UNDERLYING THE CRISIS**

This section will attempt to draw out some of the key issues discussed throughout paper in order to provide a basis on which the conclusions and recommendations can be built. This is by no means a comprehensive list as the paper, by its very nature, has attempted to touch on a limited number of pertinent issues facing Oxfam-GB in Southern Africa.

### *Understanding the “entangling crises”:*

Agencies involved in the humanitarian response are increasingly acknowledging that the prevailing situation resulted from a range of “entangling crises” such as rainfall failure, widespread disruptions in food availability, failures of governance, extreme levels of prevailing poverty and the continuing erosion of livelihood strategies through HIV/AIDS. Risk has been driven upwards by often silent but intensifying conditions of political, socio-economic and environmental vulnerability, which requires a modest external threat such as an unexceptional drought, to trigger widespread suffering. Despite increasing analysis and recognition of this, a general perception persists that this was a food crisis caused primarily by drought. Many individuals were not adequately supported at the outset with an accurate analysis of the underlying causes to ensure a better response overall.

Institutional weaknesses of national and international agencies, in particular government departments, responsible for stewarding the response to the crisis are essential to understand what transpired. Local initiative has been discouraged for the ownership of and responsibility for disaster risk through a history of external agencies taking the lead in such activities. This has led to a dominant approach that is reactive and dependent on outside initiative and financial support. A concerted effort to build national capacity and self-reliance is evidently necessary largely through direct involvement and consultation with national agencies, with a clear intention of building local institutions able to respond directly to crises before they emerge. In the 1992 crisis, the response was less about food delivery and more about national governments and agencies working with outside partners in order to engage with the problem collectively. In the recent response, a far less diversified and creative response was forthcoming, which looked at alternative uses of food aid. Agencies involved in the provision of food need to evaluate the consequences of this approach and consider the reasons for a less diversified use and application of food aid.

The analysis is clear that livelihood strategies in the region have been steadily eroded over the past two decades. Oxfam-GB needs to acknowledge this directly and respond accordingly on all fronts. In order to understand the reality of vulnerability on the ground (in order to develop effectively targeted interventions) a disaggregated approach to rural communities is required along with an

understanding of power relations within these groups, with a commitment to reaching those who are most at risk, namely women and children. This re-emphasises the point that new needs for social protection are emerging, which are different from the past. The likelihood of social protection being provided by national governments in the short-term is not promising. In addition, given the close linkages between chronic and transitory food insecurity, the challenge arises how best to support people through short-term crises while reducing their long-term vulnerability.

#### *HIV/AIDS:*

There is an increasing realisation in the region that household and community food insecurity in rural and urban Southern Africa cannot be properly understood if HIV/AIDS is not factored into the analysis. All dimensions of food security – availability, stability, access and use of food – are affected where the prevalence of HIV/AIDS is high. It is also being more widely recognised that the relationship between HIV/AIDS and food security is bi-directional: vulnerability and food insecurity feed into the risky behaviour that drives the epidemic; and the impact of HIV/AIDS exacerbates food insecurity, which again feeds into risk. These issues have a direct bearing on Oxfam-GB programming as they raise substantial challenges about “re-thinking” long-term development.

The additional impact of HIV/AIDS on already besieged agricultural systems in the region is severe. The major impact on agriculture includes serious depletion of human resources, diversions of capital from agriculture, loss of farm and non-farm income and other psychosocial impacts that affect productivity. Thus for rural populations, the impact of HIV/AIDS on farming, farming systems, rural livelihoods and nutrition is potentially serious, the latter being an issue that has been largely overlooked in the focus on prevention. Similarly, HIV/AIDS is affecting food security through its multiple impacts on remittances and employment opportunities (casual labour and seasonal labour), outside of the subsistence and small-scale agricultural production. In response, individuals and communities adopt coping strategies that may be “erosive” or “non-erosive” in nature. It is clear that HIV/AIDS has substantially increased the possibility of vulnerability to other shocks, such as drought or conflict, has led to the emergence of new types of vulnerability and the erosion of some capacities and skills for coping with shocks and adaptation and resulted in the emergence of new capacities in response to these threats.

The analysis is also clear that women have experienced the greatest losses and burdens associated with economic and political crises and shocks with particularly severe impact from HIV/AIDS. The epidemic exacerbates social, economic and cultural inequalities (economic need, lack of employment opportunities, poor access to education, health and information), which define women’s status in society. Thus a number of the linkages between gender inequalities and HIV/AIDS should be considered by programming.

It is therefore vital that Oxfam-GB continues to develop an understanding of how the impact of the epidemic interacts with other factors and reinforces the need for humanitarian systems to interact more effectively with long-term development assistance, particularly with development actors engaged in responses to food insecurity and HIV/AIDS.

#### *Agricultural subsidies and price controls:*

The rapid pace of economic liberalisation in the SADC region has ensured the removal of agricultural subsidies on the premise that they are unsustainable, distort the efficiencies of the market and therefore impact negatively on economic development. Their removal, however, has not been accompanied by adequate safety nets with the result that this has been a major underlying cause of the recent livelihoods crisis in the region. Compounding this situation, developed countries

have been able to exploit markets through their access to large subsidies. At the WTO, it was recognised that agricultural reform was an imperative, which led to developed countries promising to reform their sectors in order to put a stop to the damaging practice of export dumping. This agenda is crucial for Oxfam-GB to help facilitate the enabling environment in which both long and short-term projects are implemented.

In many ways, market liberalisation encompassing the withdrawal of agricultural subsidies has accelerated the processes of rural economic differentiation and threatened the food security of the poor. In the rural economies of southern Africa, agriculture remains the main potential motor for economic growth as well as the main potential origin of decline. It is this challenge, within the reality of an increasingly liberalised economic terrain that Oxfam-GB must engage.

Similarly food price fluctuations have an important impact on food security, which Oxfam-GB should take cognisance of when developing livelihood and development programmes. In the short to medium term, a combination of public storage and subsidising consumer prices is often utilised in order to achieve price stability. The most commonly used stabilisation schemes in developing countries are either buffer stocks or a combination of buffer stock and trade policies. Nonetheless, more research is needed in this area particularly as these types of interventions affect the people targeted in Oxfam-GB programming and, indeed, has remained popular with key constituencies. This raises the political stakes around their removal.

State holding of stocks addresses very real current problems in Southern Africa related to difficulties of assuring timely importation of food from within the region or further afield and the impact of this on food availability and food prices (FFSSA, 2003). The appropriateness of this type of intervention may be relevant for the medium term, particularly with a number of new ways that are emerging that have potential, such as futures markets. The issue of SGR and realistic alternatives is an important area for Oxfam-GB to consider when developing longer-term development programmes, which probably requires research.

#### *The impact of drought:*

The environmental shock of drought will bring collapse to systems that are already weak owing to poor governance and other factors such as HIV/AIDS impacts. It is therefore clear that erratic weather conditions triggered the livelihoods crisis. This would not, however, have reached the recent and ongoing scale without widespread poverty, poor governance, ill-advised economic policies, failed markets and the compounding force of HIV/AIDS. Indeed, even if good rains were to fall in areas suffering from food insecurity, it would not greatly improve the situation because farmers have either run out of seed and fertiliser. This re-emphasises the point that the response to the livelihoods crisis cannot simply address immediate humanitarian needs but must be geared to support long-term recovery and sustainable development.

#### *The impact of land reform:*

The relationship between land reform and food security is a complex one, firstly because land reform itself involves a number of distinct programme areas; and secondly because land reform has a variety of different types of impacts on the commercial agricultural sector, both at micro and macro-levels. The simple answer to the question as to the impact of land reform on food security is that household-level food security is enhanced by land reform in proportion to the number of additional households that gain access to land through it (HSRC, 2003). This is an extension of the argument that access to land is part of a multiple-livelihood strategy that is particularly important for poorer households in the region. Moreover, even where agriculture contributes only a modest

share of overall household income, it plays an important security role, not least in making households less reliant on purchased food, which can vary greatly in price.

## 9. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This section will attempt to develop policy recommendations that are gender sensitive for governments, donors, regional bodies and other actors on the areas discussed throughout this paper. In particular it will focus on how to address the prevailing situation in order to prevent the recurrence of the 2002-2003 livelihoods crisis and a further decline in food security. The recommendations will assist Oxfam-GB to influence governments and donors to review their policies on livelihoods in order to reduce the vulnerability in the region.

### *Relief, rehabilitation and development:*

It is clear from the analysis provided that the situation facing southern Africa is one of chronic food insecurity and is not a crisis resulting from drought or rainfall shortages. The reality is that this is not a “traditional” food crisis, which is transitory in nature, but a long-term development challenge with immediate humanitarian relief and rehabilitation required. The erosion of livelihood strategies in parts of the region due to the “entangling crises” discussed above requires robust and creative thinking about “new” strategies that combine relief, rehabilitation and development beyond a chronological approach. The “bad rains equals food aid” mentality is not applicable if Oxfam-GB is serious about development in the long-term.

Standard practice focuses on social and economic development, punctuated by occasional emergencies that require short-term relief until people get “back on track”. The advent of AIDS in particular underscores the fact that “business as usual” is no longer applicable, as this “creeping disaster” has steadily eroded the livelihood base of millions of people. Increasingly the challenge should be for the development component of the response to go beyond rehabilitation and to be built centrally into projects. This raises an imperative for agencies to seriously consider their medium and long-term assistance priorities, as “silo-orientated”, fragmented development support. For example, the issue of disaster reduction should be factored into relief and rehabilitation operations or these projects will not achieve sustainable outcomes in a region facing the reality of recurrent climate shocks and pervasive social and economic vulnerability.

Debating the distinction between relief and development is not just an academic argument as evidenced in the reality of the international community response to the recent crisis (Harvey, 2003; UN, 2003<sup>6</sup>). In crisis situations across the world, the usual response has been for international agencies to bring in emergency relief along with new implementing teams largely as a separate process to existing long-term development projects that were in place beforehand. Calls for better integration between these processes have a long history in development literature (Buchanan Smith and Maxwell, 1994 cited in Harvey, 2003), which reflects the recognition that the linear concept of a continuum between relief and development has been inadequate. A simultaneous approach has therefore been suggested as a better concept, although with the understanding that there is a powerful argument for a distinctiveness of humanitarian aid.

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<sup>6</sup> See United Nations High Level Committee on Programmes (2003) ‘Organizing the UN Response to the Triple Threat of Food Insecurity, Weakened Capacity for Governance and AIDS, Particularly in Southern and Eastern Africa’, Rome, 18-19 September, available at <http://ceb.unsystem.org/hlcp/session.reports.htm> (9 March 2004). This paper identifies the triple threat of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, deepening food insecurity and reduced government capacity as the new kind of humanitarian crisis facing Southern Africa.

The historical disjuncture between relief and development has been partly caused by the fact that the distinct aims of these two ‘modes’ of analysis and programming have been poorly defined and that the answer lay not in assuming an artificial coherence of purpose, but in specifying more clearly the purpose and limits of each agenda (Darcy and Hofmann, 2003). The problem entails formulating responses that account for the extended and structural nature of the livelihoods crisis, while also responding effectively where people faced a devastating decline in their ability to support themselves. There is thus a need for sustained welfare support to continue at least into the medium term implemented through a comprehensive strategic analysis of the nature of the crisis and how to reduce vulnerability. Part of this challenge will be the reluctance of donors and agencies to continue relief strategies over extended periods of time.

In this context, Oxfam-GB should adopt a “fast track” recovery combined with longer-term consolidation and change in order to “drive down” prevailing vulnerability conditions. The key issue here is about doing things with immediate, tangible impact that are more compatible with development and do not undermine it. The integration of development into an emergency response, rather than limiting it to delivery of seeds and tools, could be facilitated through, for example, the provision of treadle pumps and support for training around small-scale irrigation along with a credit package for irrigation clubs. This type of approach has been summed up by the UN as to recognise, assess and respond to the immediate humanitarian needs (such as insecure access to food, water, health care or education) caused by the “entangling crisis”, while simultaneously and equally urgently planning programmes both to reverse the accelerating erosion of government, community and household capacity and to confront food insecurity and poverty (2003). To succeed in this type of approach a more robust understanding of the underlying situation is required along with creative and pragmatic responses through ongoing development programmes to increasing vulnerability. In particular, active partnerships with a broad range of organisations should be established to ensure that Oxfam-GB ensured relevant expertise and support was secured and sustainability guaranteed. If these types of interventions were successful, government partners would have realistic examples from which to learn for their own interventions and be encouraged to recognise their obligations to their citizens.

These types of approaches may not appear to be “new” to some development practitioners who have been trying to integrate relief, rehabilitation and development components in the field for years. However, few examples of such initiatives have been documented and assessed for widespread learning and dissemination, an issue that became evident at a recent workshop focused on “Mitigating the Impacts of HIV/AIDS in Agriculture and Rural Development”. This workshop was hosted by the Oxfam-GB Regional Office, the FAO sub-regional offices based in Harare, Zimbabwe, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) and the Southern African Regional Poverty Network in an attempt to initialise a process of analysing successes and constraints in mitigating HIV/AIDS through agriculture and rural development, and to define future actions<sup>7</sup>. Similarly, the Regional Offices of Action Aid has recently embarked upon a study to document successful interventions, which combine these elements, in order to inform future programming. A number of cases exist across the region where innovative interventions that attempt to engage with relief and development objectives have been implemented but which have not been shared with a wider audience. There is therefore a need for research and policy to catch up with these experiences on the ground to better understand them, to disseminate the key lessons and to ensure that institutional “memory” is preserved as best as possible. Recognising the need to have a better understanding of the prevailing issues facing poor communities in Southern Africa and the importance of new approaches in order to be more effective is a key challenge for Oxfam-GB emanating from the recent crisis.

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<sup>7</sup> See [www.sarpn.org.za](http://www.sarpn.org.za) for papers and reports of this workshop.

Related to this debate, a “new” mindset seems to be necessary that reflects responsive governance that prioritises developmental initiatives that build local resilience to external and “normal” threats so that a “hazard event” no longer equals a disaster (Holloway, 2003). Despite the clear links between poverty and disaster vulnerability, few developmental players have actively integrated disaster mitigation into their programmes as a developmental priority. As mitigation activities are not linked to any specific or impending disaster event, they should be the responsibility of governmental line-ministries and developmental non-governmental organisations. Encouraging such an approach and helping governments build effective capacity to implement relevant programmes should become a key focus for Oxfam-GB, particularly if their own interventions are to be embedded in an overall conducive environment for development. Such interventions should be potentially wide reaching, and may include social programmes to support child-headed households, strategies that diversify livelihoods beyond dependency on agriculture alone and creative approaches to, for example, rainwater harvesting.

#### *Building sustainable livelihood strategies:*

Long-term sustainable livelihoods should be built upon addressing the problem of over-dependence of maize in a region with erratic rainfall. Thus greater crop diversity and sustainable farming methods become essential, something Oxfam-GB already has considerable experience with. Empowering people to diversify their livelihood strategies becomes the imperative with interventions around non-maize alternatives, credit, and the development of markets, amongst others. Oxfam-GB has focused on seed provision, the rehabilitation of irrigation systems, kitchen gardens, fish farming and livestock rehabilitation in Zimbabwe; and winter/summer cropping, canal rehabilitation, cash for work initiatives in Zambia and Malawi. So the question is raised: what to do differently with these interventions? A few possible options include:

- Develop and support programmes around alternative indigenous staple crops in drought-prone regions having recognised that maize is not always suitable as an introduced crop.
- Ensure that effective communication systems are in place to allow information and opinions to flow upwards from communities. Apart from creating ownership and effective participation such systems would also ensure an early warning structure was in place.
- Through a number of initiatives attempt to strengthen government capacity to facilitate the re-development of multiple livelihood systems based upon agriculture. Part of this would be to encourage the rehabilitation of rural infrastructure to allow access to remote areas and to enable institutions to adapt to fast-changing conditions.
- The promotion of rural development policies more generally that looks beyond agricultural production at the systems in which the sector is based. Thus a focus on agrarian reform would ensure that a broader basket of options was open for consideration within policy discourse.

Experiences garnered from such interventions should be widely disseminated amongst Oxfam-GB (and beyond) particularly if successful lesson learning is to be engendered within the organisation. Better links at regional and country level will contribute to increased programme learning and more robust strategic development.

#### *HIV/AIDS:*

One of the key issues when developing responses will be the number of challenges raised by HIV/AIDS. Harvey provides some guidance on this challenge (2003):

1. The long-term response to HIV/AIDS, seen best as a chronic crisis, must encompass the need for prevention, care, treatment and mitigation.
2. HIV/AIDS must be recognised as increasing underlying vulnerability and adding to the impact of other shocks, meaning that it needs to be taken into account as a cross-cutting issue in short-term humanitarian relief for acute suffering. By increasing underlying vulnerability, HIV/AIDS may also mean that crises are triggered more easily and this reinforces the need for development actors to invest more in disaster preparedness and mitigation.
3. HIV/AIDS must be seen as one of many contributory factors to food insecurity that adds to the existing need for safety nets and long-term welfare as part of the overall response to poverty.

Clearly, in terms of the death and suffering that arise from HIV/AIDS, it has profound humanitarian consequences. However, these consequences will develop over a period of decades, meaning that existing models of humanitarian aid, which remain constructed around the idea of a short-term response to acute need may not be an appropriate instrument for responding to the long-term crisis of HIV/AIDS (Harvey, 2003). In this regard, it is important to refer to the section on “relief, rehabilitation and development”.

A number of questions still remain about the extent of the impact of HIV/AIDS and household and community coping strategies. It is still unclear whether the epidemic will force organisations to rethink food security policy or whether the problems arising might be met by adding to and modifying current approaches, for example by adding supplementary feeding programmes and health care to affected households (Wiggins, 2003a). This clearly raises the need for documenting, analysing and disseminating experiences around mitigating the impact of the epidemic through food security interventions. One-way of engaging with this is through the application of an HIV/AIDS lens to humanitarian programming across the different sectors of response and across the programme cycle (Haddad & Gillespie, 2001). Applying this lens to specific issues includes:

- Focusing on the specific needs of HIV/AIDS affected households and communities in order to support their productivity. Thus households and communities should be placed at the centre of research and analysis, programme design and implementation, and ultimately assessments around impact of interventions. Understanding why certain households and communities are more resilient than others is key to an effective response (UN, 2003).
- Focus on gender and age bias in policies that will have to be addressed to meets the needs of orphans and elderly.
- As Oxfam-GB has already recognised, there needs to be a continuing focus on gender analysis given the close link between gender inequity and vulnerability to HIV.
- Focus on welfare models for vulnerable households and communities through, for example, reaching these people through subsidies. The impact of HIV/AIDS on livelihoods reinforces the need for some form of social protection or welfare safety net for the poorest (Devereux, 2003; Harvey, 2003; Holloway, 2003). The challenge is whether such support is possible over the long-term.
- Focus on own staff in terms of training and awareness on the multiple impacts of HIV/AIDS on livelihoods (as part of a “mainstreaming” process) and, in particular, to ensure that personnel are not “vectors of transmission”.

Focusing support specifically through long-term HIV/AIDS programmes, however, raises its own set of difficulties. For example, when and whether it is possible to cease or scale back support given the long-term vulnerabilities associated with HIV/AIDS. Also, whether it is possible to target only families affected by HIV/AIDS in a situation where people may be equally vulnerable for other reasons. These are questions that Oxfam-GB will have to engage. In essence, however, it should be remembered that the threats from rural poverty and HIV/AIDS are closely related and it is clear that the best buffer for vulnerable households is surplus within the community - and the best buffer for vulnerable communities is rising prosperity in the country (FAO, 2003).

*Agricultural subsidies and price controls:*

Given that agriculture was the major employer in most of the countries reviewed, the disappointments of agricultural development were acutely felt. There are few models of demonstrable success that has been achieved without (apparently) unsustainable government support (Wiggins, 2003a). Outside of the best agro-ecological zones<sup>8</sup> (where Oxfam-GB seldom works), which have good access to markets and are well endowed with infrastructure, it is far less easy to recommend agricultural development with confidence.

Oxfam-GB has a “traditional” role in advocacy and lobbying on the immediate and structural causes of the crisis, including trade and economic policies to address the needs of the most poor and vulnerable. This role will undoubtedly have to continue if the enabling environment in which small producers are operating is to be built firmly. Partnerships are an essential strategy in order to effectively achieve this and for advocacy to be targeted at people who have the influence to impact, for example, on Bretton Woods discourse and empower those lobbying within the WTO. These are international policy issues, which are contributing to the crisis and need strategic engagement. It is fundamental that the experiences from the field, reflecting the realities on ground, are flowing back to high-level advocacy. As Oxfam-GB well knows, micro-level analysis and anecdotal evidence help immensely in taking forward debates in policy. Therefore the use of simple “tools” to enable effective documentation of these experiences becomes central to allow “on-the-ground” personnel to input directly into the messages being lobbied globally. This would also ensure that messages from communities are flowing directly upwards in order to inform the taxpayers in the developed countries that unfair trade policies are having a devastating effect on communities within developing countries. Creative strategies are required around this to complement those already in place from Oxfam-HD that support international lobbying and advocacy.

A strategy such as the one identified above raises the challenge of not stereotyping about who writes or defines policy and practice. It is quite often the case that personnel in the field are sometimes more in touch than the “professional” policy people in regional or international offices. It is therefore a challenge facilitate the opportunity for colleagues in the field to impact directly on the policy discourse. Apart from ensuring that information is flowing “upwards” to policy makers there are other ways of ensuring the experiences from the field and from communities themselves are recorded in order to be available for informing policy. One such way would be to organise “write away weeks”, which would be an opportunity for staff to think through and record their experiences - rather than, perhaps, attending endless workshops. The other side of this strategy is to ensure that staff ensconced in national and field offices are adequately supplied with in-depth analysis and information about strategies and policies so that their day-to-day activities do not occur in isolation of broad-level processes.

These issues also reflect the fact that policy-makers and implementing agencies have been struggling with the technical details of food policy [and other issues related to the livelihoods crisis]

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<sup>8</sup> Examples include parts of Mashonaland, Zimbabwe, the line of rail in Zambia, and the irrigated valleys of southern Mozambique, amongst others (Wiggins, 2003a).



(Wiggins, 2003a). For example, there appears to be some confusion around the pros and cons of strategic grain reserves, debates around early warning systems and vulnerability assessments in general, and how to respond to the compounding impacts of HIV/AIDS on poverty. One possible solution to this problem is to actively de-mystify these issues through policy briefs that succinctly capture the key issues in a meaningful way for field officials.

The removal of agricultural subsidies without adequate safety nets being in place has been a major underlying cause of the recent livelihoods crisis in the region. This raises a challenge for Oxfam-GB to conceptualise community safety net programmes to mitigate the negative effects of rapid economic liberalisation. Safety net interventions should build upon existing government welfare and social programmes wherever possible and ensure that local participation and community control are characteristic of the processes. Such interventions should be focused on income maintenance or asset strengthening to enable households to maintain or re-establish their productive capacity. Experiences from countries that have established safety nets should be harnessed in this regard with a particular emphasis on learning for the region. This may be a process for Oxfam-GB to facilitate as a service to the number of national and international organisations struggling with this issue.

#### *Drought:*

It was emphasised throughout the paper that drought or severe climatic variations should not be seen as the central cause of the crisis and rather recognised as part of the “entangling crises” or a “trigger” that led to severe hardship in the region. Oxfam-GB should continue to take cognisance of drought and its impacts through continued partnerships with institutions that have the capacity and mandate to monitor climatic impact on the region. Such institutions include the early warning unit at SADC, FEWS NET and FIVIMS. In particular, Oxfam-GB should look towards the continuous monitoring of the situation in order to have a certain level of preparedness in place. Climatic variations are often a signal for an ensuing shock, which should be recognised and responded to as appropriate. A certain level of creativity is essential within a preparedness programme in order to encourage flexibility to respond effectively to the prevailing situation of increased vulnerability.

#### *Land Reform:*

Land should continue to be a central issue for Oxfam-GB, particularly as it underpins many livelihood strategies in the region. In particular, the issue of HIV/AIDS as it affects and impacts land rights, especially those of women and vulnerable children, should be a central concern. Thus the recognition that land reform as a powerful intervention for poverty alleviation should continue to inform Oxfam-GB programming where appropriate. This should, however, be tempered by an understanding that land reform, as an intensely political process, can have severe economic and livelihood impacts, as it evidently has in Zimbabwe. Oxfam-GB should also work within a paradigm that recognises that land reform, in order to achieve its livelihood goals, must be supported by a range of supporting interventions such as agricultural inputs.

#### *Concluding comment:*

A core objective of this paper has been to draw together some of the emerging lessons from the recent and ongoing crisis in Southern Africa and to reflect on its causes. The paper has thus intended to stimulate thinking, challenge approaches, and to facilitate the questioning of assumptions. It has not intended to create a “new recipe or blueprint” for Oxfam-GB to adhere to as the organisation continues to grapple with the regional livelihood crisis. It should rather be seen as a stimulus and reminder that many of the solutions are already lodged within the Oxfam offices. The challenge, therefore, is to harness this knowledge and channel it in a way that it influences continuous learning and integration within programmes.

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