

Regional Food Security Policy Issues: Challenges and Opportunities for Civil Society Engagement

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Background Paper for the "Conference on Enhancing Civil Society Participation in SADC Food Security Processes"

Summary

This paper was delivered to the conference on "Enhancing Civil Society Participation in SADC Food Security Processes" jointly organized by SARPN¹, FANRPAN and ODI. The paper reviews the food security situation on a sub-regional basis and the major interventions to address both chronic and acute food insecurity. This is followed by a policy analysis, looking at the major donor, multi-lateral and national government policy debates that influence regional food security. From this conclusions are drawn on how, and where, CSOs might engage with regional policy processes.

Current food security reports indicate a widespread acute food crisis in southern Africa, affecting (parts of) Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, Swaziland and Lesotho. However, it is important to acknowledge the complex nature of the southern Africa crisis. A number of analyses have stressed that this is a livelihoods crisis rather than a 'traditional' food security crisis. The re-emergent needs are best characterized as the manifestation of an acute phase of a chronic emergency - and this is taken as the key context for analysis and framing a response.

However, responding to the intermediate and underlying causes remains problematic. There is an expressed desire to move away from short-term emergency responses and engage in longer-term development interventions, but little evidence that this has been translated into increased investments. Indeed the necessary policy frameworks to achieve food security remain poorly developed.

In the short-term CSOs may consider contributing to the on-going national and regional policy debates. This paper identifies and summarizes the major current issues in the thematic areas of: (1) the role of food aid, (2) social protection and safety nets, (3) grain storage and strategic reserves, (4) early warning and vulnerability analysis (5) rural livelihoods, (6) trade liberalization, (7) HIV-AIDS and (8) vulnerability and risk reduction. Two further issues are touched on as critical, but currently under represented in regional policy debates; (9) links to nutrition, health and education, and (10) climate change.

¹ This paper draws heavily on research conducted by the author for CARE International entitled "A Food Security Policy Analysis: Support for a CARE Campaign on Food Insecurity in Africa". Specific thanks are due to Dan Mullins and Titon Mitra of CARE for their permission and contributions. However, the views expressed are those of the author alone and should not be attributed to SARPN, FANRPAN, ODI or CARE International.

There is a strong argument for CSOs to engage more proactively with these policy processes. This is partly a logical conclusion from the current deficiencies in policy and program response. Moreover, it reflects the opportunity for CSOs to scale up best practice derived from field projects to national scale. This involves engagement throughout the policy cycle - from formulation, to implementation, to monitoring and review, and back to reformulation. This can be as simple as better M&E and documentation of program experience - and ensuring that this is communicated back to decision makers.

A major challenge, given the breadth of the food security debate, is for CSOs to focus their limited resources on a carefully selected sub-set of these larger policy debates. Criteria are suggested as helpful in defining this focus include an analysis of the organizational strategies and competencies. There must be strong synergies between the policy dialogue and the field programmes or areas of expertise. Key policy processes that the CSO may engage with include the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and Vulnerability Assessment Committees (VACs).

Acronyms

CFSM	Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DBS	Direct Budget Support
DFID	Department for International Development
DMMU	Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit
EMOP	Emergency Operations Programme
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FEWS NET	Famine Early Warning System Network
FFW	Food For Work
GMB	Grain Marketing Board
GMO	Genetically Modified Organism
IDC	International Development Committee
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGC	National Institute of Disaster Management
INGO	International NGO
MMT	Million Metric Tonnes
NDP	National Development Plan
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PRRO	Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RIACSO	Regional Inter Agency Coordination Support Office
RCSA	Regional Centre for Southern Africa
REC	Regional Economic Community
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SAFEX	South African Futures Exchange
SAP	Structural Adjustment Program
SETSAN	Technical Secretariat for Food Security and Nutrition
SGR	Strategic Grain Reserve
SWAP	Sector Wide Approach
UN	United Nations
VAC	Vulnerability Assessment Committee
WFP	World Food Programme

Introduction

This background paper is a contribution to the SARPN, ODI and FANRPAN regional project which aims to promote the use of Civil Society evidence in policy development for food security, vulnerability and poverty reduction in Southern Africa. The underlying thesis is that Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have a vital role to play in designing and implementing public policies - particularly so for food security policies where CSOs can draw on lessons from their community based field operations.

As part of the overall project, this meeting has been organized to focus on strengthening the interaction between CSOs and SADC on food security policy. This paper is intended to provide background context for the meeting. To do so it addresses three main issues. Firstly, the current status and understanding of food insecurity in the region is summarized - looking at both the chronic and acute dimensions. This problem statement provides a context for identifying policy priorities. Secondly, the major food security policy discussions that are currently active within the region are identified. This is intended to clarify the range of on-going policy debates that CSOs may choose to engage with in the short to medium term. Thirdly, criteria are suggested that may help to CSOs to narrow the focus in selecting priorities within this very broad range of policy debates.

Food Security in Southern Africa

Current food security status

Current food security reports once again suggest a widespread acute food crisis in southern Africa. At various levels of severity this is affecting Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, Swaziland and Lesotho.

The analysis of the national food security situation is driven by a number of key processes, including the FAO/WFP Crop and Food Supply Assessment Missions (CFSMs) and the reports from the Vulnerability Assessment Committees (VACs). These mainstream analyses tend to focus on the (mainly drought induced) reduction in agricultural production as an immediate cause, with secondary impacts on prices and food access.

Significant maize crop failures have been reported for 2004/05 in several Countries, including

Figure 1 Consolidated Regional Estimate of Food Insecure and Emergency Food Needs

Country	2005/06 Marketing year ¹	
	Assessed Number of Food Insecure	Assessed Food Aid Requirements
Lesotho	548,800	20,244
Malawi	4,224,400	269,600
Mozambique	587,499	69,755
Swaziland	226,640	27,020
Zambia	1,232,661	118,335
Zimbabwe	3,900,000 ²	308,000
Total	10,720,000	812,954

1/ Sourced from the June 2005 VAC presentations to the Stakeholders meeting of 7 - 8 July 2005 pending final reports, and June 2005 FAO/WFP CFSAM Reports. 2/Preliminary results provide a range of 2.9 - 3.9 million people

Source: FEWS NET September 2005

Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia and southern Mozambique. However, regional maize availability remains good following a record harvest in South Africa. These stocks are being drawn down on as commercial and humanitarian imports in the neighbouring countries. Crucially these regional surpluses are moderating prices and household food access.

The greatest concern is currently focused on Southern Malawi and Zimbabwe. The consolidated regional figures compiled in September 2005 by FEWS NET (Figure 1) estimated that 10.7 million people require over 800,000 MT of food assistance. This includes 4.6 and 3.9 in

Malawi and Zimbabwe respectively. The latest SETSAN assessment in Mozambique has revised the population in need to 880,000. In Zimbabwe, official Government sanctioned figures are yet to be released, but informal estimates place the total numbers in need of assistance at around 5 million.

The aggregate numbers are starting to approach the levels witnessed in 2001-03. Early warning reports do not yet suggest 'famine conditions'. The limited nutritional data for most Countries in this region (with the probable exception of Malawi) have not yet reached the internationally accepted standards for emergency nutritional interventions, and are well below reported levels of acute malnutrition evident in Sudan, Ethiopia or Somalia. The use of extreme or irreversible coping strategies - for example resorting to potentially toxic wild foods - is still rarely noted. Therefore the major justification for urgent intervention is to protect and preserve increasingly fragile livelihoods before more severe manifestations of suffering emerge.

Lessons from the 2001-03 crisis

The current crisis must be interpreted in the context of the analysis surrounding the preceding crisis of 2001-03. Important understandings of the 'causes' have emerged that have ramifications for the analysis of, and response to, the current crisis. The understanding of the crisis remains incomplete, but these studies helped to highlight - especially to the humanitarian community - the multiple and complex roots of the crisis².

As the crisis unfolded it was initially interpreted as a 'traditional' food crisis with its roots in a series of poor harvests. However, while this crop shortfall was significant, 22% in 2001 and 34% in 2002, it did not approach the 66% for the six countries experienced in 1992. Yet the humanitarian crisis that unfolded was arguably greater in absolute and proportionate terms than 1991/92. Consequently, explanations of the crisis had to acknowledge changes in the regional economic, political and social context. The subsequent analysis converged around a common set of issues.

Many analysts understood the food crisis as being rooted in the falling incomes and rising levels of poverty evident since the 1970s. At the household level this reduced assets, constrained coping strategies and led to rising levels of vulnerability. At the national level the revenues and response capacity of Governments has been constrained. Indeed poverty levels are indisputably high (Table 1). There is also evidence that the picture is deteriorating; indeed for Zambia and Zimbabwe the human development indicators peaked 20 years ago and have been in decline ever since.

A large contributory factor is understood to be due to macro-economic 'failures' dating back to the 1970s. There has been a major contraction of the mining industry. The mines of South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe have been important both domestically and as a regional source of employment and remittance income to the neighbouring Countries. The Zambian mines have been in decline since the copper price falls of the 1970s. More recently the South African mines have shed large numbers of jobs - the number employed has fallen from 750,000 in the 1980s to 420,000 in 1999.

² This section draws on a number of retrospective analyses of the crisis of 2001-03. This includes work by SADC (Mano et al 2003), the ODI Forum for Food Security in Southern Africa (FFSSA 2004), a study commissioned by Oxfam and implemented by the HSRC (Drimie 2004), Christian Aid (Christian Aid 2004), Michigan State University (Tshirley et al, 2004), Wiggins (2005) and the UK International Development Committee (IDC 2003a).

Formal employment has fallen in manufacturing industry, as liberalisation has led to the closure of previously protected domestic industries. In government the public sector has been cut back as part of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). Consequently urban populations are increasingly reliant on the informal sector jobs.

Table 1 Poverty Indicators for Selected Countries in Southern Africa

	1990	1994	1997	2000	2003
Lesotho					
Population below \$1 a day (%)		36.4			
Poverty headcount (% of population)					
Prevalence of underweight children (<5)		21.4	16.0	17.9	
Prevalence of HIV (%aged 15-49)				29.6	28.9
GNI per capita (current US\$)	650.0	780.0	830.0	640.0	590.0
Malawi					
Population below \$1 a day (%)			41.7		
Poverty headcount (% of population)	54.0		65.3		
Prevalence of underweight children (<5)		29.9		25.4	
Prevalence of HIV (%aged 15-49)				14.2	14.9
GNI per capita (current US\$)	200.0	170.0	220.0	170.0	160.0
Mozambique					
Population below \$1 a day (%)			37.8		
Poverty headcount (% of population)			69.4		
Prevalence of underweight children (<5)		27.0	26.1		
Prevalence of HIV (%aged 15-49)				12.1	12.2
GNI per capita (current US\$)	170.0	130.0	180.0	210.0	210.0
Zambia					
Population below \$1 a day (%)	64.6	73.6	63.7		
Poverty headcount (% of population)			72.9		
Prevalence of underweight children (<5)			23.5		28.1
Prevalence of HIV (%aged 15-49)				16.7	15.6
GNI per capita (current US\$)	450.0	350.0	380.0	320.0	380.0
Zimbabwe					
Population below \$1 a day (%)	33.3		56.1		
Poverty headcount (% of population)	25.8		47.0		44.0
Prevalence of underweight children (<5)		15.5		13.0	
Prevalence of HIV (%aged 15-49)				24.9	24.6
GNI per capita (current US\$)	880.0	630.0	680.0	440.0	
Sub-saharan Africa					
Population below \$1 a day (%)	44.6	44.1	45.6	46.4	
Prevalence of HIV (%aged 15-49)				7.3	6.7
GNI per capita (current US\$)	580.0	510.0	550.0	480.0	510.0

Source: World Bank Reporting on the Millennium Development Goals

Changing domestic agricultural policies are understood to have led to a major decline in agricultural production. National Government support to input and credit supply, extension advice and marketing has been decimated. Much of this support was dismantled in the 1980s

and 1990s, under regimes of structural adjustment and market liberalisation. Compounding the problem, the private sector has failed to fill the void - particularly in remote locations and amongst small-scale producers. Consequently it has been postulated that *“the bulk of rural populations are 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, 2003).

The liberalization of domestic markets and trade has been a particular focus of attention. Both urban and rural dwellers are reliant on the markets for the majority of their staple food needs. Consequently affordable and stable prices are intimately linked to food security. Prior to liberalization Governments regulated markets, controlled trade and maintained extensive storage facilities to achieve this policy goal. Post liberalization prices have fluctuated widely and occasionally disastrously. The consequences of market failure was evident in Malawi during 2001, where this proved a major factor in precipitating the crisis and the consequent mortality (Devereau, 2002). While there may be general agreement that prices have not been well managed, but agreement on how to improve the situation remains contentious with divergent opinions mooted. Some argue for stronger Government interventions, while others argue that continued Government efforts to regulate trade, for example through imposing maize export bans in Zambia and Malawi, have served to deepen the crisis.

Overall the liberalization process has been highly skewed. Despite liberalization in Africa, massive subsidisation of agriculture continues by developed countries. The amounts devoted to agricultural subsidies in the EU, US and Japan dwarf development assistance. The combination of high subsidies and high tariffs are seen to fuel artificially low world prices and constrain the access of developing country products to global markets. Farmers in developing countries cannot compete effectively in domestic and export markets. While a cut in global agricultural subsidies may well stimulate African agriculture and their economies, it is recognized that this may entail short run negative impacts on food insecure consumers whose staple food costs would be higher.

Agricultural production has been further undermined by the demographic and environmental trends. High population pressure, combined with unsustainable management practices are argued to underlie the long-term decline in yields in southern Malawi and Lesotho.

A further major strand of the debate revolves around the impact of HIV-AIDS on food security. It is accepted that the HIV/AIDS pandemic has complex interactions with the food crisis. With labour lost to sickness and caring for the affected, it reduces farm production and incomes. Money which might have been available for farm inputs becomes diverted to medical expenses. As assets are sold to pay for the costs of care the coping capacity of households is reduced. At a broader level HIV/AIDS tends to particularly affect skilled and professional labour, undermining the economy and the performance of the public service. There is also the recognition of the impacts on the inter-generation transfer of knowledge, including farming practices. The impact of HIV-AIDS is particularly prominent in southern Africa, which is at the centre of the global pandemic. National prevalence rates are estimated to approach 40% in the worst affected countries of the region.

A number of specific national governance failures have been cited. The fast track land reform program in Zimbabwe is viewed as a major factor in precipitating and maintaining the Zimbabwe crisis. The dramatic shift of Zimbabwe from a major regional food exporter to a net importer may well have contributed to the larger regional crisis. The mismanagement of the Malawian Strategic Grain Reserve (SGR) -even accepting the contributing role of the IMF in that saga - certainly contributed to intensity of the Malawian crisis. According to some

commentators, the refusal of the Zambian Government to accept GMO commodities was a further governance failure.

The bottom line from the preceding analysis is that what was, and is, being witnessed is a *livelihoods crisis rather than a traditional food security crisis*. The re-emergent crisis should be characterized as the manifestation of an acute phase of a chronic emergency. This interpretation of the problem has been widely accepted within senior UN and NGO circles in the region. This analysis places a greater emphasis on the chronic dimension of the crisis and the consequent need for the development policy instruments to guide the response. It can be used to define a series of overlapping crises in the region, each of which requires a policy and programme response (Wiggins 2005).

It is important to note that the current consensus tends to focus heavily on the economic, environmental and (to a limited extent) the political causes of the crisis. In the terminology of the McCaston & Rewald (2005) the focus is still on the 'intermediate' causes. There are relatively few analyses which attempt to drill down further - and understand more deeply the social and political processes and power relationships which underlie and maintain these conditions - or the 'underlying causes'. Such analyses might in turn serve to broaden the scope of the policy framework.

The Current Response

There is a continuing struggle to incorporate the deeper understanding of the regional food security crisis with the food security analysis and phrasing of the response. While the chronic dimension of the problem is widely recognized, the tools to understand the contribution of economic, policy and health changes remain weakly developed in the mainstream food security assessment processes. Consequently the main recommendations remain couched in terms of identifying the numbers in need of assistance and their food aid needs. While short-term emergency assistance continues to have an important role, the preceding analysis stresses that food aid, in greater or lesser amounts, will have limited impact as a solution to regional food security.

These analytical and response shortcomings are recognized at the collective regional level. A joint meeting was held by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the UN in Johannesburg in July to consider the results of the vulnerability assessments and FAO/WFP Crop and Food Supply Assessment Missions (WFP, 2005). The meeting was unanimous that the information should not translate into a need for food aid alone and concurred that the region should move away from short-term emergency responses and engage in longer-term development interventions.

In any case, judged on traditional crisis outcome indicators alone, southern Africa may struggle to attract large scale funding when judged against other concurrent global crises. Indeed the WFP PRRO has a deficit of over \$100 million before the end of April 2006 and the Malawi Flash Appeal is only 42% funded. Fundamentally the real need is for an increase in long term commitments, including development assistance, rather than ad hoc emergency assistance.

It was recommended that the long term development frameworks used should be the SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) and Dar-Es-Salaam Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security. However, the adequacy of these policy frameworks, which are dominated by the instrument of agricultural development, needs further analysis - which is examined further in the following section of this paper.

Southern Africa remains caught in this dilemma. A mix of overlapping crises continues to drive an increase in poverty and human vulnerability - with the outcome of heightened food insecurity. The acute dimension of the crisis is not capturing the attention necessary to compete adequately for scarce emergency funds that might stabilize the situation in the short term. Beyond this the development investments remain woefully inadequate to halt, let alone reverse this trend. If southern Africa is to progress towards food security there is an urgent need for innovative food security strategies, policies, programmes, backed with advocacy campaigns.

Food Security Policy Analysis

The Food Security Context

One of the basic challenges in developing a common food security strategy is the wide diversity of opinions of what legitimately falls within the topic. Agencies and individuals often have widely different views of the strategic and programmatic elements of food security. It is therefore important to establish a framework for this discussion. The understanding of the components of food security is generally understood to include issues of:

- **availability** (ensuring that a wide variety of food is available in markets and fields)
- **access** (that people have enough money to purchase a variety of foods)
- **utilization** (ensuring positive nutritional outcomes through appropriate care, clean water, and good sanitation and health services)

Consequently 'food security' embraces a potentially huge area range of issues. Each of the major areas listed above can be further broken down in a series of sub-issues:

- The primary option to promote food availability is to increase domestic food production. This involves sub-questions of agricultural development; input supply, credit, production technologies, storage and processing. Markets, both for inputs and products, are key to stimulating agricultural development - the issue being the appropriate role of the state as markets are liberalized. International and intra - regional trade and storage mechanisms provide alternatives to ensure food availability and manage variations in supply. Consequently, the trade liberalization debates, especially in relation to staple food commodities, coincide with food security. Similarly the role and management of Strategic Grain Reserves (SGRs) has considerable food security implications.
- Ensuring access involves the major issues of incomes and prices. How can incomes be bolstered, either through economic development or welfare transfers? A huge number of potential interventions fall under these options. The appropriate balance of investment between these two components is a key question for Governments everywhere. Guaranteeing the affordability of foodstuffs has links back to the availability debate, but also enters the realm of price controls and food subsidies.
- The utilization banner includes issues of care (food preparation and child care), interactions with hygiene, sanitation and health, and the role of education. Most importantly there is the specific question around the interactions of the HIV-AIDS pandemic and food insecurity.

To this list may also be added the question of 'stability' - ensuring that food security is maintained over time and in the face of a variety of natural, economic, social and policy shocks. There has a shift in attention from emergency response to the prevention of food

insecurity. Grounded in a better understanding of vulnerability this encompasses preparing for, mitigating and coping with risks. This is a cross cutting theme with implications for both disaster management and development.

The relative emphasis given to these factors has tended to wax and wane overtime. Different perspectives are expressed by different institutions. At a crude level Government policy in the region may be characterized as focusing on promoting availability, while many donors are currently more focused on ensuring food access.

It is probably most helpful to recognize that the successive elements of availability, access and utilization are necessary, but not independently sufficient, to ensure food security. Therefore the challenge is to ensure a balanced policy framework and portfolio of interventions. The challenge for CSOs is to determine where they can invest their limited resources to greatest effect.

Current Policy Debates

In choosing to engage more proactively with policy processes, CSOs need to consider the major on-going food security policy debates and policy priorities of the key stakeholders. Drawing on the literature and the personal experience of the author, issues where there is the most active debate and action are detailed below. As might be expected these encompass a large span of issues - affecting short, medium and longer-term response:

(1) Food Aid

While many of the arguments around food aid are not new, this topic has been given renewed impetus by the attempts to include food aid under the disciplines of the WTO at the Doha round of talks scheduled for December 2005. The basic argument of the critics is that much food aid is, in effect, a means for dumping of agricultural surpluses by donor Countries. This results in both trade disincentives, through the displacement of alternative commercial imports, and production disincentives, as staple food prices are kept artificially low in the recipient Countries stifling domestic production and economic growth.

It is acknowledged that well targeted food aid, provided in emergency situations where food is unavailable and markets have failed, continues to be a legitimate part of emergency response. However, the reformists argue for a more focused role for food aid and the elimination of some of the more negative uses. At the heart of this lies the argument that the provision of food aid should be untied from the donor's domestic agricultural policies. This policy change would facilitate many of the suggested changes. In practice these include:

- A move away from a 'food first' approach. Better analysis should underpin the use of food aid only where it is appropriate. Direct food aid transfers should only be used when local markets fail.
- Where food aid is necessary, increasing the proportion of local and triangular purchases. This provides the additional benefit of supporting the development of local markets and economies
- Restricting the monetization of food aid. This is regarded as creating significant market distortions and providing a highly inefficient transfer of resources

The technical arguments for much of this agenda are well articulated and backed by strong evidence. Indeed many of the major donors have accepted these arguments in principle and are moving steadily towards implementing this agenda. USAID, who supply 99% of food aid as direct transfers, proposed to congress that \$300million should be made available for local purchase - a proposal that was not ultimately endorsed. It can be argued that the main barrier to change now lies at the political, rather than technical, level.

The main stakeholders in this debate are the donors and those tasked with implementation; WFP and the NGOs. As WFP is now the largest cereal buyer in sub-Saharan Africa its procurement operations have great potential in promoting or undermining the establishment of mature national grain markets. Consequently private sector traders are increasingly vocal on local purchase issues. Recipient governments do not generally have well articulated positions or even well developed analytical capacities. The NEPAD regional strategy seeks to minimize the use of food aid, but national attitudes and practices are uneven. The short term benefits of the resource transfer, including the political benefits, are strongly apparent, but the longer term disincentives remain less visible.

(2) Social Protection and Safety Nets

Social protection includes a wide range of potential interventions directed at both chronic and transitory poverty and food insecurity. This includes the objectives of protecting poor people who have a chronic incapacity to work or earn (for reasons of age or health) and mitigating the vulnerability of the working poor to short-term shocks such as droughts, floods and illness. These strategies can be either informal, market based or public in nature.

Within the wider social protection debate there has been a tremendous growth of interest and experimentation in the use of safety nets in the region over the last few years. The justification and objectives of safety nets are multiple:

- They have attracted considerable attention as a more effective response mechanism to predictable and multi-annual needs. Emergency appeals are relatively inefficient instruments, with large time lags before a response can be mounted and large degree of uncertainty over the level of resources which will ultimately be pledged. In contrast safety nets can be a permanent feature of policy and practice. As such they can be useful risk management tools, preventing those who are at the margins of food security from being pushed into food insecurity and poverty by a transitory climatic or economic shocks.
- Additionally safety nets can be used as a targeted means to ensure the incomes and food access of the chronically food insecure. This group, and the related objectives, may be further subdivided.
 - For the very poorest households, without the assets or capacity to escape from poverty, long-term resource transfers through safety net mechanisms may be justified. Some estimates suggest this may be the bottom 5 or 10% in society.
 - For many other amongst the chronically food insecure (sometimes termed the capable poor) safety nets may provide a 'ladder' out of poverty. It is argued that assuring incomes provides a foundation and opportunity for these households to engage in development processes - sometimes termed 'productive safety nets'. The small amounts of cash available may also provide a small surplus for investment.

Social welfare programs have a long history in southern Africa and relatively elaborate schemes were widespread in the region. Most of these were dismantled in line with falling national budgets, with the strictures of SAPs provided the final impetus for change. However, there is now renewed interest in resuscitating these, in part as a response to HIV-AIDS.

Safety nets may be food based, cash based or provide subsidized access to health and education facilities. While there is particular interest around the use of cash grants, this is

sometimes apparent as an erroneous simplification of the debate. There are a plethora of schemes currently being piloted throughout the region, notably in Malawi and Zambia. These are examining many of the practical questions around the operation of these schemes - testing and comparing approaches on impact and efficiency.

The central question now centres on the sustainability of these schemes at national level. Both Governments and donors are reluctant to take on large open ended commitments. Only a few countries in the region have the capacity to implement and sustain such schemes; including South Africa, Namibia and Botswana. There is an underlying policy choice implicit in this, between investing national resources in economic development or in social transfers. For many Countries the pathway to poverty reduction is seen as economic growth, and they remain reluctant to 'waste' scarce public resources on social transfers. To the promoters of such schemes, chiefly DFID and the World Bank, this is not just an argument of social justice, but also as an investment which underpins economic growth. In the language of the food security debate, food security is not just an outcome of poverty but also a cause.

(3) Storage and Strategic Grain Reserves

A major strand of the response strategy proposed by the national and regional governments is the reinvigoration of the Strategic Grain Reserves (SGRs). This call may be understood in light of the failure of the Malawi food security reserve at the start of the 2001-03 crisis. There is also a strong political interest in establishing a regional reserve facility under SADC. The argument is that a regional reserve could operate more efficiently, with a lower stock and overhead costs, to complement national reserves.

SGRs serve two major functions. The first of these is to provide a buffer stock of food for immediate distribution during an emergency. Food aid typically takes 5 months to arrive from the US - far too long for the immediate response. The amount of stock needed for this purpose is relatively small and cheap to maintain. Consequently there are few arguments against SGRs fulfilling this role. The Ethiopian Food Security Reserve is cited as an example of a well maintained facility designed for this purpose. Some countries with good private storage facilities and/or good infrastructure to connect to international markets do not feel it necessary to keep even this reserve - South Africa being one of the few examples.

However, SGRs are commonly employed as the executing agency by which Governments intervene in markets; to stabilize and subsidize prices to producers and consumers. This function is far more contentious. To many Governments this is perceived as a critical role. Floor prices may be used to provide producers with guaranteed minimum returns and dampen inter-annual production fluctuations. Similarly price spikes can have disastrous consequences on consumers - as seen in Malawi. Certainly the experience of market liberalization has not been entirely positive and the private sector has not developed as expected to fill the role previously filled by Government. Consequently several Governments have reversed some elements of liberalization, including Zimbabwe and Malawi. This position has some sympathy from various NGOs.

The anti-liberalization position is opposed by the multi-lateral agencies, who argue that the growth of the private sector needs additional, not less, support. It is argued that consistent policy signals are needed from Government and larger SGRs send the wrong signals. More specifically physical reserves are extremely expensive to maintain and operate and are often subject to mismanagement. While a policy goal of more stable markets is desirable, alternatives to physical storage may achieve this more cheaply, effectively and in tune with the development of the private sector markets. Studies commissioned by NEPAD and SADC in 2004 basically concurred with this position and advised against the establishment of a regional

reserve (NEPAD 2004a). However, the original proposal to establish a physical regional reserve has remained highly durable despite the mounting technical evidence.

At the same time the current year has seen exciting developments in piloting alternatives to physical reserves, largely promoted by the donors and multi-laterals. These include:

- *Weather based insurance.* This is being tested by WFP in Ethiopia. This provides an automatic payout on the basis of agreed rainfall indicators. In a drought humanitarian agencies will have the cash to buy food and non-food commodities. The advantage is that lumpy, unpredictable response costs are converted to predictable insurance premiums.
- *Use of SAFEX maize options.* The Malawi Government, with UK funding, has taken an option on the delivery of 100,000MT of maize at the end of the year during the peak hunger months. While not committing the Government to import or pay for the maize the relatively small premium locks in the maximum maize price early in the season. Government policy intentions are transparent to traders who can then import with more confidence. This device is intended to prevent market price spikes.
- *The expansion of private warehousing facilities.* Private capacity, such as in South Africa, can substitute for Government stores. Private storage schemes are being promoted in tandem with the proliferation of warehouse receipt schemes across the region. Warehouse receipts allow farmers to store their crop in anticipation of higher prices later in the year, while using the receipt as a loan security to meet immediate cash needs including for agricultural inputs.

(4) Early warning systems and vulnerability assessment

The fragility of current livelihoods requires the maintenance of excellent early warning capacities. These EWS are being increasingly challenged to monitor chronically poor and under-nourished populations who can be plunged into an acute emergency by ever smaller triggers. EWS have been an area of consistent investment over the last 20 years, yet in this challenging operating environment it is perhaps understandable that they remain on the policy agenda.

It is of considerable concern that early warning is perceived to have 'failed' in the recent crises in Malawi and Niger (Clay 2005). This view is this is that Governments are unwilling to issue an alert until they see irrefutable evidence of suffering, that can be used to leverage international humanitarian resources. By then it may be too late. This attitude impinges on the situation analysis provided by the cooperating partners such as FEWS NET which increasingly work in close cooperation with Government. The implication may be the need for more 'competition' in early warning and minority views, especially amongst the NGOs. This runs counter to efforts of the last decade to build coordinated EWS, where consensus was intended to lead to rapid response.

A closely allied area is the process of vulnerability analysis. There has been considerable innovation and strengthening of regional capacities over the last few years. SADC remains committed to supporting the VACs over the next 5 years. However, as the experience of this year has shown there are major challenges to the future of the VACs. The current analysis is failing to deepen the understanding of the causes of food insecurity. The overlapping crises remain largely confounded. Consequently responses continue to address symptoms rather than causes.

The VAC process could offer a major opportunity for the CSOs to engage with regional policy processes. The constitution of VACs welcomes participation by civil society, while the move towards institutionalization provides a ready channel for policy uptake to the highest levels of national government.

(5) Rural Livelihoods

The expansion of crop production through agricultural development lies at the heart of the food security strategies of national governments and their regional organizations. This is clearly stated in the relevant NEPAD and SADC strategy papers (NEPAD 2004b). The SADC Dar-es-Salaam declaration on agriculture and food security which called for member states to increase expenditure on agriculture to 10 percent of the national budget, specifically to reduce food insecurity. FAO has been an important technical architect of many of these plans. An agricultural focus has received a certain amount of donor endorsement. Agriculture is prominent in USAID strategies (PCHPA 2005), including those emanating from RCSA and the Presidential Initiative to End Hunger in Africa (IEHA).

The strongly pro-agriculture position in part reflects a continued desire to achieve food self sufficiency, if not at the national level, then at the regional level. This can be critiqued as an outdated approach - which has largely been replaced by a food self reliance approach elsewhere. Trade has been given a more prominent role in ensuring availability with the key question shifting to how to ensure food access. Additionally, despite a long history of investment in agriculture in Africa the success stories are thin on the ground and aggregate per capita production is in decline. The evidence suggests that where (modest) gains have been achieved these are mostly amongst the medium and larger scale farmers. Agricultural programmes have often had less demonstrable success in directly improving food production amongst the most food insecure households.

Consequently there is a reticence amongst many donors to support the current crop of agricultural investment proposals. Many of these proposals exhibit little awareness of the failures of the past. However, the fact remains that agriculture is the dominant source of livelihood for rural Africans. A key question is how to reinvigorate agriculture. The strategic objectives and constituent programs need to be recast in favour of improving food access, with demonstrable impact at the level of small-scale farmers. There is also an overlap with the risk management agenda, with the goal being to diversify from the heavy reliance on (drought susceptible) maize.

NGOs have an established expertise within this field. The challenge is to scale up their livelihoods based approaches to achieve national level impact, at affordable cost. The strength of livelihoods approaches is also often conversely their weakness - the detailed cross disciplinary insights that it provides may be most relevant at the local level, but hard to apply through sectoral programs.

An important strand within the larger agricultural debate is the role of (subsidized) input supply of fertilizer and seeds. While these programs are generally accepted as part of a recovery package, there is much less consensus over the longer term provision of subsidies. The removal of these subsidies is seen as a major cause of production declines and there are strong lobbies for their reintroduction. The alternative perspective contends that they are expensive, financially hard to maintain, poorly targeted and offer a poor return compared to other investments (such as research and extension). This position suggests that raising crop prices is the key to sustainably improving the use of agricultural inputs.

(6) Trade Liberalization

The process of trade liberalization has gained substantial momentum over the last few decades. At a broad level increasing trade is expected to lead to macro-economic growth in Africa. In practice the longer-term regional economic benefits from liberalization have been slow to appear, while the short-term consequences, particularly job losses in unprotected industries, are quickly evident. Despite this, there is still a general consensus in support of the process. The question is largely interpreted as how to capitalize on the benefits whilst mitigating the negative consequences.

From a food security perspective the particular focus has tended to be on trade in staple foodstuffs - most specifically maize. Freer grain trade can directly impact on food security through reducing prices to consumers in times of deficit, and providing markets to support regional producers with local surpluses. Overall trade can help to minimize inter-annual price variations and provide more consistent producer incentives.

Nearly all regional governments are committed to the process of trade liberalization and this is the core role of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs). There has been considerable progress in reducing tariffs. To some extent the official position has not been matched by practice, as tariffs have been replaced by a variety of non tariff barriers. Zambia, Malawi and Tanzania have frequently invoked trade bans. Zimbabwe is the extreme case which has effectively renationalized maize trading and marketing. Much of the current trade debate revolves around reducing non tariff barriers such as customs documentation, SPSS regulations and rules of origin. In addition major constraints of infrastructure, information and inconsistent government policies are a further area of action.

At the same time, the progress towards liberalization of agriculture in African states has not been matched by the developed Countries. Agricultural subsidies in the EU, US and Japan continue. The amounts provided as agricultural subsidies dwarf those of the total development assistance budgets. The often quoted European cows receive more in subsidies per day (\$2.2) than the majority of Africans have to live on. The basic argument is that these subsidies depress agricultural commodity prices and inhibit the development of African agriculture. There is growing pressure for reform, with agriculture the focus of the Doha round of WTO talks. While the outcome is still uncertain the willingness of the main protagonists to discuss the issue has improved since the Cancun round and significant policy shifts by the main protagonists are not unimaginable.

However, useful parallels may be drawn with the experience in liberalizing trade in industrial products. While this may be in the longer-term interests of Africa, it may pay to give careful thought to the short-term impacts. While farmers will benefit from higher prices, conversely consumers (including the food insecure) would suffer through higher prices. The issue is how to anticipate these negative impacts and designing appropriate measures to mitigate the consequences.

(7) HIV-AIDS

Clearly the HIV-AIDS pandemic constitutes a major crisis and judged in terms of mortality far exceeds the food security crisis. The broad response encompasses issues of prevention, treatment, care and mitigation. In this review the specific focus is on interactions between HIV-AIDS and food and nutrition security - which are becoming increasingly entwined in a vicious cycle. Food insecurity has heightening susceptibility to HIV exposure and infection, and HIV/AIDS in turn heightening vulnerability to food insecurity. Consequently two main rationales are presented for responding to HIV-AIDS from a food security perspective; first to raise the chances that food and nutrition security policies and programs can achieve their

original objectives despite AIDS, and, second, to contribute to the multi-sectoral response to HIV/AIDS.

The impacts of the pandemic are continuing to manifest themselves as the epidemiology progresses. It is clear that the MDGs, including the commitment to reduce poverty and hunger, will remain unattainable in the absence of a holistic approach to addressing HIV/AIDS. A major recent review asked the question, given the accumulated evidence of the interactions, what options exist for responding to the HIV/AIDS-food-insecurity nexus? (Gillespie et al, 2005). The main thrust of the recommendations centres on mainstreaming an HIV/AIDS perspective within established policy processes. Consequently this overlaps with and enriches the debate on most of the issues already raised in this section; questions of maintaining rural livelihoods, social protection and reducing vulnerability and risk.

One topic that arises most strongly and relatively uniquely within the HIV/AIDS debate is the interaction with nutrition. The argument is that poor nutrition, both protein-energy malnutrition and deficiencies in micronutrients such as iron, zinc and vitamins, 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, 2005). There is continuing concern that the issue of HIV/AIDS nutrition inter-linkages has been largely overlooked in the focus on prevention.

A related issue is the interaction of nutrition with ART treatments. Nutrition is directly relevant to using antiretroviral drugs –and is especially important now that access to antiretroviral therapy is beginning to expand in the region. Interactions between these drugs and food and nutrition can significantly influence the success of ART by affecting drug efficacy, adherence to drug regimens, and nutritional status. Management of these interactions is critical to maximizing the benefit of ART to people living with HIV/AIDS in resource-poor settings.

A large number of NGOs have been extremely active in this area. However, the incorporation of this nutritional agenda into national food security policies remains weakly articulated.

(8) Risk Management and Vulnerability Reduction

There is a well developed discussion around the reduction of human vulnerability. This debate is heavily influenced by the conceptual advances from the disaster reduction community. The role of disasters (natural, technological and economic) in driving food security is well established. From this has developed a consensus for increasing attention away from emergency response to prevention and mitigation. The same principles apply to the management of a range of shocks from large scale natural disasters to household level idiosyncratic shocks such as illness, disability or the loss of employment.

Recent global agreements (eg. The Hyogo framework) have gone further and emphasize the interactions of disasters with human development. Just as disasters can interrupt development, poorly planned development is understood to increase the risk of 'disasters'.

At the continental level, disaster risk reduction is a high priority. Disaster related losses are increasing and disaster impacts have become an impediment to sustainable development. The African Union (AU) and its New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) developed an African regional strategy for disaster risk reduction (AU/NEPAD, 2004). In this document the problem of disasters is increasingly viewed as a development challenge. Consequently the primary aim of the strategy is phrased around contributing to the attainment of sustainable

development and poverty eradication by mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into development. To some extent this parallels the HIV-AIDS mainstreaming debate.

In practice there are numerous challenges to realizing the African strategy. Key sectoral policies; such as on food and agriculture, rural and urban development and enterprise development, do not sufficiently consider how they impact people's vulnerability to hazards. Few countries have explicitly included disaster reduction as specific thematic focus areas in their Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). Even where the policy, legal and programme guidelines are established implementation is too often constrained by inadequate competencies and resources.

While the need to mainstream disaster risk management is repeatedly referenced, the observed actions still fall some way short of a comprehensive package necessary to achieve this. Policy recommendations cluster round a set of enabling conditions; increasing political commitment; improving methodologies and knowledge management for disaster risk reduction; improved governance of disaster risk reduction institutions; and integrating disaster risk reduction into emergency response management. What are still lacking are the practical mechanisms within the development sphere to drive this forward.

The eight topics listed above are a personal interpretation of the key policy debates relevant to food security which are on-going in the region. Within each of these major topic areas there are a myriad of sub-issues. This broad canvas may be useful for CSOs to consider as they define their own strategic focus. However, mention should also be made of a few key issues which I believe are not yet adequately reflected in regional food security policy debates.

(9) Nutrition, health and education

There is an evident schism in food security decisions between availability and access issues on the one hand, and food utilization questions on the other. In practice utilization questions, or nutritional security, is separated from the mainstream food security debate.

There is much persuasive evidence on the dietary importance of key vitamins and micro-nutrients including Vitamin A, Iodine and Iron. It is relatively inexpensive to implement nutrition fortification and supplementation programs and has huge implications on physical and cognitive development. Yet regional policies and programs continue to pay these issues scant regard, and collective donor support to these programs hovers around \$100million per year globally. To the advocates the control of vitamin and mineral deficiencies offers one of the major opportunities to improve lives and accelerate development at low cost and in a short time. As mentioned earlier, the importance of nutrition has been highlighted through the HIV-AIDS lens.

Health and education programmes, above and beyond the specific case of HIV-AIDS, have great potential in reducing food insecurity. It has long been recognized that disease, not hunger, is the real killer in an emergency. Studies have further demonstrated the importance of education and care practices in improving nutritional wellbeing. Bridging this divide and improving the understanding of food security may be a critical role for CSOs. General investments in health and education are increasingly appreciated, not only as part of the social protection agenda, but as ladders out of poverty.

(10) Climate change

The larger global debates on the food security implications of climate change do not appear to be strongly echoed within the region. South Africa is the only country that appears to have the capacity to proactively analyze the national impacts and feed this knowledge into planning processes. A recent South African study identified significant impacts on areas as

diverse as agricultural production, health and infrastructure. Some regional models have been developed illustrating expected crop impacts. This initial analysis indicates a mixture of winners and losers, some areas becoming wetter and others drier. In part planning for a response centres on adaptation to gradual climatic shifts. Despite the presence of global programs to support climate adaptation, little impact is evident in regional policy discussions.

There is also strong scientific evidence that climate change is associated with the increased incidence of extreme climate events; droughts and floods. This has obvious and immediate potential consequences on food insecurity.

Challenges and Opportunities

The analysis of regional food insecurity emphasized the chronic nature of the problem and linked this to the need for changes in policies. The shortcomings of the current frameworks used to guide response are clearly apparent. Therefore in developing food security 'solutions' there is a strong incentive for CSOs to engage more proactively in food security policy processes.

This is mirrored by the emerging changes in the architecture of aid assistance. There is clear regional trend to reinforce the centrality of national Governments and institutions in poverty reduction and development. Development assistance is increasingly being directed into national budgets. Preliminary agreement has been reached, that by 2010, 85 per cent of aid going to developing countries will show up in developing country budgets (OECD 2005). This strategy is being manifested by a shift towards Direct Budget Support (DBS) and Sector Wide Approaches (SWAPs) - principally driven by the European donors. The UN in the region is concurrently undergoing a major exercise to repositioning itself to align programming with national processes.

The practical consequence is fewer donors and less money available for CSOs to work in a direct service provision role. It is becoming harder to justify CSO projects simply on the basis of the benefits to a relatively small number of targeted households. The challenge is to replicate the success of these projects at the national level - using national institutions and structures. National and regional policy processes are the medium to make this linkage.

However, policy formulation and implementation is a relatively new role for many CSOs. The challenge is to start to unpack how this can be done and identify topics could provide a focus.

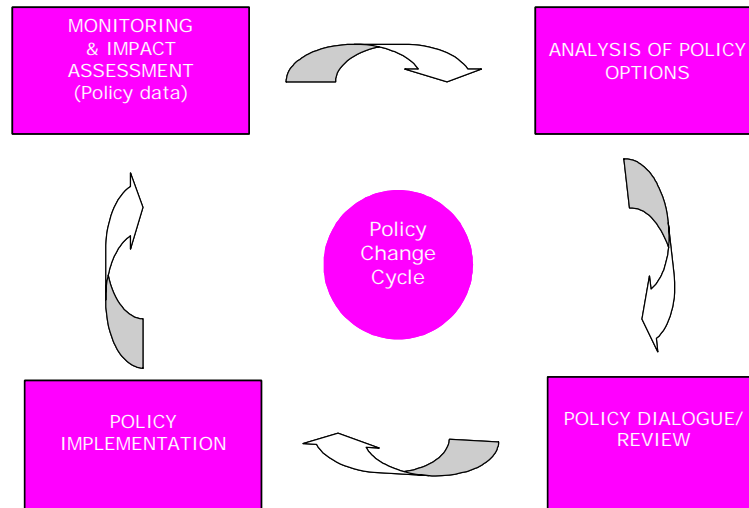
Identifying key policy processes

Policy development implies engagement throughout the policy cycle (Figure 2). The most visible part of this process is the formulation of formal policy documents; strategies, legislation and frameworks. However, support is required throughout the cycle - from formulation, to implementation, to monitoring and review, and back to reformulation. This can be as simple as better M&E and documentation of program experience - and ensuring that this is communicated back to decision makers.

There is clearly a wealth of information that has been developed by CSO field programs - however much of this remains 'buried' or poorly communicated. ***The conclusion is that CSOs should maximize the generation of relevant evidence from their field programs to support policy formulation, implementation and review.*** The evidence may relate to (i) policies that, often unintentionally, serve to trigger, maintain or deepen food insecurity, (ii)

identifying helpful policies that remain unimplemented, and (iii) identifying 'gaps' where new policies that need to be formulated.

Figure 2 The Policy Cycle



These food security policies are owned by different agencies including; (i) policies of the national governments in the region, (ii) policies of the regional institutions (in particular SADC), (iii) donor government policies, and (iv) policies of the multi-lateral institutions (IMF and World Bank). There is the potential and necessity for CSOs to become involved in policy debates with all these various stakeholders. Indeed effective synergies between the policies of the different players may be crucial in achieving food security.

A key aspect is linking the information generated by CSOs to stakeholders. There are well articulated national policy processes where the contribution of CSOs is increasingly being invited. A couple of regional wide opportunities, with specific relevance to food security, stand out.

- The PRSPs (or NDPs in some cases) are key strategy documents that shape national development priorities. CSOs have a mandated role in the formulation and monitoring of these key documents. There are already good examples in the region where CSO pilot programmes are linked directly to the development of relevant chapters and could provide models for others to emulate.
- The national Vulnerability Assessment Committees (VACs) are key to assessing, analyzing and recommending programmatic and policy responses to food insecurity. Each VAC is chaired by a host Ministry and consequently the VAC recommendations are tabled in cabinet, providing a link straight into policy. However, CSO involvement in VACs remains relatively light, especially at the strategic level.

The experience of NGOs, particularly INGOs, has tended to be geared towards influencing the policies of donor countries through the medium of advocacy campaigns. However, there is an increasing focus on changing the policies of the national Governments in the region. Many of these are not traditional CSO advocacy targets and there is an instinctive appreciation that adversarial advocacy techniques will not work well. Where advocacy *per se* is called for, 'softer' advocacy approaches may need to be developed.

Narrowing the policy focus

Given the breadth of the food security debate CSOs will need to focus their limited resources on a carefully selected sub-set of these larger policy issues. In part this will be driven by the internal organizational strategies and goals. In practice CSOs will have greatest credibility where there are strong synergies between the policy dialogue and the field programmes or areas of expertise.

A good example of how field experience can be linked to policy is the DFID funded Program Partnership Agreement implemented by CARE in Zambia. Under this CARE is implementing a pilot cash transfer program in two districts. CARE retains overall responsibility the program, but works through Government structures. There are only three specific CARE staff employed on the program, one centrally and two district coordinators - all other implementers are Government employees. The project is being used to pilot cash transfers, to understand best implementation modalities, and backed by rigorous M&E it is testing the cost effectiveness in comparison to alternative social protection measures. On the back of the experience being gained CARE has been asked to help draft the chapter on social protection in the new National Development Plan (NDP). Ultimately it is hoped to roll-out a national scheme, funded by Government.

If the CSO expertise in the region are mapped against the on-going policy debates of the previous section some general patterns tend to emerge. Experience suggests there are areas of strong and developing CSO competencies. These would include rural livelihoods, HIV-AIDS, safety nets, vulnerability analysis and nutrition. In all these areas CSOs often have a firm basis for engagement in policy processes.

However, the preceding arguments demonstrated the increasing importance of economic and trade related policies to regional food security. CSO competencies in these areas are relatively thin. While in the short term it would probably be a mistake to engage in these policy areas, given the significance of these topics, it may be appropriate to consider whether CSOs may need to develop greater competencies on trade and economic policy in future.

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