Forum for Food Security in Southern Africa

Policy Options for Increasing the Contribution of Social Protection to Food Security

Stephen Devereux
Institute of Development Studies
University of Sussex

September 2003

This Theme Paper is one of four commissioned by the Forum for Food Security in Southern Africa. Each Theme Paper covers a specific topic: institutions; markets; human vulnerability; and social protection. The aim is to contribute to analytical and strategic thinking on longer term food security options following the Southern African crisis.

The Theme Papers use economic, institutional and political analysis applied to the evidence base in the region, and informed where relevant by evidence from other parts of the South, to explore the policy implications of the priority food security issues raised in Country Issues Papers produced by resident experts in Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

To access the other Theme Papers, or to send comments on them, and to find out more about the work of the Forum for Food Security in Southern Africa, visit
www.odi.org.uk/food-security-forum

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY v

Introduction 1
Contextualising Social Protection 1
Defining social protection 1
The case for social protection 3
Dilemmas of social protection in southern Africa 4
Comparing 2001/02 with 1992/93 7
HIV/AIDS 7
Market liberalisation 8
Poverty 8
Governance factors 8
Targeted Social Protection Interventions 9
Risk Reduction Measures 10
Fertiliser subsidies and handouts 10
National food security agency 11
Risk Mitigation Measures 12
National grain reserves 12
Grain futures markets 13
Weather insurance 13
Risk Coping Measures 14
Food price subsidies 14
Cash transfers 14
School feeding and food-for-education 15
Nutritional support to AIDS-affected families 16
Public works programmes 17
Social Protection and the PRSPs 20
Lesotho 21
Malawi 22
Mozambique 24
Zambia 24
Summing Up: PRSPs and Social Protection 25
Conclusion 26

References 28

ABBREVIATIONS

ADMARC	Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation [Malawi]
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CBO	community-based organisation
CFW	cash-for-work
CHAD	Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department [United Kingdom]
COPE	Community-based Options for Protection and Empowerment of HIV/AIDS affected families and children [Malawi]
CPAR	Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief
DDPRR	Department of Disaster Preparedness, Relief and Rehabilitation [Malawi]
DFID	Department for International Development [UK]
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
FANR	Food Agriculture and Natural Resources [SADC]
FFW	food-for-work
FPE	Free Primary Education [Lesotho, Malawi]
GAPVU	Gabinete de Apoio à População Vulnerável [Mozambique]
GFDC	Ghana Food Distribution Corporation
GM	genetically modified
GMB	Grain Marketing Board [Zimbabwe]
GTZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Technische Zusammenarbeit [Germany]
IDC	International Development Committee [UK]
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
IFRC	International Federation of the Red Cross
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council [South Africa]
ILO	International Labour Office
KAIPPG	Kenya AIDS Intervention Prevention Project Group
kg	kilogram
LFCD	Lesotho Fund for Community Development
MACOHA	Malawi Council for the Handicapped
MASAF	Malawi Social Action Fund
MK	Malawi Kwacha
MoAI	Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation [Malawi]
MSPAP	Minister of State Responsible for Poverty Alleviation Programmes [Malawi]
NAMBOARD	National Agricultural Marketing Board [Zambia]
NASFAM	National Smallholder Farmers Association of Malawi
NFRA	National Food Reserve Agency [Malawi]
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OVC	orphans and vulnerable children
PAAP	Poverty Alleviation Action Plan [Zimbabwe]
PEAP	Poverty Eradication Action Plan [Uganda]
PLWA	people living with AIDS
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PUSH	Project Urban Self-Help [Zambia]
PWAS	Public Welfare Assistance Scheme [Zambia]
PWD	people with disabilities
PWP	public works programme
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAFEX	South African Futures Exchange
SCOPE-OVC	Strengthening Community Partnerships for the Empowerment of Orphans and Vulnerable Children [Zambia]
SGR	Strategic Grain Reserve
UK	United Kingdom
UN-OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation

Executive Summary

Among the many explanations of why southern Africans coped less effectively with the food crisis of 2001/02 than with the drought of 1991/92, three sets of factors – AIDS, market liberalisation, and governance failures – suggest that new needs for social protection might be emerging that differ from the needs of the past. These factors, which all impact negatively on informal social security systems, are ratcheting up the poverty and vulnerability of people throughout the region. Against these real and possibly increasing needs, serious challenges face the attempt to deliver even minimal levels of publicly funded social protection in southern Africa, including the following:

1. How can very poor countries provide effective social protection for their citizens, given the fiscal constraints these governments face, and pressures to prioritise public spending in the 'productive' economic sectors rather than the social sectors?
2. Given the close linkages between chronic and transitory food insecurity, which public interventions can achieve positive synergies between social protection and pro-poor economic growth, by supporting people through short-term crises while reducing their long-term vulnerability?
3. How can governments and donors move beyond supporting a set of loosely related 'social welfare' or 'safety net' instruments, towards an integrated approach to social protection that addresses vulnerability in a comprehensive and systematic way?
4. Given fiscal and administrative constraints, and a context of reducing government interventionism in the economy, how can public actors (governments, donors) work together in partnership with private and informal actors (communities, CSOs and NGOs, including faith-based organisations) to deliver effective social protection?

Three principles should guide the selection of social protection interventions:

1. Since comprehensive social protection for all southern Africans is unaffordable for the foreseeable future, affordable, high-impact interventions should be prioritised;
2. Social protection means providing social assistance to those who are chronically unable to make ends meet, as well as social insurance against transitory fluctuations in household access to food;
3. In the current policy context of PRSPs, social protection must be fully integrated into poverty reduction programmes, and should include measures that empower citizens wherever possible to move out of poverty and reduce their vulnerability.

Recommendations for moving towards the ideal of comprehensive social protection throughout southern Africa are discussed under the three categories of risk reduction, mitigation and coping.

<u>Risk reduction measures:</u>

This paper recommends the establishment of National Social Protection Agencies, coordinated at the regional level by SADC, with at least three mandated functions.

- to find sustainable solutions to the problem of constrained access to agricultural inputs that undermines viability of farmers' livelihoods and raises vulnerability throughout the region;
- to monitor national food availability and trends in food prices, in collaboration with early warning systems such as FEWSNET, and to ensure that rapid response capability exists;
- to devise more effective responses to the impacts of HIV/AIDS on household livelihoods, for instance by identifying and promulgating labour-saving agricultural technologies and/or

low-labour alternatives to farming, for households that have become labour-constrained because of AIDS-related illness and deaths.

Risk mitigation measures:

The 2001/02 crisis underlined the importance of maintaining national grain reserves. However:

- the appropriate level of national grain stocks – balancing risk mitigation objectives against the high financial costs of holding unutilised grain in silos – must be determined;
- the mismanagement of Malawi's Strategic Grain Reserve has highlighted the importance of effective and transparent management of national grain reserves;
- more effort should be invested in exploring the feasibility of alternatives such as grain futures markets – again, regional coordination should complement national activities;

Risk coping measures:

A major challenge is to target the benefits of social protection transfers on the most needy. For example:

- it may be desirable to extend the concept of social pensions (as in South Africa, Namibia and Botswana) to much poorer countries in the region, but this is clearly unrealistic;
- instead, targeted transfers to elderly carers of AIDS orphans offers a way of supporting these vulnerable groups without incurring the costs of an untargeted transfer scheme.

Another principle is to select measures that achieve both risk coping and risk reduction objectives simultaneously, for example:

- public works programmes, which build market-integrating roads and other infrastructure;
- school feeding schemes, which transfer skills that should offer the current generation of southern African children more livelihood options than farming for subsistence.

For the longer term, a risk management approach to household food security would shift policy attention away from reactive short-term safety nets, and towards a risk reducing strategy that seeks to minimise income and consumption variability by supporting farmers while simultaneously promoting livelihood diversification, to reduce dependence on rain-fed agriculture. Since the objective is to support more secure and more lucrative livelihoods for all southern Africans, such a strategy should achieve both social protection and economic development objectives.

Introduction [1]

The question this paper attempts to answer is: What social protection policies and institutions are needed to achieve the food security goal of ensuring adequate and appropriate food at affordable prices to all southern Africans at all times? Clearly, formal and informal social protection systems do not adequately support household food security in southern Africa at present. This is apparent not only in the unprecedented impacts of the recent food crisis, but also in the evidence of unsustainable livelihoods throughout the region – high levels of stunting in Malawi and elsewhere, child mortality reversals in Zambia during the 1980s and 1990s (Simms et al. 1998), displacement of thousands of commercial farm workers in Zimbabwe, millions of orphans and falling life expectancy across the region due to the direct and indirect effects of HIV/AIDS.

This paper is organised into three main sections, as follows. The next section sets the context: it defines social protection, sets out several dilemmas facing the implementation of effective social protection measures in southern Africa, and asks the question “Why were people in southern Africa more vulnerable to the food production shock of 2002 than to the more severe shock of 1992?” The following section reviews experiences with a range of social protection interventions, from Strategic Grain Reserves to school feeding programmes, arguing that each has advantages and disadvantages, but that effective social protection requires a multi-pronged approach that meets the full range of food security needs, rather than a single ‘one size fits all’ instrument. The final section before the Conclusion reviews the extent to which each national Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper addresses social protection issues, and finds a great diversity across countries.

Contextualising Social Protection

Defining social protection

Social protection is distinguished from other development interventions in that it is not intended to promote economic growth, though it is intended to alleviate poverty. In general, economic growth is for poverty reduction; social protection is for vulnerability reduction. This has two aspects. One is reduced income and consumption variability. If the objective of economic growth is to raise mean income, the objective of social protection is to reduce variations around mean income. The second role for social protection is to buffer the consumption of chronically poor individuals who cannot benefit from interventions that raise earned income (i.e. the labour-constrained poor – people with disabilities [PWD], orphans, people living with HIV/AIDS [PLWA], and so on).

DFID’s current definition of social protection has three key elements – vulnerability, unacceptable levels of deprivation, and public action: “Social protection refers to the public actions taken in response to levels of vulnerability, risk and deprivation which are deemed socially unacceptable within a given polity or society” (Norton, Conway and Foster 2002:543). This definition is fairly similar to the World Bank’s, which emphasises the two elements of risk management (social insurance), and support to the chronically poor (social assistance): social protection is defined by the World Bank as “public interventions to assist individuals, households, and communities better manage risk, and to provide support to the critically poor” (Holzmann and Jørgensen 2000:2).

Initially, social safety nets aimed simply at “raising the consumption of the poor through publicly-provided transfers”, but more recently the focus has shifted to “helping low-income households cope with income fluctuations as well” (Morduch and Sharma 2002:569). The World Bank identifies “two compelling reasons for using public transfers to reduce risk: one is that the poor are often more susceptible to variations in income and less able to withstand shocks and the other is that some form of insurance may allow them to take on the greater risk that leads to higher long-term income” (Smith and Subbarao 2003:12).

[1] My thanks to Rebecca Holmes for research assistance. Stephen Carr, Elizabeth Cromwell, Neil Fisher, Paul Harvey, Neil Marsland and Simon Maxwell and Steve Wiggins all provided helpful comments on earlier drafts. I am also grateful to participants in the e-discussion on ‘Social Protection’ that ran from 16-25 June 2003, under the **Forum for Food Security in Southern Africa**, including: Barbara Chibambo, Michael Drinkwater, Erica Keogh, Ina Mentz, Andrew Shepherd, and Philip White.

In the context of food security, Sen's notion of "development as freedom" suggests a critical role for social protection, to assist in achieving "a very elementary freedom: the ability to survive rather than succumb to premature mortality" (Sen 1999:24). Sen's entitlement framework identifies four legal sources of food: production, employment, trade and transfers. A narrow definition of social protection might restrict the definition for policy purposes to direct transfers of food, but a broader definition recognises that all four sources can be supported under the rubric of social protection. Production-based entitlements can be stimulated through the provision of inputs (seeds and tools) to food deficit farmers; employment-based transfers can be created through food-for-work projects; trade-based entitlements can be enhanced through food price interventions (consumer subsidies). All of these interventions can be considered as instruments of social protection, in addition to conventional transfer-based entitlements (food aid or supplementary feeding, as well as cash transfers or vouchers that boost the purchasing power of the food insecure).

Table 1 below provides a framework for analysing different categories of social protection needs, in terms of vulnerability factors and vulnerable groups, and social protection interventions, under three broad categories of social assistance, social insurance, and social equity. The inclusion of social equity reflects a recognition that the rights and well-being of poor and vulnerable groups can be protected and enhanced without necessarily transferring economic resources to them: a sensitisation campaign (e.g. the 'HIV/AIDS Anti-Stigma Campaign' in Uganda) or a change in legislation (e.g. introducing a minimum wage) can make a positive difference at low fiscal cost.

Table 1. A framework for social protection analysis and interventions

Vulnerability Categories	Affected Groups
Chronically Poor	Severely disabled Terminally ill Ethnic minorities Urban unemployed Pastoralists
Economically At Risk	Cash crop farmers Internally Displaced Persons Orphans Informal sector workers Widows and the Elderly
Socially Vulnerable	Ethnic minorities People living with AIDS Victims of domestic abuse People with disabilities Female-headed households Abducted children

Category of Interventions	Types of Programmes
Social Assistance	Disability benefit Single-parent allowances Social pensions Food aid Food-for-work
Social Insurance	Formalised pensions Unemployment benefits Health insurance Maternity benefits Accident insurance
Social Equity	Sensitisation campaigns Changes to regulatory framework to protect vulnerable and minority groups against discrimination and abuse Operationalising economic, social and cultural rights

Source: Social Protection Task Force, Social Protection in Uganda, Phase I Report: Vulnerability Assessment & Review of Initiatives, Kampala, October 2002

Three issues that emerged out of the e-discussion on Social Protection about definitions should be emphasised. Firstly, it is important to draw a clear distinction between social assistance for vulnerable individuals who are unable to make an independent livelihood (orphans, elderly, etc.) and social insurance to support the working poor against livelihood shocks (e.g. drought). This relates to the second point, which is that some forms of social protection can contribute to economic growth, and should therefore be given more prominence in PRSPs. Finally, Philip White argued that social protection should be "an inclusive concept embracing 'social assistance' and 'social insurance', and flexibility to include many alternative combinations of targeting mechanisms (none, geographical, administrative, community, self), forms of transfer (cash, food, agricultural inputs, housing, fuel, vouchers etc.) and terms of transfer (free distribution, price subsidies, credit arrangements, deferred payment) which meet group and time-specific needs for 'hand-outs' or 'hand-ups'."[2]

The case for social protection

Against the view that social protection is an expensive use of scarce public resources, the case for prioritising social protection more highly can be made on several grounds. Firstly, there is the 'equity' argument for humanitarian relief to people whose lives and livelihoods are threatened by natural disasters (drought, epidemics, etc.). The international relief industry is grounded in the humanitarian principle that saving lives is an imperative that must be followed, whatever the cost. This argument is reinforced by international human rights charters – the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), for instance, includes provision for various forms of social security.[3]

Secondly, the current preoccupation of governments and donors with poverty reduction and the Millennium Development Goals requires a holistic approach that includes not only policies for raising incomes, but also redistribution of assets and income to the poor, and measures to reduce income variability and smooth consumption. Although social protection focuses on the second and third of these three components, and the first might seem the most direct route to sustainable poverty reduction, there are reasons for believing that social protection can also generate positive returns. As argued by the World Bank (cited above), the presence of effective safety nets can encourage moderate risk-taking by the poor, leading to higher average incomes. Evidence for this effect comes from evaluations of the Employment Guarantee Scheme in Maharashtra, India, where the assurance of public works employment allows farmers to invest in high-yielding crop varieties rather than drought-tolerant varieties that produce more reliable but lower returns.

There is also some evidence that social transfers to the poor do have significant asset creation and investment effects. Public works and school feeding programmes build infrastructure and human capital, for instance. A recent evaluation of an 'Income Generation for Vulnerable Group Development Program' in Bangladesh concluded that its innovative mixture of "livelihood protection (food aid) with livelihood promotion (skills training and microfinance)" had achieved qualified success and "should be a major focus for anti-poverty strategies" (Matin and Hulme 2003:647).[4] A study of social pensions in Namibia and cash payments to 'destitutes' in urban Mozambique (discussed further below) established that high proportions of transfer income were invested in small enterprises, agriculture and education costs, as well as generating income and employment multipliers (Devereux 2002a).

A third argument in favour of social protection is the direct plus indirect economic costs of <u>not</u> investing in social protection. In countries that are heavily dependent on rain-fed agriculture, the costs of harvest failure are threefold: lost income to farming households, lost foreign exchange from agricultural exports, and higher than normal food imports, for which scarce foreign exchange must be expended. A recent study of the costs of climatic variability in southern Africa estimated that the 1991/92 drought cost the region over US$ 2 billion in lost maize production (10 million tonnes), costs of importing cereal to bridge production deficits, and incalculable wider impacts on the agriculture sector and on GDP (Clay et al. 2003:viii). If these countries had succeeded during

2 Philip White, contribution to Social Protection e-discussion, 25 June 2003.

3 "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control" (United Nations 1948).

4 The authors emphasise, however, that this programme benefited only the working poor who can take advantage of training and credit: "a small proportion of the population will always need more traditional 'social welfare' support to avoid persistent deprivation" (Hulme and Matin 2003:662).

the 1990s in ‘weather-proofing’ their economies – by investing in small-scale irrigation, livelihood diversification, market integration and comprehensive social protection measures – then the costs and impacts of the 2001/02 weather shocks might have been largely contained. Instead – though the full costs have not yet been estimated – the recent crisis exposed the heightened vulnerability of national economies and household livelihoods. These effects were magnified in most affected countries by the absence of adequate social protection.

Dilemmas of social protection in southern Africa

Most African governments are facing what might be called “the Catch-22 of social protection” – the greater the need for social protection, the lower the capacity of the state to provide it. Wealthy countries with high revenue-raising capacity and low prevalence of poverty can afford to provide welfare benefits to a variety of poor and vulnerable groups, and have the administrative capacity and infrastructure to do so. The UK government, for instance, spends around 1/3 of its annual budget on welfare programmes. Very poor countries have neither the fiscal nor administrative capacity to finance and deliver effective social protection, and often lack the basic infrastructure needed as well. Poverty exceeds 60% in all countries covered by the Southern Africa Forum except Lesotho. Since the poor generally pay little or no taxes, this means that all redistributive measures towards the poor involve resource transfers from less than half to more than half of the population – and most of the ‘non-poor’ are far from wealthy by industrialised country standards. On the other hand, government decentralisation, including devolving authority to raise revenues to meet the costs of local service provision, is occurring throughout sub-Saharan Africa. In theory, decentralisation offers new opportunities for social protection needs to be identified and met through tax collection at the local level; but the dangers of rent-seeking or of the tax burden becoming excessive on the poor are high. In the case of Uganda, Ellis and Bahiigwa (2003:1010) argue that the local tax regime, far from facilitating poverty reduction, is “disabling in character”.

Smith and Subbarao (2003:1) identify four “common characteristics” of very poor countries that constrain the feasibility of installing effective public safety nets:

1. “They have very low average incomes;
2. They are generally not on a growth path that would significantly reduce poverty in the near future;
3. They have very limited resources to fund transfers to the poor;
4. They are often in the early stages of transition out of subsistence agriculture”.

Fiscal unaffordability, lack of information on beneficiaries, low administrative capacity to target programmes are all identified as “binding constraints” in very poor countries, which limit the scope for interventions to “what is feasible” rather than “what is desirable” (Smith and Subbarao 2003:14). With this proviso in mind, this paper suggests that the construction of an appropriate set of social protection interventions to address food insecurity in southern Africa should follow three sequential steps:

1) identification of the chronic and transitory food security problems faced by the poor;
2) identification of a range of desirable or ideal social protection interventions;
3) selection of a set of fiscally affordable and administratively feasible interventions from the toolbox of options available.

With respect to the first of the three steps, it is important for policy-makers to distinguish between transitory and chronic food insecurity. For transitory food crises as occurred in 2001/02, food aid is the instinctive response of governments and the international community – though it is not necessarily the most appropriate, and certainly not an adequate response on its own.[5] The issues

[5] As is typical of most or all humanitarian relief programmes, pledges for non-food items were significantly lower than for food aid requested in the Southern Africa emergency appeal. By March 2003, the food aid appeal was 70% funded, but the health component was 15% funded and the water and sanitation component just 8% funded (IDC 2003:37).

here are mainly around food aid management: adequate early warning, timely response, accurate targeting (minimising both exclusion and inclusion errors), avoiding dependency, and appropriate forms of food. In this context, the row over genetically modified [GM] food aid in Zambia has ramifications that have not yet been fully comprehended. The Zambian government's refusal to accept food aid comprising American GM commodities brought widespread condemnation of the government from the international government. Yet the government was entitled in terms of the Cartagena Protocol to reject GM food imports, and its concerns about (1) possible adverse health impacts and (2) cross-pollination of local crops closing access to European markets for Zambia's agricultural exports both deserved more serious consideration. In the event, the fact that Zambia avoided major famine after turning food aid away suggests that the international response to the crisis was exaggerated: having reacted too late to the first phase of the emergency in 2001/02, the donors overreacted to the second phase in 2002/03.

Food aid managers must also take decisions around appropriate delivery mechanisms: targeted food handouts versus public works projects, food subsidies versus school feeding schemes. An evaluation of food-for-work in Namibia during the 1991/92 drought found that the administrative complexity of designing, selecting and implementing food-for-work projects was such that this component of the drought relief programme reached only 7% of targeted beneficiaries within the programme period, while the 'Vulnerable Groups' feeding programme – targeted food handouts – achieved 88% coverage in the same period (Devereux and Solomon 1994). This result does not suggest that there is no role for administratively complex mechanisms in the delivery of food aid, but it does suggest that caution should be exercised if the to deliver food to hungry people is urgent: the humanitarian imperative should always be pre-eminent during emergencies.

The dimensions of chronic food insecurity in southern Africa are multiple, and include: climatic variability (rather than drought per se), natural disasters (floods in Mozambique), land pressure and declining soil fertility (southern Malawi, mountainous Lesotho), HIV/AIDS, and introduction of user charges for basic social services (health and education in Zambia). For addressing chronic food insecurity, a broader range of policy instruments is available. Recalling that food security can be achieved by improving either availability of food or access to food, interventions can include: holding buffer stocks at national level, attempting to increase household food production ('Starter Packs' in Malawi, inputs-for-work), providing the means to access food (targeted cash transfers, 'flexi-vouchers'), transferring food regularly to vulnerable groups (school feeding), or making food more affordable (subsidising or stabilising food prices).[6]

Much was written in the 1990s about 'linking relief and development' (Maxwell and Buchanan-Smith 1994), and it is certainly true that governments, donors and NGOs are trying to deal with the current food crisis in a way that reduces vulnerability to future food production shocks. CARE (2002), for instance, make a useful distinction between the short-term emergency of 2001/02 and the increasing underlying chronic vulnerability of people in the region. Emergency food aid helped to minimise the suffering caused by the emergency of 2001/02, but it has not addressed the underlying vulnerability that turned a moderate production decline into a serious livelihoods crisis for millions of people across southern Africa. Instead of treating the crisis as a food emergency at the household level, CARE analyses the problem as a livelihoods crisis at the community level, which requires an integrated approach that addresses the underlying causes of vulnerability.

CARE is one of many international NGOs that are active at community-level in several southern African countries, which found themselves caught up in the emergency and had to negotiate a balance between responding to the immediate crisis without undermining the longer-term development projects that they were running at the same time. PLAN International, for instance, has ongoing food security projects in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe. During 2002, PLAN set up temporary relief programmes to distribute food to families at risk of starvation, and also provided targeted support to orphans and families caring for them, disabled and elderly people, pregnant

[6] The potential impact of subsidising food prices was succinctly expressed by John Seaman from Save the Children UK, in his oral testimony to the International Development Committee's inquiry into the humanitarian crisis in Southern Africa: "if you had stabilised the price of maize in 2001 in Malawi no crisis would have occurred" (IDC 2003: Ev 67).

and breast-feeding women, as well as destitutes. “At the same time, PLAN has been conducting long-term sustainable food security projects that will help communities in Zimbabwe achieve self-sufficiency. Similar projects are also underway in Zambia and Malawi” (PLAN 2002:2).

PLAN’s ‘self-sufficiency’ approach in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe is mirrored by CARE’s food security approach in Lesotho: in all these countries, enhanced access to inputs for smallholders is included as a safety net intervention. This is a recognition of the importance of ‘productivity-enhancing safety nets’ for the working poor, to complement conventional ‘welfare transfers’ to the incapacitated poor. On the other hand, CARE’s ‘livelihood security model’ raises the question of whether the goal of production self-sufficiency is appropriate for all rural households, in a context of rising vulnerability to production shocks. For labour-constrained households and families with high dependency ratios – such as female-headed and elderly-headed households (grandparents caring for several orphaned grandchildren being an especially vulnerable category) – a more urgent priority might be to assist these households to diversify their livelihoods away from labour-intensive agriculture towards less risky and less labour-intensive alternatives.

This policy dilemma – between investing more scarce public resources in subsistence-oriented agriculture or promoting diversification instead – is one of many facing policy-makers concerned with social protection in contemporary southern Africa. Other dilemmas include:

- the distinction between transitory livelihood crises and underlying livelihood vulnerability;
- the (perceived) public spending choice between reducing poverty through investing in economic growth and alleviating poverty through social transfers;
- how to achieve synergy between public action and informal safety nets, to maximise the effectiveness of public interventions “and minimise the risk of displacing existing mechanisms” (Morduch and Sharma 2002:569);
- the difficulty of insuring large numbers of poor people against covariant risks such as weather shocks, versus the difficulty of identifying viable livelihood diversification options;
- the fiscal problem of financing social protection in very poor countries;
- doing what is ideologically and practically feasible in a liberalised policy environment.

On the last two points, it is worth recalling that there was a panoply of safety net interventions in southern Africa until the early 1990s, which were perceived as unaffordable and unsustainable by, especially, the Bretton Woods institutions, and systematically dismantled. Most countries in the region implemented food price subsidies, price controls (pan-territorial and pan-seasonal pricing), buffer stocks and subsidised input credit. Most governments maintained large parastatal agencies to implement these programmes, which were criticised as inefficient and antithetical to the emergence of a thriving private sector for agricultural inputs and outputs. As the parastatals were encouraged to become more efficient ‘cost recovery’ agencies, so they lost their social role of food security guarantors, and the fiscal and administrative burden of social protection was effectively delegated by governments onto donors (for funding) and NGOs (for implementation). Many projects were initiated that partly mimicked the policies and institutions that had just been abolished – Malawi’s transition from fertiliser subsidies (phased out by 1994) to fertiliser handouts (in most years since 1994) is a prime example – and therefore contradicted the spirit and intent of the reform process. In this policy environment of partial liberalisation and the ‘projectisation’ of social protection, perhaps the most fundamental dilemma facing national governments is how they can meet their obligation to protect their citizens against chronic and transitory food insecurity, in a world of diminished fiscal resources and severely restricted policy instruments.

In this context, an alternative approach might be to ‘mainstream’ (rather than ‘projectise’) social protection in the Poverty Reduction Strategies that most governments in southern Africa are now designing and implementing – i.e. to select policies have a social protection element, rather than setting up new projects that do nothing except provide social assistance. An example mentioned above is to identify and promote labour-saving technologies (or low-labour crops) in agriculture, which will enable the labour-constrained (e.g. child- or elderly-headed households) to continue farming. A conventional social assistance approach would simply transfer welfarist resources to such households, which is very expensive and encourages dependency rather than self-reliance.

Comparing 2001/02 with 1992/93

A useful starting point for understanding why social protection in southern Africa is inadequate for protecting the citizens of this region against livelihood shocks such as the recent food emergency is to compare it with the crisis of 1992. The World Bank's generic typology of risks facing the poor (in the World Development Report 2000/2001) includes illness, crime, unemployment, harvest failure and food price fluctuations (World Bank 2000:137). It is indisputable that most or all of these risks have increased in most countries of southern Africa since the 1992 drought. One reason for the higher vulnerability of people in Southern Africa to the food production shock of 2001/02, therefore – compared to the production shock of 1991/92 – may be that they faced 'compounded risks' in 2001/02: HIV/AIDS, market failures and governance crises, as well as erratic rainfall.

The southern African food production shock of 1992 was more severe than the production shock of 2001/02. By November 2002, across the six worst-affected countries, 14.4 million people were affected by food shortages and were declared at risk of "losing their livelihood assets, suffering from acute malnutrition or death, if food assistance is not provided" (UN-OCHA 2002:2). In July 1993, however, 18-20 million people in ten countries were considered to be "at serious risk" (SADC 1993; cited in Eldridge 2002:79). Cereal production collapsed to just 38% of the average for the previous five years, but in 2001 cereal production was 45% of the previous five years.

While the magnitude of the harvest failures in 200102 was less than the harvest failures of 1992, the consequences of the recent crisis were far more serious, including several hundred famine deaths when no excess mortality was recorded ten years earlier. In vulnerability terms – defining vulnerability as a product of exposure and susceptibility to livelihood threats – the exposure of poor households was similar in both years, but their susceptibility was higher in 2001/02. Why? HIV/AIDS is one factor, market liberalisation is another, poverty – related to both of these – yet another. Country-specific political or governance factors adds an additional layer of vulnerability. These issues are examined in depth in Theme Paper 3, and so are reviewed only briefly here.

HIV/AIDS

The single 'new' factor that undermined the capacity of households and communities to cope with the livelihood shock of 2001 is, arguably, the long-term demographic and socio-economic impacts of HIV/AIDS, which policymakers in national governments and the international community have failed to anticipate and address. As Guy Scott, a former Zambian Minister of Agriculture, asserts in a critique of 'one size fits all' structural adjustment policies: "Only recently have the Bretton Woods institutions come to realise the threat that AIDS poses to economic recovery in developing countries" (Scott 2002:406-407). The food crisis of 2001/02 made a strong case for stepping up social protection interventions to support PLWA, AIDS orphans and their carers alongside stepping up support to agriculture; but there is a real danger that this lesson will not be learned. Instead, policymakers are likely to react to the crisis by pursuing the PRSP priority of promoting economic growth through agriculture growth, which will in all probability leave the survivors of the recent crisis just as vulnerable to the next harvest failure.

"In 1992 Southern Africa faced a harsh drought that affected some 18 million people. However, HIV had not then taken hold as it has now" (Oxfam 2002:5) – especially in rural areas, where people depend on their physical strength to produce their own food. The statistics are stark and devastating: 20% of adults in the region are HIV-positive; there were half a million AIDS deaths and 2½ million new AIDS orphans in 2001 alone (UNAIDS, cited by Ellis in Theme Paper 3). This burden of caring is not only undermining the productive capacity of families and communities – because it selectively removes economically active adults from the workforce[7] – it is stretching

[7] "Stephen Lewis, the UN Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, has argued that 'AIDS caused the famine', since the number of people able to farm and produce food has declined so precipitously" (quoted in UN-OCHA 2002:2).

the coping capacity of extended families and communities beyond breaking point, according to some sources (though more research into this assertion is needed). People living with AIDS [PLWA], AIDS orphans and elderly-headed households are now routinely added to lists of 'vulnerable groups'.[8] In rural Lesotho, about 50% of all households are elderly- or child-headed. In urban Malawi, the numbers of street children is rising due to an influx from rural areas to towns (UN-OCHA 2002:4).

Market liberalisation

"It is clear that without some form of state intervention as a safety net, poor people have become much more vulnerable to shocks such as erratic weather" (Oxfam 2002:7). In the early 1990s, most states in southern Africa maintained a range of institutions (such as marketing parastatals) and policies (such as input and output subsidies) that had complex and ambiguous effects – suppressing producer and trader incentives, perhaps, but also protecting food security for poor smallholders and consumers. The removal of institutional and policy pillars of support have, like the effects of HIV/AIDS, undermined both the productive and reproductive capacities of the poor in southern Africa: they are less able to produce enough food and income than before, and less resilient in the face of livelihood shocks. Marketing parastatals and price subsidies compensated for market failures that their abolition has done nothing to resolve. Instead, smallholders have lost access to inputs and output markets, food prices have become more volatile, and both chronic food insecurity and vulnerability to transitory food insecurity have increased across the region. The reasons for this unsatisfactory outcome are well described in Theme Paper 1, on 'The Role of Market-Based Economic Development in Strengthening Food Security (Poulton and Dorward). Throughout the region, liberalisation was implemented partially and reluctantly, it was badly sequenced, and – perhaps most important of all – several of the 'Washington consensus' policy prescriptions were inappropriate given the low level of market development in adjusting countries, especially in the food insecure rural areas where vulnerability has drastically increased.

Poverty

In 1992, drought-affected households responded to production deficits by purchasing food, which provided 2-3 times more staple food than emergency food aid (Eldridge 2002:80). Three factors made this a viable strategy in 1992, but much less effective in 2002. Firstly, households had more assets to sell or exchange for food (though livestock did die, and livestock prices fell); secondly, there were more off-farm employment opportunities for earning cash or food (in Malawi, the ratio of people looking for work to people offering work has escalated as rural poverty has deepened); thirdly, food prices did not rise as dramatically as in late 2001, although on both occasions the terms of trade between assets and food declined sharply. These changes make it important to speak not only of dollar-a-day income poverty, but also of 'asset poverty' and poverty induced by price volatility and lack of livelihood options, if a meaningful comparison is to be drawn.

Governance factors

A number of political factors impinged on the rapidity and effectiveness of the international response to the food crisis in 2001/02. Some of these were temporary and affected only the immediate humanitarian response, others indicate more fundamental and deep-seated causes of vulnerability. These country-specific governance factors included:

- in Malawi: the deteriorating relationship between the Government and its donor partners, and the stand-off over the sale of Malawi's Strategic Grain Reserve;
- in Zambia: the government's refusal to accept genetically modified [GM] food aid;

---

8 Lesotho's Food Security Assessment Report of September 2002 called for food assistance to the following 'vulnerable groups': aged-headed households living alone or without a spouse; female-headed households; orphans living in households with a high dependency ratio; HIV/AIDS victims and affected households (CARE 2002:1). The standard list of 'vulnerable groups' requiring social assistance is provided by Frank Ellis in Theme Paper 3. Male-headed households where the head's wife has died are not usually on this list, though given the multiple roles of women – not least as farmers – such households may be extremely vulnerable (Paul Harvey, *pers. comm.).*

- in Zimbabwe: the government's controversial 'fast-track' land resettlement policy, and its politicisation of food aid.

In 1992, a combination of people's own efforts and the effective response of governments and donors helped to prevent famine, as Eldridge (2002:86) concludes: "[F]amine in southern Africa in 1992/3 was averted largely by the activities of those most affected by the most calamitous drought in half a century: though the context was important: there was no conflict in the worst affected countries, governments generally reacted responsibly, if belatedly, and donors were unusually responsive." It was the absence of two of these three contextual factors – governments did not all act responsibly, and donors were not immediately responsive – combined with a much reduced capacity to cope among affected households and communities, that produced the conditions for a minor famine in parts of southern Africa in early 2002.

<u>Targeted Social Protection Interventions</u>

Social protection interventions can be designed to address one or more of three broad objectives: risk reduction, risk mitigation, and risk coping (World Bank 2000:141). In the aftermath of a food crisis, it is all too easy to focus on 'coping' interventions, designed to assist affected households and communities first, to survive and second, to rebuild their livelihoods. These are important ameliorative measures, but they do nothing to reduce vulnerability to future shocks that will require more ex post coping interventions. A strong case can be made for thinking now about strategies to 'weather-proof' rural communities in southern Africa against the production shocks that triggered the recent crisis, and to reduce the structural vulnerability of individuals and households affected by other risks, such as HIV/AIDS, or market failures. This requires a more holistic view of social protection than is usually adopted, and implies making strong linkages with 'developmental' policies such as those aimed at market deepening, without neglecting the immediate needs of the vulnerable.

The 1990s saw a shift away from general, untargeted safety nets and towards targeted social protection interventions. This shift has been associated with a great deal of thinking, theorising and experimentation around appropriate targeting mechanisms that accurately identify those who need social assistance at reasonable cost. Self-targeting – e.g. by imposing a work requirement – is one approach that is popular with policy-makers (this is examined below, under 'public works programmes'); identifying vulnerable groups is another.

Although chronic vulnerability can be a reasonable proxy for food insecurity, the specification of 'vulnerable groups' in terms of personal or household characteristics – people with disabilities, female-headed households, and so on – does not translate neatly into categories of people for whom targeted social protection interventions will automatically be needed. Firstly, it is rarely if ever the case that all members of these groups are vulnerable (which leads to 'inclusion errors' or leakages). Secondly, some vulnerable people – poor male-headed households, for instance – will inevitably be left out by these proxy categories (these are 'exclusion errors'). Though vulnerability is highly gendered and is closely related to capacity to work – and therefore health-determined as well – these are not the only determinants of economic vulnerability. Thirdly, vulnerability – especially 'transitory' as opposed to 'chronic' vulnerability – needs to be defined in relation to specific threats. While the 'chronically vulnerable' are those who are persistently unable to make ends meet without external support, the 'transitorily vulnerable' require assistance only after a shock undermines their capacity to meet their subsistence needs; but such a shock can take many forms and affect different people in different ways and to different extents. In southern Africa, as discussed above, erratic weather has generated specific food security threats to smallholder food producers, but this is exacerbated by rising levels of poverty and HIV/AIDS (across the region), governance crises (especially in Zimbabwe and Angola, but also in Malawi), and 'market liberalisation failures' (which are felt most acutely in remote rural areas).

In the present circumstances, two social protection needs are particularly acute: rebuilding assets and livelihoods, and support to orphans and other vulnerable children. First, in order to survive the recent emergency, affected families were forced into 'distress sales' of livestock and other household assets at low prices, thus depleting their wealth base as well as undermining their productive capacity. Effective social protection should include efforts to rebuild these assets, both to restore households' coping capacity against future crises and to enable them to earn more income and grow more food. (It is important in this context to think in terms of community-level assets, and not just targeted transfers to households. For instance, for a community to be self-sufficient in draught power, it is not necessary for each household to own a pair of oxen.) Second, since the numbers of OVCs in southern Africa are rising faster than the ability of informal and formal social protection providers to cope, one objective of social protection policy should be to strengthen family and community capacity to support OVCs, including fostering services.

This section discusses a number of interventions under the broad category of social protection, most of which have been implemented in southern Africa. Some of these (e.g. fertiliser subsidies) could be described as 'productivity-enhancing safety nets', since their intention is to raise food production. Others (weather insurance and social pensions) are forms of 'social insurance'. Instruments such as national grain reserves and food price subsidies attempt to protect entitlements to food by stabilising prices. Finally, some 'social assistance' interventions, such as school feeding and public works programmes, have dual objectives – to transfer food or cash and build sustainable assets (human capital in the case of school feeding, physical infrastructure in the case of public works). As will be seen, all of these measures have their strengths and weaknesses; each addresses a distinct social protection need; but none is sufficient on its own.

Risk Reduction Measures

Possible measures to reduce agricultural risk in rural southern Africa include efforts to boost crop production by providing direct support to farmers, and the idea of establishing a new agency with responsibility for ensuring household and national food security.

Fertiliser subsidies and handouts

Restricted access to agricultural inputs, especially inorganic fertilisers, is widely recognised as one consequence of economic liberalisation that has been detrimental to household food security among smallholders in Southern Africa. As noted in Theme Paper 2 and Theme Paper 3, a perverse consequence of market liberalisation was to push farming households back towards subsistence-oriented production and away from market-oriented production, because of the removal of parastatals as input suppliers and output buyers and the failure of the private sector to fulfil these functions in rural areas across the region. In Malawi and Zambia, the abolition of fertiliser subsidies, collapse of subsidised credit programmes, and massive currency devaluations combined to elevate fertiliser prices beyond the purchasing power of most smallholders. More controversial is whether interventions to restore access to inputs qualify as social protection, since the intention is clearly to boost agricultural production. The answer is, it depends on how access to inputs is provided. Consider a recent World Bank definition of safety nets: "safety nets are taken to include any direct transfers to the poor, whether in cash or in kind (e.g., food and fertiliser), with or without a work requirement" (Smith and Subbarao 2003:2; emphases added). In these terms, direct transfers of inputs count, but credit – including inputs credit – does not.

The 'Starter Pack' programme in Malawi is widely credited with improving household and national food security since it was introduced in 1998, but is also blamed for contributing to the production failure of 2001, after the donors scaled it back from a universal programme to one targeted at a half, then a third, of farming households. A review of three years of Starter Pack and Targeted Inputs Programmes in Malawi found that they contributed ±25% to the national maize harvest in 1998/99, 15-30% in 1999/00, and 5% in 2000/01, when it was scaled down and erratic rains reduced smallholder maize production by 40% (Levy and Barahona 2002). According to Levy and Barahona, an important effect of the first and second Starter Pack programmes was their scale, which enhanced household and national food security not only through their impact on food production but also – crucially – by dampening maize price rises during the 'hungry season' months of January–April, when most smallholders are net purchasers of maize, and prices peak.

An important secondary source of food in parts of southern Africa is the winter crop, planted in June and harvested in November-December. This option is available mainly to farmers with access to wetland areas (dambo). In Malawi and Zambia, donors such as DFID and FAO, and NGOs such as Oxfam, distributed free seeds and tools to farmers after their main harvest failed in 2001 and/or 2002, to assist them in producing food to bridge the hungry season months until the next main harvest the following April. In Malawi in 2002, a winter season 'Targeted Inputs Programme' distributed packs of fertiliser and seed (hybrid maize and beans) to 300,000 farming households with access to either dambo or irrigated land. The objective was to increase maize production and thus reduce household food insecurity, following the poor main harvest. However, an impact assessment found that the Winter TIP contributed relatively little to national or household food security, because it benefited mainly better-off households: "the 2002 Winter TIP benefited few of the poorest and most vulnerable households, which probably did not have access to dambo" (Nyirongo et al. 2003:9).

Even though programmes such as the Starter Pack do partially restore access to agricultural inputs, these interventions are implemented at the discretion of donors such as DFID; they do not give farmers choice over how much fertiliser and seed to apply, of what kind, and when. The programme currently operates only in Malawi; even there, it is doubtful whether it is politically and financially sustainable. A self-targeted alternative way of improving access to inputs in a context of high prices or market failure is inputs-for-work, which has been successfully piloted in Malawi.

<u>National food security agency</u>

There is no doubt that there were serious problems with the parastatal marketing agencies that dominated agriculture in southern Africa until the 1990s – ADMARC in Malawi, Grain Marketing Board [GMB] in Zimbabwe, National Agricultural Marketing Board [NAMBOARD] in Zambia. Parastatals clearly contributed to agriculture's problems in the past in many ways, including: late payment of farmers for their produce, under-paying farmers, and disincentivising food producers by subsidising food prices for urban consumers. These agencies did not always act in the best interests of the poorest smallholders, they were inefficient and unaccountable, in some cases they became by-words for corruption. However, they did fulfil important food security functions, and their partial privatisation or abolition has left the people they served in a dangerous 'transition' phase, between dependence on a parastatal that is no longer reliable as an input supplier and output buyer of last resort, and dependence on a thin network of private traders that is either exploitative of the poor or completely absent. The challenge now is to find ways of achieving the important food security goals that parastatals were set up to achieve – ensuring access to inputs for farmers excluded from markets by poverty or remoteness, providing a guaranteed market for farmers' produce, stabilising food prices and supplies – without the heavy costs and negative consequences associated with parastatals and subsidies.[9]

It might be argued that the food crisis of 2002 highlighted the need for a reconstituted 'national food security agency', to fulfil the essential food security functions that the private sector will never perform. These functions would include: intervening in the market to stabilise food prices counter-seasonally and during emergencies; opening temporary 'social markets' to supply inputs (at planting time), sell food at affordable prices (during the 'hungry season') and purchase cash crops (after harvest) in communities that are either neglected or exploited by private traders; maintaining a national 'strategic grain reserve'; and importing grain as necessary to stock the reserve, bridge seasonal production deficits, and respond to emergencies.

The idea of a National Food Security Agency had broad support among those who commented on it in the e-discussion, particularly in terms of coordinating the activities and interventions of

[9] Recent ideas in this direction build on the principle that self-organised associations of farmers are more likely to define and achieve their objectives than a 'top-down' national agency. NASFAM – the National Smallholder Farmers Association of Malawi – is a prominent case in point. 'Modern cooperatives' are re-emerging in Tanzania, where 'savings and credit co-operatives' also provide an important element of informal social protection (Mchomvu *et al.* 2002).

donors and governments that are generally uncoordinated, and often inconsistent, at present.[10] One question raised is how to ensure such an agency's independence from political interference, to avoid the problems that plagued parastatal (mis-)management in the past. Another important question is how broadly to define its mandate – perhaps a 'National Social Protection Agency' is more appropriate, as this would allow a broader view of social protection needs than just food security to be adopted. Also, an overarching concern is whether the institutional capacity exists to implement such agencies effectively, and whether the donors have the flexibility and patience to commit to the long-term capacity-building and institution-building that would be required.

Risk Mitigation Measures

Initiatives to buffer the impacts of livelihood shocks include strategic national grain reserves, the use of grain futures markets, and innovative approaches to crop or weather insurance.

National grain reserves

Many countries in the SADC region hold strategic reserves of grain as an insurance against harvest failures. A grain reserve is a nationally-run mechanism for protecting household food security, but there are various ways in which it might be used. One is to hold the grain until a production deficit and then to release it as food aid or at subsidised prices, to compensate for reduced supplies. This is the 'buffer stock' function. The difficulties inherent in this approach are well demonstrated by the mismanagement of Malawi's Strategic Grain Reserve in the run-up to the food crisis of 2001/02. The National Food Reserve Agency [NFRA] was mandated to manage the national Strategic Grain Reserve [SGR] on a cost recovery basis, but after taking a loan to stock the SGR initially, two good harvests left the NFRA with rotting grain that it could not sell without incurring heavy losses, and when it finally did sell the reserve with the intention of replenishing it the harvest turned out to be much worse than predicted, and Malawi was left with no SGR precisely when it was desperately needed.[11]

Another possibility is to revert to the counter-seasonal price stabilisation interventions favoured by parastatal agencies such as the Ghana Food Distribution Corporation [GFDC] in the 1980s. The GFDC bought grain at low prices post-harvest, stored these stocks until the 'hungry season' six months later, then released this grain onto village markets at purchase price plus handling costs – storage and transport. The effect was to undercut traders who applied excessive profit margins, and this intervention successfully dampened food price seasonality. The arguments against this kind of intervention are: cost (this is an expensive operation to run) and ideological (it inhibits the activities of private traders). The cost argument requires closer analysis: some investment in food security is needed; but is this the most cost-effective intervention in the toolbox? The ideological argument has some merit in contexts where the private sector is inhibited by the contra-market interventions of parastatal agencies, but has less validity in contexts of market failures.

Holding large grain reserves is expensive, and some donor agencies are arguing for alternative approaches. Is there any potential for setting up a Regional Food Security Reserve? The idea was mooted for the Great Lakes region in the 1990s, but there is no actual experience to draw on. As the region's major surplus producer of maize, South Africa acts as a quasi-reserve for southern Africa (as Zimbabwe did until recently) but South Africa is also subject to weather shocks. One positive consequence of the food crisis has been the strengthening of SADC's food

---

10 Two examples: firstly, while some donors are funding or implementing food-for-work projects in southern Africa, others are supporting cash-for-work, yet payment in food or in cash reflects two diametrically opposed approaches to household food insecurity. Secondly, it is inconsistent for donors on the one hand to argue for market-based approaches to inputs provision, and on the other hand to fund programmes such as the Starter Pack or Targeted Inputs Programme (a 100% fertiliser subsidy) and inputs-for-work – these being two valid but transfer-based mechanisms of getting seeds and fertilisers to farmers.

11 A similar difficult choice between economic pressures and food security objectives almost brought Zimbabwe to the brink of famine in 1990/91, when the Bretton Woods institutions instructed the government to sell its grain reserve just prior to the 1991 agricultural drought.

security function;[12] this offers hope for the possibility that regional solutions will be found to regional food insecurity.[13]

Recently, attention has shifted to innovative ideas such as holding some reserves in physical stocks and some in foreign exchange – or even holding only financial reserves – so that food can be imported quickly when needed, at greatly reduced transactions costs. The experience of landlocked countries like Malawi and Zambia in 2001/02, facing logistical difficulties, transport bottlenecks and competing demands for food from wealthier neighbours like Zimbabwe, highlights the riskiness of this approach and provides grist to the mill for pursuing a more conservative approach – increasing the Strategic Grain Reserve, not reducing it. There is no optimal solution. A larger buffer stock is more expensive but reduces risk; a smaller buffer stock is cheaper but riskier. One principle that must be established is that a grain reserve cannot be expected to cover its costs, and must not be compelled to. (The decision to make the NFRA in Malawi a cost-recovery quango was literally a fatal error, one that should not be repeated.) This does not mean that a national grain reserve can not be run accountably, transparently and cost-effectively.

Grain futures markets

A final alternative to physical grain stocks is the use of futures markets by national governments or SADC as food security insurance. In 2001, SADC Ministers of Agriculture commissioned an investigation into this mechanism, which concluded that it should be seriously considered as one component of a diversified portfolio of risk management strategies against food security threats. The South African Futures Exchange [SAFEX] was identified as potentially having the capacity to manage this scheme, which would (briefly) function as follows. Following first-round production forecasts (usually in February in SADC countries), governments (and/or private traders) would decide whether to purchase an option from SAFEX to buy maize at a fixed price at a future date – say September or December, depending on the size of the projected maize deficit. The cost of this option, at 5-10% of the total purchase cost, is the ‘insurance premium’ that will either be taken up, sold on or allowed to lapse, depending on the actual harvest outcome, If managed at the regional rather than national level, this approach has the potential to promote intra-regional trade, strengthen the role of private actors, and reduce the need for national governments to hold either large physical grain stocks or large financial reserves.[14]

Weather insurance

Morduch and Sharma (2002:585-586) describe an innovative idea for ‘weather insurance’, which is being piloted by the World Bank and IFPRI in Africa and Latin America. Instead of individual payouts based on each farmer’s harvest, ‘weather insurance’ pays out automatically to all participating farmers when rainfall in the insured area falls below the long-term mean or median, and the amount paid out is proportional to the percentage that total rainfall falls below average. One advantage of this idea over conventional crop insurance – which has failed in poor agrarian societies across Africa, Asia and Latin America, mainly because of information asymmetries and covariant risk – is that it eliminates ‘moral hazard’ (the incentive to reduce effort, since a payout is assured if the harvest fails). In contrast to crop insurance, payouts are made relative to measured rainfall, which is independent of farmers’ behaviour. (It is more difficult for insurers to monitor farmers through the agricultural year than to monitor rainfall.) On the other hand, covariant risk remains a major obstacle for potential insurers: when thousands of farmers are affected by the

[12] For instance, in March 2003 SADC’s Food Agriculture and Natural Resources [FANR] unit hosted a ‘Regional Dialogue on Agricultural Recovery, Food Security and Trade Policies in Southern Africa’, in Gaborone, Botswana.

[13] Several major donors also upgraded their presence in the region because of the food crisis during 2002. WFP set up an operational centre for the Southern Africa emergency in Johannesburg, and DFID set up a regional Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department [CHAD] office in Pretoria, for instance. Whether these institutions will remain in place to deal with the chronic vulnerability that precipitated the recent emergency remains to be seen.

[14] This paragraph draws on a ‘Concept Note’ on ‘Food Security Insurance for Southern Africa: Using the Futures Market as a Tool to Avert National and Regional Food Shortages’, prepared by FEWSNet for SADC in February 2002.

same drought or crop blight, few insurers can cope with this number of claims submitted at the same time. Also, the thinking behind weather insurance seems more relevant to conventional drought-triggered harvest failures, whereas the problem facing farmers in southern Africa is of more complex climatic variability, both within and between farming seasons (Clay et al. 2003).

Risk Coping Measures

Among the many possible interventions for coping with the consequences of risk events, the following six are discussed here: food price subsidies, cash transfers (e.g. social pensions in Namibia, GAPVU in Mozambique), school feeding schemes (and food-for-education), nutritional support to AIDS-affected families, and public works schemes (food-, cash-, or inputs-for-work).

Food price subsidies

Price controls were maintained in most southern African countries until the late 1980s or early 1990s. Price controls – fixed prices or price banding – were costly and suppressed trade, but they did guarantee affordable food across the country throughout the year (pan-territorial and pan-seasonal prices). One effect of the abolition of price controls under structural adjustment reforms has been the re-emergence of food price seasonality and price volatility as a major contributor to household food insecurity. A large part of the problem in late 2001 and early 2002 was sharp price rises for staple food, especially maize, in local markets. Market monitoring by Oxfam in early 2002 (during the annual 'hungry season', when prices are already out of reach for the poorest, even in 'normal' years) found that maize prices were 400% higher in southern Zambia than at the same time in 2001, 300% higher in Zimbabwe and 350% higher in Malawi (Oxfam 2002:4). Such excessive price rises reflect actual scarcity to a large extent, but they also reflect market failures, and could have been ameliorated by interventions to stabilise prices.

Even assuming that ideological objections do not override the priority of achieving food security for the poor and vulnerable, there are practical considerations that make the reintroduction of general food price subsidies problematic. In the liberalised market environment that characterises all southern African economies today – in contrast to the heavily interventionist stance of these states at the time of the 1991/92 crisis – it is extremely difficult to implement subsidies effectively. The danger of elite capture of subsidies is high – traders can profiteer by buying up subsidised grain and reselling it at excess margins – and porous borders make leakages of subsidies to neighbouring countries where no subsidies are in place too attractive an opportunity for traders to resist.[15] These realities need not rule out price subsidies altogether, however. Lesotho continues to maintain a 20% subsidy on unsifted maize meal,[16] and in early 2003, the World Bank persuaded the Government of Malawi to take a $50m loan to subsidise the price of imported maize.[17] An alternative mechanism, not adequately explored during the recent food crisis, is to exploit the self-targeting potential of alternative staples, such as yellow maize, cassava, sorghum and millet (i.e. to market or subsidise these less preferred crops instead of white maize).

Cash transfers

Three countries in the southern Africa provide non-contributory social pensions to their elderly citizens: Botswana, Namibia and South Africa. In Botswana and Namibia the social pension is untargeted except by age (it is an entitlement to every citizen over 60 years old), but in South

---

15 In Malawi in 2001/02, the government attempted to restrict profiteering by traders on subsidised maize in various ways. ADMARC was prohibited from selling to traders, quotas were imposed on purchases (10-15kg/person/day), truckers were required to sell ADMARC maize at no higher than a specified ceiling price. But all these efforts to minimise profiteering were subverted by traders who simply paid people to buy ADMARC maize for them, and by truckers who 'lost' bags of maize *en route* from ADMARC depots to village markets, only to sell this maize to private traders at higher prices than they paid back to ADMARC (Devereux 2002c).

16 Neil Marsland, *pers. comm.,* July 2003.

17 This intervention backfired, as a 50% subsidy introduced on maize imported at MK35/kg brought the retail price down to MK17/kg, at a time when early harvested maize was selling in Malawi village markets at MK12-15/kg. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the NFRA sought to re-export the subsidised maize to Zimbabwe, but the sale fell through when they were offered only K5-6/kg.

Africa it is means tested, and therefore targeted on the poor. The social pension has made an enormous contribution to food security in poor households and isolated rural communities, especially in drought years, when access to a stable source of regular income independent of rainfall variability has sustained millions of poor people and reduced their vulnerability to food production shocks.

In Namibia, the injection of regular cash income into poor communities has stimulated local trade and promoted the development of markets and grocery stores even in very inaccessible parts of the country. Because it is paid monthly, the social pension has helped to stabilise food supplies and household incomes, and minimised the need for food aid deliveries during food crises. In the 1991/92 drought emergency, for instance, the government of Namibia very nearly opted for cash handouts instead of food, recognising the capacity of private traders to supply village grocery stores with maize-meal, but backed away fearing that traders might exploit the crisis and provoke a spiral of price inflation (Devereux and Næraa 1996). Nonetheless, the elderly were removed as a beneficiary category from Namibia's food aid programme in 1991/92 – an unprecedented step given their automatic status as a 'vulnerable group' in most other contexts.

The value of the social pension is enough to support not only the pensioners themselves but also their family members. In South Africa, an estimated 7-9 dependants are supported by each social pension. In drought years this income is redistributed to food insecure relatives; while in 'normal' years it contributes to reducing child poverty – it pays for the education and child-rearing costs of pensioners' grandchildren. Increasingly, as grandparents become unpaid carers for orphans, the social pension is a vital source of support for OVCs and for HIV-infected adults. Extending the pension to other countries could therefore be seriously considered as a way of supporting OVCs.

The main question mark over direct cash transfer programmes such as the social pension is their affordability and sustainability. Since donors are understandably reluctant to finance long-term social security programmes, a sizeable fiscal base is clearly needed. Small, relatively wealthy countries like Botswana and Namibia, and highly unequal middle-income countries like South Africa, do have the necessary revenue base, but countries characterised by widespread poverty and limited public revenue-raising capacity – like Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia – do not. Nonetheless, it should not be forgotten that public spending decisions are policy choices, as Beattie and McGillivray (1995:68) point out: "It is alleged that public pension schemes are often not affordable, which presumably implies that they impose an excessive burden on the economy. … There is no economic law that prevents societies from deciding to allocate more resources to old-age security and less to some other expenditure." Besides, in highly aid-dependent countries like Malawi, the real issue is donors' willingness to pay for social programmes, not government's.

In this context, Mozambique's experience with a targeted cash transfer programme known as 'GAPVU' is instructive. GAPVU, which was implemented in the mid-1990s, transferred a small monthly amount of cash to registered 'destitutes' in urban areas: mainly people displaced or disabled by the civil war. Although the amount of income transferred was small, beneficiaries used it in a variety of ways to improve household food security. Apart from purchasing food directly, they also invested some transfer income in trading activities or in their backyard gardens. This provides further evidence for the power of cash transfers to enhance household food security in multiple ways, and also for the argument that social safety net transfers do have the potential to reduce chronic poverty (Devereux 2002a). On the other hand, the programme was undermined by corruption, both by administrators and claimants, the main reason being the low proportion of programme funds allocated by monitoring and supervision – an attempt to maximise transfers to beneficiaries which badly backfired. This experience does not invalidate the concept of targeted cash transfer programmes; instead it points to the importance of investing in sound administrative systems.

School feeding and food-for-education

The importance of education as a prerequisite for future economic growth is acknowledged by every government in the southern Africa region, and by their donor partners. Several countries have introduced Free Primary Education [FPE] in an effort to improve access to education for children from poor families, orphans and other vulnerable children. Malawi's incoming UDF government abolished primary school fees in 1994, which immediately increased attendance from 1.8 million to 3.2 million children, though at some cost to education quality as teacher-learner ratios fell and inexperienced and under-qualified teachers were recruited. Lesotho launched fee-free primary education in January 2000.

Despite these efforts to raise enrolment ratios, a common response to chronic and transitory food insecurity is to withdraw children from school. This has been documented as a 'coping strategy' during the recent food crisis in all six affected countries,[18] even where education is free: during a livelihoods crisis, access to education is related to household wealth. Whether education is seen as a basic human right or as an investment in a country's economic future, it is important to find ways of keeping children in school – reducing absenteeism and drop-outs – during difficult times.

School feeding programmes are one social protection instrument that can contribute to this objective, since the provision of a meal at school relieves the family of the burden of feeding the child at home – especially when the granary is empty and food prices are high. In Malawi in 1996, enrolment at one primary school rose by 26% after WFP introduced a school feeding project (Dil 1996). There is some evidence that learner performance also improves in school feeding schools – pass rates are higher, and drop-out rates lower – because cognitive processes of malnourished children are enhanced by consuming a nutritious meal at school.

An innovative variation on school meals is 'food-for-education', where schoolchildren are targeted for 'take-home' food rations. In Bangladesh this idea has been successfully introduced to improve gender ratios in access to education.[19] In the southern African context of high dependency ratios and very high numbers of AIDS orphans, the provision of school meals and/or take-home food rations may be an essential element in the effort to maintain or enhance levels of school enrolment and attendance among the region's children.

Nutritional support to AIDS-affected families

One danger of any targeted transfer programme is 'exclusion errors' – overlooking groups whose needs may be as great as those who qualify for benefits, but are excluded by the programme's targeting criteria. Providing school-going children with meals or take-home rations, for instance, overlooks the fact that most malnutrition is concentrated among pre-schoolers (under-fives) and among children who cannot go to school, because they live in extremely poor households and/or may be caring for ill relatives. Box 1 below describes an innovative project that mobilised local resources and provided training to improve the food security and nutrition status of orphans, widows and other AIDS-affected people in western Kenya.

Box 1. Nutritional programme in support of AIDS-affected families, Kenya
The Kenya AIDS Intervention Prevention Project Group (KAIPPG) is a local NGO that works with disadvantaged people in the rural areas of Western Kenya. KAIPPG mobilises communities to use local resources in an endeavour to address HIV/AIDS. One of KAIPPG's current activities is titled the Community Based Dietary Intervention Project (CBDIP). Significance of the Programme Malnutrition is a major factor in dealing with HIV/AIDS that has always gone unnoticed, and which is rarely considered by most AIDS service organisations. Untreated malnutrition is a major cause of early deterioration and the ultimate death of thousands of HIV/AIDS patients in Kenya. Dietary deficiency of calcium and vitamin C is responsible for mouth sores common in HIV/AIDS patients. Protein and complex starches help build and maintain muscles, while excess starch moderates fats. Apart from helping to rebuild body organs, proper diets help the HIV/AIDS patients to cope with the

[18] For evidence on the impact of the 2001/02 food crisis on learner (and teacher) absenteeism in Malawi, see Gallagher *et al.* (2003).

[19] "In the Bangladesh Food-for-Education program the transfer to a household of 100 kilograms of rice increased the probability of boys' schooling by 17 percent and girls' schooling by 160 percent" (World Bank 2000:158).

strong medicines used to treat opportunistic infections associated with HIV/AIDS, such as TB. In addition, micronutrients improve the body's ability to clear by-products and toxins (including those generated from the strong anti-TB drugs), thereby reducing skin inflammation and blisters. Because of their precarious conditions people with HIV/AIDS (PWHAS) need dietary supplies that can be easily absorbed (such as fruits and vegetables) without burdening their bodies. In developed countries drugs for PWHAS are administered alongside nutritional supplements to give the patient a better chance of recovery. Such ARV treatments and expensive nutritional supplements are far beyond reach for the poor communities in Western Kenya where KAIPPG operates.

At the rate of 700 Kenyans dying every day due to HIV/AIDS, the society's capacity to foster stable families and healthy individuals has been highly compromised. The sweeping effects of HIV/AIDS in families have left a myriad of problems in their wake. Most communities are now left exposed to food insecurity. Their ability to grow food has been reduced because so many farmers are sick or dying, as are individuals who grow their own foodstuffs. The weak HIV/AIDS patients, who need good nutrition to help them cope with their disease, are vulnerable to malnutrition. HIV/AIDS deaths have created an overwhelming orphan problem in the community. These orphans develop malnutrition as well, which complicates their ability to heal even the curable diseases they may contract. Within Western Kenya, the malnutrition rate stands at 34%. KAIPPG has created the CBDIP to try and address this problem, especially among the widows and orphans affected/infected by HIV/AIDS.

Activities

KAIPPG selected 180 vulnerable women from its regional units. Nutritional field schools were formed, so learning would take place within the community. Members were taught and trained in the entire process of crop husbandry and food production. They were taught how to use adaptable technologies in energy preservation, local production of animal and plant cakes, bread-baking, and hygienic practices for keeping food safe to eat. Members donated parcels of land and labour, which was harnessed through a "merry-go-round system". Each field school had a leader who supervised its activities and coordinated with KAIPPG. These groups, through their group leaders, were also trained to give basic treatment and care to their sick members. 15% of the yield from grains, cereals, and fruits was to be retained and supplied to the other widows who did not benefit from the first phase of the project. This aspect of material sharing helped expand the project without relying on external support, and fostered a feeling of family and community togetherness.

Project Outcomes

1. The health status of HIV/AIDS affected and infected widows and orphans improved.
2. Vulnerable members of the community were empowered in cheaply adaptable technologies i.e. nutrition management and home-based care for PLWAS, also in more general terms. This has benefited women in particular, who comprise a majority in our programs and communities, especially in terms of care-giving and being the family breadwinners.
3. We learned that it is locally possible to solve the problem of malnutrition in AIDS orphans and other vulnerable children through empowerment education.
4. Most people living with HIV/AIDS or affected by HIV/AIDS need food and increased nutritional supplements, and we found a way to provide that.
5. Foster parents need to help orphans utilize the large tracts of land their parents left to raise crops. Lack of food has thrown many orphans out into the streets to beg, if not into various orphanages where food will be available.

Source: Janet Feldman, Director, KAIPPG/International (submitted to the Social Protection e-discussion by Ina Mentz)

Public works programmes

Two major advantages of public works programmes [PWPs] are their self-targeting nature, and the possibility that the work requirement will enable the construction of useful assets, especially community infrastructure such as feeder roads. Self-targeting is achieved by adjusting either the wage rate (down) and/or the work requirement (up). The wage rate can be made unattractive to the non-poor by paying workers below the local market rate,[20] or by paying workers in food rather than cash – food-for-work is in general more likely to attract the poorest (including women) than cash-for-work, which tends to be dominated by men. If working for food is more stigmatised than working for cash, then working for a less preferred food (such as yellow maize rather than white maize, the preferred staple in southern Africa) is even more self-targeting. Much of the work undertaken on PWPs is demanding physical labour – road construction, repairing culverts – and this acts as a further deterrent to the non-needy. Labouring on PWPs is not queuing up for a free handout; it requires a heavy commitment of time and effort.

The potential for asset creation on PWPs was overshadowed in the early days of food-for-work programmes by poor project design, when public works acquired its persistent negative image. More recently, the World Food Programme [WFP] and other agencies that implement PWPs have given more attention to the issue of asset creation, and WFP has adopted as a principle that the benefits of PWPs should accrue directly to project workers. With infrastructure being a major constraint on market integration in rural Africa, and the importance of rural roads increasingly recognised as a precondition for rural development, road-building programmes facilitated by PWPs often have a positive role to play. Soil and water conservation measures, such as ridging or bunding, re-afforestation and rainwater harvesting, can also be supported with public works: this has been done extensively – some argue excessively (see Hoben 1996) – in Ethiopia. More recently, MASAF and other agencies in Southern Africa have introduced participatory approaches to project selection, which has been found to increase community commitment to the construction and maintenance of public works assets.

On the other hand, complaints about the poor quality of assets created on labour-intensive public works – or 'employment-based safety nets' – have motivated the ILO to shift to labour-based methods instead. Whereas labour-intensive methods maximise employment creation as their overarching goal, labour-based methods optimise employment, without compromising the quality of the asset created or maintained by the project. A measure of the labour-intensity of a PWP is the proportion of project budget that is allocated to wages. A high share of labour costs implies maximising short-term employment creation; a lower labour/total cost ratio implies spending more on tools and equipment, as well as supervision and training – i.e. creating less employment, but ideally producing better quality assets, better managed projects, and greater potential to build skills that might be transferable to other employment after the project ends.

These strengths of public works are also the source of several valid criticisms that are often made against PWPs. Firstly, paying people below market wages or in commodities – especially inferior foods – is increasingly considered unethical and runs counter to current notions that development should empower the poor, not stigmatise and exploit them. Secondly, the logic of forcing poor and food insecure women and men – who may already be undernourished – to expend physical energy on hard labour before receiving a payment or ration which may be inadequate even to meet their nutritional requirements is questionable, even perverse. At the very least, it reduces the net nutritional benefit of the cash wage or food ration, thereby reducing the food security effectiveness of this intervention.

Even worse, the work requirement excludes many categories of the poor and food insecure – specifically, time- and labour-constrained individuals such as the elderly, the young (including orphans), people with disabilities, and the chronically ill (including PLWA) – who badly need access to cash or food transfers. For this reason, it is common to treat PWPs as one instrument in a package of social protection measures, each component targeted at different groups – food-for-work for the working poor, free food aid for the labour-constrained. Alternatively, as on food-for-work projects in Ethiopia, rations are scaled to household size (a worker from a five-person household takes home five rations), so that most people unable to work on PWPs – dependant minors or elderly relatives, the incapacitated ill or disabled – are supported by working household

[20] This strategy is explicitly recommended by the World Bank. "In order to promote self-selection, it is best if a public works program offers a wage slightly below the market wage, in other words, if the program maintains the level of its wage at a rate low enough so that only the poor would be attracted to the program" (Subbarao 2003:6).

members. In the southern Africa context, with a high prevalence of AIDS and rising numbers of households with no members able to labour, this strategy seems less feasible. In this context, innovative thinking is needed around how to design projects that do not exclude the labour-constrained: providing compensation to carers of orphans, PLWA and PWD, for instance.

A recent review of PWPs argued that these negative features should not invalidate this method of transferring resources to the poor and food insecure. Instead, PWPs need to be more sensitively designed and implemented (Devereux 2002b). For instance, instead of ratcheting the payment rate below the local market wage for self-targeting purposes, alternative targeting mechanisms, such as community selection or job rotation, should be preferred. Another problem that has been successfully resolved – though errors are still made – is inappropriate timing: whereas early PWPs sometimes competed with labour demands for farming, nowadays PWPs are generally implemented during the dry season months, when farmers are underemployed and looking for alternative sources of income.

The World Bank argues that PWPs have greater potential as an income stabilisation intervention against livelihood shocks and seasonal food insecurity than as employment creation programmes (Subbarao 2003). This feature makes public works an important instrument for social protection. The importance of stabilising income is not only that it protects consumption during hard times, but also that it protects household assets against 'coping strategies' that involve selling these assets for food, thereby undermining the household's future livelihood viability.[21]

There has been a great deal of experience with PWPs in southern Africa, with mixed results. A high proportion of Lesotho's rural road network was constructed under food-for-work projects in the 1970s. In Zambia during the drought of 1995, an innovative cash-for-work project was implemented in Western Province, while food-for-work projects were run elsewhere in the country. Cash-for-work was found to generate a range of benefits not normally associated with food-for-work, including income and employment multipliers, investment of cash-for-work earnings in farming and non-farm enterprises, stimulation of trade, and food price stabilisation (Devereux 2002a). In Malawi, road rehabilitation and afforestation projects have dominated food- and cash-for-work activities implemented by various donors and NGOs, including CARE, CPAR, the EU, GTZ, World Food Programme, the World Bank-funded Malawi Social Action Fund [MASAF] and the United Nations Capital Development Programme [UNCDF].

When Malawi's National Safety Net Programme was being undertaken in 1999, a study was commissioned of the potential for public works projects to scale up and play a significant role in social protection. This study reached the conclusions summarised in Box 2 below.

Box 2. Conclusions from Malawi Public Works Study
1. Public works programmes have the potential to target poor people and women in rural and urban communities in Malawi but have limited potential to target certain vulnerable groups such as the aged, infirm and disabled.
2. Public works should be implemented in the context of district development plans which reflect the needs of local communities and take into account future maintenance requirements.
3. Payment of wages in kind is an effective mechanism for targeting certain vulnerable groups such as women, and should be considered as an integral part of an expanded PWP.
4. Current public works programmes are severely constrained by lack of organisational and supervision capacity at district level and, to some extent, by lack of viable projects.
5. The existing public works programmes focus mainly on road rehabilitation and re-

[21] Assets should be broadly defined to include sexual services, the sale of which is a transmission mechanism for HIV/AIDS in the southern Africa region.

afforestation which can be implemented with relatively little technical input. Other works for erosion control and flood protection may ultimately provide greater opportunities for employment creation, but will require detailed technical feasibility studies. 6. The Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF) is a well designed safety nets programme which has the capacity to develop into a large scale programme if the lack of implementation capacity at district level can be solved. A realistic estimate envisages expansion of MASAF from providing about one million worker days of employment per annum currently to about five million worker days per annum after three years. There are no compelling reasons for starting a new PWP in parallel or in place of MASAF.
Source: Scott Wilson Central Africa (1999:45)

From May 2001 to May 2003, over 20,000 residents of Balaka and Machinga districts in southern Malawi participated in an inputs-for-work programme, which transferred vouchers redeemable for fertilisers and hybrid maize seeds to participants in a context where escalating prices had made fertilisers unaffordable for most farmers and unprofitable for maize production. A post-harvest survey in 2002 established that maize yields on participants' farms had increased by 300%. The programme also built or rehabilitated 370 kilometres of rural roads. An evaluation concluded that: "this program has succeeded in its dual objectives of rehabilitating a significant extension of roads in rural Balaka and Machinga districts and in improving food security dramatically … This program provides a model for resolving Malawi's chronic and recurrent food security crises" (Development Associates 2003:104). While this claim might seem overly strong, this case study does provide a good example of social protection and economic growth objectives being pursued simultaneously, contra the trade-off that some critics of social protection believe is inevitable.

Social Protection and the PRSPs

Of the five countries covered by the Southern Africa Forum, four – Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia – have produced Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers within the last three years.[22] Since southern Africans are predominantly farmers, and since poverty headcounts are higher in rural than urban areas, it is hardly surprising that all four PRSPs emphasise agriculture as the principal engine of growth and poverty reduction.[23] More surprising, perhaps, is the failure of all these PRSPs to recognise the difficult reality that the smallholder sector may be on a downward spiral. At the very least, agriculture has been subjected to damaging shocks in recent years that requires the introduction of substantial safety nets to protect farmers against future bad years. More fundamentally, increasingly unpredictable harvests may even require a radical rethink of the role of family farming as a livelihood strategy for the rural poor in southern Africa. Instead, these PRSPs are predicated on assumptions of linearity and stability that are highly questionable, given the region's recent history of conflict (Angola), natural disasters (Mozambique floods) and political crises (Zimbabwe).

As noted, Zimbabwe is currently outside the PRSP process. In 1994, the government launched a Poverty Alleviation Action Plan (PAAP), but the PAAP failed due to the weakening performance of the Zimbabwean economy, and was superseded by the Programme for Social Transformation in 1997. Zimbabwe was scheduled to draft a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper during 2001, but because of the deepening economic and political crisis, this never happened.[24] According to Chikwanha-Dzenga (1999:39): "The government's neglect of the rural poor can be attributed to its failure to perceive poverty as a national problem as evidenced by the absence of poverty

[22] Lesotho's Interim PRSP was published in December 2000 and has not yet been finalised, though it was due to be launched by May 2002; Zambia's PRSP for the period 2002-2004 was published in March 2002; Malawi's 'Final Draft' PRSP was published in April 2002; Mozambique's PRSP was published in February 2003.

[23] See, for instance, Malawi's PRSP: "agriculture remains the most important source of income … Thus, increasing agricultural incomes will be a key source of poverty reduction" (Government of Malawi 2002:22).

[24] Steve Wiggins, *pers. comm.,* July 2003.

eradication strategies in the national development plans". Zimbabwe is arguably the only country of the five covered by the Southern Africa Forum that has the fiscal and administrative capacity to implement effective and comprehensive social protection. Instead, the failure of its economic growth strategy caused the government to implement an ad hoc series of welfarist projects – seed packs, food handouts – which bought electoral popularity but also generated widespread dependence. "The task to cater for the well-being of Zimbabwe's poor in the rural areas has thus been left largely to the NGOs, with the government frequently alleviating immediate suffering through seed packs and drought relief food" (Chikwanha-Dzenga 1999:40).

The rest of this section reviews the PRSPs of the other four countries. As the key national policy document addressing the needs of the poor, what does each PRSP say about social protection?

Lesotho

The need for social protection in Lesotho is clear from figures on poverty trends. The most recent 'Poverty Mapping Exercise', undertaken in 1999, found that 68% of the population was 'poor' and 49% were 'destitute'.[25] This suggests both a high level of need for social protection and a limited state capacity to provide it, a dilemma that is shared by Malawi and Zambia. Poverty in Lesotho is concentrated in remote rural areas, especially the Mountain and Senqu River areas. Arable land in Lesotho fell from 13% of landmass in the 1980s to under 10% by 2000, while population has steadily increased and dependence on agriculture has risen, due to a loss of migrant employment opportunities in South Africa (which halved from 122,000 in 1986 to 65,000 by 1999). A related social protection need in Lesotho is for rural households and communities whose incomes have been severely undermined by lost remittance flows from migrants to South Africa. Urban poverty and unemployment are rising: of 25,000 new entrants to the labour force each year, only 9,000 find jobs, and there is no formal unemployment insurance.

There is no specific focus on social protection or social safety nets in Lesotho's Interim PRSP. The strategy aims at "sustained economic growth and poverty reduction in the context of macro-economic stability" (Kingdom of Lesotho 2000:21-22). Only one of the seven components of the PRSP touches on social protection for the poor, under 'social welfare policies': "Ensure that protective and rehabilitative welfare services are provided to all vulnerable groups without discrimination". This should be achieved by establishing social assistance packages for vulnerable groups who cannot work (including "social security schemes for the elderly, child welfare services and education for the disabled and the destitute" (Kingdom of Lesotho 2000:13)), and supporting income-generating projects for those who can work.

Two examples of the latter are Lesotho's Fund for Community Development [LFCD], a social fund which runs community projects that offer employment in rural and urban areas, and a rural roads rehabilitation project, run by the Lesotho Construction Unit [LCU], that uses labour-intensive methods to maximise employment generation for the poor. The project employs unskilled and semi-skilled rural dwellers as labourers and trains some as contractors; it is also credited with reducing rural-urban migration. The PRSP aims to "re-design the public works programme to better target the poorest segments of the population" (Kingdom of Lesotho 2000:25).

There are a number of additional measures, mentioned in the PRSP under "social sectors", that are effectively social protection measures. These include: the plan for Free Primary Education [FPE], which aims to achieve universal access to primary education by 2006; a school feeding programme that incentivises poor parents to send their children to school; the provision of some basic health services free of charge (with support from NGOs and church organisations); and monthly pensions for World War II veterans or their widows.

An oversight in the PRSP is a specific focus on HIV/AIDS. By 2000 there were 108,000 adults living with HIV in Lesotho, and 26,000 cases of full-blown AIDS (Drimie 2002:8). HIV/AIDS prevalence is estimated at 31%, in a country of 2.2 million people. Extended family support systems are proving unable to cope with the rising number of AIDS orphans, not least because of

[25] These figures are contested; the World Bank (1995) prefers a much lower estimate of 49%.

a fear that taking in an AIDS orphans exposes the carers' household to the risk of HIV-infection. There is also some evidence of AIDS orphans losing their inheritance, specifically their rights to land, which increases their vulnerability. A survey by the Lesotho Red Cross found that 79% of orphans received no community support at all, while 11% were being helped with food, 3% with clothes and school fees (even though help with education was their first priority), and under 2% with medical costs (even though half the orphans surveyed were found to be in poor health) (Sparrow 2003:2). The Lesotho Red Cross provides food, clothing and school fees for vulnerable children, and will soon start an integrated community home-based care programme to provide structured support to 6,000 households with orphans and people living with HIV/AIDS or other chronic illnesses.

The food crisis in Lesotho in 2002 did not officially qualify as a famine, because child wasting peaked at 7.5%, half of WHO's cut-off of 15% for a nutritional emergency. However, the crisis did draw attention to the underlying vulnerability and chronic food insecurity facing growing numbers of Basotho – and to the lack of formal safety nets to protect them. In their analysis of "ways forward" for Lesotho in a context of increasing vulnerability, CARE (2002:3) highlights several points, including: "recognising the incremental downward spiral of households in Lesotho"; and "rethinking the government's safety net policies … focus on providing safety nets to enable the poorest households to access seeds, other inputs and advice or support".

Malawi

Malawi's and Zambia's PRSPs are the only two of the four examined here that explicitly consider vulnerability and social protection. Lesotho's Interim PRSP and Mozambique's PRSP equate 'poverty reduction' with 'income growth'; there is little recognition of the needs of the transitory poor or the labour-constrained chronically poor,[26] for whom alternative approaches to economic growth may be needed. The third "pillar" (of four) of Malawi's Poverty Reduction Strategy is titled "Improving the Quality of Life of the Most Vulnerable", and it includes two "goals" about "Safety Nets" and "Improving Disaster Management". The strategy for achieving this pillar is built on:

> "providing moderate support to the transient poor and substantial transfers to the chronically poor. The most vulnerable are broadly defined to include individuals or households affected by disasters; households headed by orphaned children, elderly and single-parents (especially female-headed); persons with disabilities; under-five children, lactating and pregnant mothers; orphans in streets, orphanages, foster homes and extended family member households; the unemployed and underemployed in urban areas; the land constrained in rural areas; and technology-constrained small-scale farmers. It is noted however, that this general categorisation does not mean that all people or households falling under these categories are the most vulnerable. The determining factor is their ability to meet their basic needs" (Government of Malawi 2002:64).

The PRSP mentions four areas where "Malawi has sought to improve the quality of life of the poor" in the past, but identifies problems and limitations with each of these (Government of Malawi 2002:64-65):

- Market-based policies – price controls, price subsidies, minimum wages – but these were "inefficient, fiscally unsustainable and mostly benefited the non-poor", and were therefore abolished (apart from minimum wages).
- Administered safety net programmes – nutrition supplements, free food distribution, free input distribution, food-, cash-, and inputs-for-work – which were generally "fragmented, uncoordinated and poorly targeted, suffering from both inclusion and exclusion errors".
- Direct assistance and social welfare transfers – through the Department of Social Welfare, the Malawi Council for the Handicapped [MACOHA] and the Department of

[26] Malawi's PRSP defines the "transient poor" as "those within the poorest 30 percent of the population who are capable of moving out of poverty"; while the "chronically poor" are defined simply as "the poorest 5 to 10 percent of the population" (Government of Malawi 2002:65).

Disaster Preparedness, Relief and Rehabilitation [DDPRR] – these have been "small in size and limited in coverage, largely due to fiscal constraints".

- Informal safety nets – the extended family and community support systems – which "have become over-stretched and vulnerable to shocks due to increased poverty and the HIV/AIDS scourge".

Safety nets are divided into (1) "productivity enhancing interventions" – "targeted distribution of inputs for the capital-constrained poor, and public works programmes for the land-constrained poor" – and (2) "welfare support interventions" – "targeted nutrition interventions for malnourished children and vulnerable pregnant and lactating mothers, and direct welfare transfers for the poor who cannot be supported by any of the other three programmes … groups like the chronically ill, the elderly and orphans" as well as "disaster affected households" (Government of Malawi 2002:68-69). These programmes are coordinated by Malawi's 'Minister of State Responsible for Poverty Alleviation Programmes' [MSPAP], a unique ministerial appointment in the SADC region.

These proposals are unusually detailed, going well beyond the degree of specification normally associated with a broad-brush strategy document. For instance: "cash transfers will be made through District Assemblies. In some cases, the programme will use value-based welfare retail vouchers (flexi-vouchers). To reduce security risk, the vouchers will be both beneficiary and date specific" (Government of Malawi 2002:69). There are also plans to strengthen the capacity of informal support groups. "This will involve training of foster care parents, volunteer counsellors, and home-based carers and committees, and establishing community-based childcare centres" (Government of Malawi 2002:70).

Malawi's PRSP also includes HIV/AIDS as a cross-cutting issue, but with a focus on prevention and mitigation; there is only one mention of direct social protection for affected individuals and families: "providing food to affected households" (Government of Malawi 2002:88). One in six (16%) of Malawi's three million children are orphans (Levine 2001:13). The Malawi Social Action Fund [MASAF], a World Bank-financed social fund, has a 'sponsored sub-projects' component that provides skills training, orphanages and pre-schools for orphans and vulnerable children. Lessons learned from this experience include the necessity for an integrated approach to social protection for OVCs, the benefits of community-based approaches, and the difficulties of scaling up from successful community initiatives to nationwide coverage (Levine 2001:14).

Save the Children (US) in Malawi has been running a programme called 'COPE' (Community-based Options for Protection and Empowerment of HIV/AIDS affected families and children) with USAID funding since 1995. COPE activities include "home-based care, the identification and monitoring of orphans and vulnerable children, income-generating activities to improve food security, HIV/AIDS education and policy development. The program also provides support for elderly caregivers" (Levine 2001:16). The COPE programme aims at replicability across different community contexts, but it recognises the difficulties of protecting food security of vulnerable children in a context of widespread chronic food insecurity in Malawi at large.

Similarly, the difficulties of providing adequate health care to PLWA are compounded by the already weak and often deteriorating health services, in many southern African countries. As a general rule, the intensive and local-level inputs required for community-based and home-based care programmes makes NGOs logical implementation partners, and makes national-level programming difficult – replication may be more feasible than scaling up. Coverage, or "going to scale", is hindered more by skills and logistical constraints than by limited financial resources.

A survey of the sources of risk and vulnerability in rural Malawi proposed that a comprehensive package of social protection support should be designed and integrated into the government's Poverty Reduction Strategy. One objective of the package would be to intervene early enough to protect household assets against the asset depletion strategies that are raising household vulnerability from year to year. This package could include (Kadzandira 2002:63):

- a “general food distribution” during the annual ‘hungry season’ months between planting and harvesting, to complement the ‘Starter Pack’ of fertiliser and seeds that should be continued to provide access to otherwise unaffordable agricultural inputs;
- “a special food assistance programme targeting households infected with HIV/AIDS and other chronic illnesses”;
- “economic empowerment” measures for “parentless and elderly-led households”;
- “community-based insurance schemes to help the affected households in their efforts at cushioning the effects of such shocks as diseases and funerals”;
- enhancement of non-farm income generation through food-, cash-, or inputs-for-work;
- a review of customary land tenure laws and marriage norms, to protect women and children’s access to land and household assets, in cases of household dissolution through divorce or widowhood.

Mozambique

Following rapid growth since the end of the civil war in the early 1990s, Mozambique’s PRSP reflects a heavy emphasis on continued economic growth and improving productivity. There is almost no mention of activities related to social protection or the needs of vulnerable groups. However, the PRSP does note that efforts at “reducing food vulnerability … failed to achieve the expected results; and activities to improve the nutrition situation were mainly confined to increasing agricultural output” (Government of Mozambique 2003:22). The PRSP concludes that: “components relating to improved access to land, encouragement of marketing and reduction of food vulnerability need more attention in terms of planned activities and funding” (Government of Mozambique 2003:23). It also argues for the use of labour-intensive activities in reconstruction and rehabilitation of rural roads: “Labour-intensive activities make it possible to raise income levels, particularly among rural families” (Government of Mozambique 2003:24).

The PRSP overlooks the fact that 13% of 15-49 year-olds in Mozambique are HIV-positive, that AIDS has reduced life expectancy by 15 years, and that there will be one million orphans by 2005, mostly absorbed by their communities rather than placed in institutions. As elsewhere, the impact of HIV/AIDS on household food security in Mozambique has been felt in terms of reduced labour capacity and income-earning family members. Solutions are being sought that involve labour-saving technologies in agriculture, and training for less labour-intensive livelihoods outside agriculture. Mozambique launched a national Orphans and Vulnerable Children Strategy in 2000, which recognises the centrality of communities in providing primary support to vulnerable children, and focuses on assisting care-givers. The symbolic significance of the strategy is that it demonstrates political will at the highest level. On the other hand, the strategy is not incorporated or integrated into the PRSP.

Zambia

Zambia’s PRSP “targets agricultural development as the engine of income expansion for the poor” (Republic of Zambia 2002:38). Like Malawi’s PRSP, but unlike Lesotho and Mozambique, Zambia’s PRSP refers directly to several ongoing and planned social protection measures.

> “Zambia recognises that the approach through growth stimulation should be complemented by measures that target the poor against the adverse impacts of economic reforms and other internal and external factors. [These] include the poverty-focused social safety nets like the Public Welfare Assistance Schemes [PWAS];[27] the Social Recovery Fund; Project Urban Self-Help [PUSH]; the Food-For-Work Programme; and entrepreneurial development and training for retrenched employees. All these areas constitute the ‘social theme’ of the

[27] “The Public Welfare Assistance Scheme [PWAS] introduced in 1995 was intended to address inequities in access [to health services]. Chronic patients who cannot pay are supposed to be referred to the District Social Welfare Office for assessment, and approved fees are paid to the District Health Management board by PWAS. However, the referral system has not functioned well and those who cannot pay fail to access services” (Republic of Zambia 2002:86). The PRSP prioritises improving the PWAS “through enhanced funding and better management and targeting of the poor” (Republic of Zambia 2002:88).

PRSP. Higher budgetary allocations to these poverty-oriented interventions are seen as important prerequisites under a multi-prong approach to poverty reduction" (Republic of Zambia 2002:38).

The PRSP also calls for the creation of a Poverty Action Fund, to provide "direct support to the poorest and most vulnerable in society" (Republic of Zambia 2002:50). "On top of this, Zambia's PRSP has incorporated the fight against HIV/AIDS, which is a critical intervention against poverty" (Republic of Zambia 2002:38). A chapter on 'Cross-Cutting Issues' devotes a section to the poverty impacts of HIV/AIDS, and identifies priority interventions including efforts to reduce its socio-economic impact, community-based health care, and improving the quality of life for orphans and vulnerable children [OVC]. Zambia had 1.25 million AIDS orphans (27.4% of children under 15) as of 2000 (USAID 2002:1). There are few national-level programmes of social protection support to PLWA, orphans or carers. However, the government with UNICEF support provides communities with some resources to allocate to vulnerable children – food, blankets – as well as health service subsidies, exemptions from school fees for orphans and vulnerable children. The Government of Zambia sees families and communities as "the primary safety net for children" (Levine 2001:36). USAID supports 30 NGOs and CBOs that are assisting 54,000 OVCs in eight districts, including providing basic education to out-of-school orphans (USAID 2002:5). One example is a project run by CARE Zambia and the Family Health Trust called SCOPE-OVC ('Strengthening Community Partnerships for the Empowerment of Orphans and Vulnerable Children'), which aims to strengthen livelihood security in households and communities hosting vulnerable children (Levine 2001:31). Faith-based organisations are another important source of support for orphans in Zambia.

The chapter on 'Cross-Cutting Issues' also includes a section on gender, which examines the "feminisation of poverty" in Zambia and argues for interventions targeted at women to empower them. But there is no mention of social protection measures specifically targeted at women or gender-vulnerable groups such as widows.

Zambia used to have a range of consumer subsidies on maize and agricultural inputs, but these were progressively removed during the 1980s and early 1990s. As in other countries in the region, this market liberalisation undermined smallholders' access to inputs and reintroduced food price volatility – two significant sources of vulnerability to the food crisis of 2001/02. The PRSP includes no measures to restore access to agricultural inputs or to stabilise food prices. More generally, Scott (2002:411) critiques both the Government of Zambia and its donor partners for displaying a nominal commitment to implementing structural adjustment conditionalities, including implementing social safety nets, which he attributes partly to lack of government capacity but mainly to "resistance to change by entrenched interests".

Summing Up: PRSPs and Social Protection

This review of four southern African PRSPs has highlighted the fact that social protection is, in general, inadequately incorporated into current poverty reduction strategising. One reason for this is a persistent and widespread belief that policy-makers must choose to allocate public spending between "investing in economic growth" and "wasting scarce resources on social protection". For instance, Malawi's Minister of Finance recently asserted that Malawi's PRSP is "too pro-poor" and needs to be revised to promote economic growth instead.[28] To a large extent, I would argue that this is a false dichotomy. It is of course true that governments in southern Africa have very limited resources to allocate between the range of economic and social programmes, and it is important to consider carefully what the balance between these competing priorities should be. But the recent food crisis has highlighted the stark reality that increased spending on social protection is now unavoidable, given that rural livelihoods in much of southern Africa have become unviable, and millions of people are surviving closer to the edge of disaster than ever before.

[28] Similarly, in 1999 the government of Malawi rejected a donor-drafted proposal for a National Safety Net Programme, on the grounds that if the donors had millions of dollars to spend on safety nets then that money should rather be spent on the 'productive sectors'.

Moreover, since many interventions can achieve both ‘social’ and ‘economic’ goals, a substantial proportion of social protection spending can and should be directly linked to asset creation at individual, household and community levels. Two examples discussed earlier in this paper are labour-intensive public works, and school feeding schemes. The challenge is to scale up these projects, many of which are innovative and successful at local level, to the district and national levels, and to convince governments and donors that positive synergies do exist between social protection and economic growth.

To mention two positive cases. Firstly, South Africa’s Developmental Social Welfare Policy is premised on “the idea of empowering people to escape/move out of their poverty conditions into a situation where they can sustain themselves. … [S]ocial protection should not stand alone; it should be integrated into poverty reduction programmes aimed at empowering the vulnerable to cope with their conditions, or even better, to obtain skills and knowledge to move out of the poverty trap, if possible”.[29] This argument is appealing because it makes the links from social protection to sustainable poverty reduction – but note that a distinction needs to be drawn between vulnerable groups who can benefit from 'developmental social welfare' and those who can not. Secondly, in Uganda, social protection has been identified as one of eight ‘cross-cutting issues’ for the 2003 revision of the Poverty Eradication Action Plan [PEAP], which effectively mainstreams social protection in Uganda’s PRSP: all 15 Sector Working Groups must refer to social protection in their Sector PEAP Revision Papers. Perhaps all the countries of southern Africa that have a PRSP should be encouraged to follow this example.

Conclusion

The southern African food crisis of 2001/02 was sobering not only because it brought the spectre of famine to a part of Africa that had historically been virtually famine-free, but also because it drew attention to a creeping process of escalating vulnerability in the region, a process which had developed almost unnoticed until a moderate food production shock exposed the extent to which millions of people in half a dozen countries are now living closer to the edge of disaster than ever before. The crisis was the complex product of several triggers and underlying factors – some environmental (erratic weather, land pressure, declining soil fertility), some demographic (the multiple impacts on families of HIV/AIDS), others economic (misconceived and mismanaged processes of economic liberalisation, especially in agricultural reform), still others political (weak governance, difficult donor-government relationships).

While comprehensive social protection for all southern Africans is clearly unaffordable for the foreseeable future, a good deal of financial resources and political will have been mobilised to ensure that a food crisis of the type that struck the region in 2001/02 is either less likely to occur (risk reduction) or is better prepared for (risk mitigation) and responded to (risk coping) in future. An effective social protection system for southern Africa will address all three aspects, as far as is financially and administratively feasible, by prioritising affordable, high-impact interventions. In a vulnerability context of increasing volatility and uncertainty – in terms of rainfall and harvests, food prices, direct and indirect impacts of AIDS, and governance failures – the objectives of social protection should be both to provide social assistance to those who are chronically unable to make ends meet, and to provide social insurance against transitory fluctuations in household access to food.

In terms of risk reduction, this paper recommends the establishment of National Social Protection Agencies in each country, to be coordinated at the regional level, possibly by SADC. A major constraint on livelihoods in the region is access to agricultural inputs, and finding a viable solution to this problem should be one function of both national and regional social protection agencies. The provision of free fertiliser handouts – the solution currently favoured in Malawi – may be needed for some years to come, but this approach to enhancing access to agricultural inputs should be superseded by a more sustainable approach that delivers more choice to farmers over their farm enterprises. A second function of each National Social Protection Agency should be to

[29] Ina Mentz, contribution to Social Protection e-discussion, 23 June 2003.

monitor national food availability and trends in food prices, in collaboration with early warning systems such as FEWSNET, and to ensure that a rapid response capability exists when needed. A third function should be to think strategically about how to respond better to the impacts of HIV/AIDS on household livelihoods, for instance by identifying and promulgating labour-saving agricultural technologies or low-labour alternatives to farming, for households that have become labour-constrained because of AIDS-related illness and deaths.

In terms of risk mitigation, the 2001/02 crisis underlined the importance of maintaining national grain reserves. However, the appropriate level of these reserves (balancing risk mitigation against the costs of holding grain stocks) and the mismanagement of Malawi's Strategic Grain Reserve have raised unresolved financial sustainability and governance questions. More effort should be invested in exploring the feasibility of alternatives such as grain futures markets. This is another area that could benefit from regional (SADC) coordination to complement national activities. On the related ideas of crop insurance or 'weather insurance', this is probably unfeasible beyond the pilot project level at this time. The innovative idea behind 'weather insurance' – paying out to farmers when rainfall falls a specified percentage below the long-term median – may provide a useful criterion for geographic targeting of drought relief resources at local level. On the other hand, the food crisis in 2001/02 was triggered not by low rainfall, but by erratic rainfall – including localised flooding – and this may require more sophisticated 'weather insurance' indicators.

In terms of risk coping measures, a major challenge is to target interventions on the most needy. For example, it is unrealistic to extend the concept of social pensions (as in South Africa, Namibia and Botswana) to much poorer countries in the region. But since HIV/AIDS has been identified as a major risk factor, and given that the burden of caring for orphans weighs especially heavily on elderly household heads, targeted transfers to elderly carers might be a way of supporting these vulnerable groups without incurring the costs of an untargeted social pension scheme. Another principle to follow is to select measures that achieve both risk coping and risk reduction objectives simultaneously, for example public works programmes (which build market-integrating roads and other infrastructure) and school feeding schemes (which transfer skills that will offer the current generation of southern African children more livelihood options than farming for subsistence).

For the longer term, a strategy is needed that includes supporting farmers while simultaneously strengthening the non-agricultural economy, so that livelihoods become more diversified (for risk-spreading reasons) and less dependent on rain-fed agriculture. A risk management approach to household food security would not prioritise raising agricultural productivity in a context of increasingly unpredictable harvests, but would instead seek to minimise income and consumption variability, to install effective safety nets against the inevitable low-return years, and to promote livelihood diversification. This may require introducing or reintroducing some measures, at least for the interim period, that are currently unfashionable: fertiliser subsidies, 'Starter Packs' of seeds and fertilisers that support shifts to higher-value crops, micro-credit for off-farm enterprises as well as 'meso-credit' for medium-scale job-creating enterprises and market development. Since the objectives are to support more secure and more lucrative livelihoods for all southern Africans, such policies can achieve both social protection and economic development objectives.

References

Beattie, R. and McGillivray, M., 1995, 'A risky strategy: reflections on the World Bank report "Averting the old age crisis"', paper presented at a conference on Financial Security in Retirement.

CARE, 2002, 'A short discussion paper on the Lesotho Food Crisis: Balancing humanitarian and development responses to food shocks', Mimeo. Pretoria: CARE South Africa–Lesotho

Chikwanha-Dzenga, A., 1999, 'Rural Folks – The Neglected Lot of Zimbabwe', Journal of Social Development in Africa, 14(2) 39-49

Clay, E., Bohn, L., Blanco de Armas, E., Kabambe, S. and Tchale, H., 2003, 'Malawi and Southern Africa: Climatic Variability and Economic Performance', Disaster Risk Management Working Paper Series, No. 7. Washington DC: World Bank

Development Associates, 2003, 'Fertiliser for work program', USAID/Malawi's S01: Increased Agricultural Incomes on a Per Capita Basis – 1993 to 2001, Washington DC: USAID

Devereux, S., 2002a, 'Can Social Safety Nets Reduce Chronic Poverty?' Development Policy Review, 20(5): 657-675

Devereux, S., 2002b, 'From Workfare to Fair Work: The Contribution of Public Works and other Labour-Based Infrastructure Programmes to Poverty Alleviation', Issues in Employment and Poverty: Discussion Paper 5. Geneva: International Labour Office [ILO]

Devereux, S., 2002c, State of Disaster: Causes, Consequences and Policy Lessons from Malawi. Lilongwe: ActionAid Malawi

Devereux, S. and Næraa, T., 1996, 'Drought and Survival in Rural Namibia', Journal of Southern African Studies, 22(3): 421-440

Devereux, S. and Solomon, C., 1994, 'Food-For-Work in Namibia: A review of the 1992/93 food-for-work programme', SSD Research Report, 18. Windhoek: UNICEF-Namibia and Social Sciences Division, University of Namibia

Dil, L., 1996, Rural Appraisal: Primary Schools, Vulnerable Group Feeding and Food for Work as Channels of Maize Distribution. Lilongwe: World Food Programme

Drimie, S., August 2002, The Impact of HIV/AIDS on Land: Case studies from Kenya, Lesotho and South Africa. Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council [HSRC]

Eldridge, C., October 2002, 'Why was there No Famine Following the 1992 Southern African Drought? The Contributions and Consequences of Household Responses', IDS Bulletin, 33(4): 79-87

Ellis, F., 2003, 'Human Vulnerability and Food Insecurity: Policy Implications', Forum for Food Security in Southern Africa: Theme Paper 3 (Draft 0). Norwich: Overseas Development Group, University of East Anglia

Ellis and Bahiigwa, 2003, 'Livelihoods and Rural Poverty Reduction in Uganda', World Development, 31(6): 997-1013

Gallagher, B., Mvula, P. and Konyani, S., 2003, A Rapid Appraisal of the Impact of Food Shortages on Education: Final Report. Zomba: Centre for Social Research, University of Malawi

Government of Malawi, April 2002, Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper – Final Draft. Lilongwe: Government of Malawi

Government of Mozambique, February 2003, Mozambique Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. Maputo: Government of Mozambique

Hoben, A., 1996, 'The Cultural Construction of Environmental Policy: Paradigms and Politics in Ethiopia', in M. Leach and R. Mearns (editors), The Lie of the Land: Challenging Received Wisdom on the African Environment. Oxford: James Currey

Holzmann, R. and Jørgensen, S., 2000, Social Protection Sector Strategy Paper: From Safety Net to Trampoline. Washington DC: World Bank

International Development Committee [IDC], March 2003, The Humanitarian Crisis in Southern Africa: Third report of Session 2002-03. London: House of Commons

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2002, Lesotho: Appeal 2003-2004. Geneva: IFRC

Kadzandira, J., 2002, Sources of Risks and Vulnerability for Malawian Households and Communities. Zomba: Centre for Social Research, University of Malawi

Kingdom of Lesotho, December 2000, Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. Maseru: Ministry of Development Planning

Levine, A., October 2001, 'Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children: What Role for Social Protection?' Social Protection Discussion Paper Series, No. 0126. Washington DC: World Bank

Levy, S. and Barahona, C., 2002, Findings of the Starter Pack and TIP M&E Programmes: Implications for Policy in 2002-03 and Beyond. Reading: University of Reading

Maxwell, S. and Buchanan-Smith, M. (editors), 'Linking Relief and Development', IDS Bulletin, 25(4). Brighton: Institute of Development Studies

Mchomvu, A., Tungazara, F. and Maghimbi, S., July 2002, 'Co-operatives and Social Protection in Tanzania', Journal of Social Development in Africa, 17(2): 29-44

Morduch, J. and Sharma, M., 2002, 'Strengthening Public Safety Nets from the Bottom Up', Development Policy Review, 20(5): 569-588

Norton, A., Conway, T. and Foster, M., 2002, 'Social Protection: Defining the Field of Action and Policy', Development Policy Review, 20(5): 541-567

Nyirongo, C., et al. February 2003, 'Food Production and Security in Rural Malawi: Winter TIP Survey', 2001-02 Targeted Inputs Programme (TIP) Evaluation Module 1. Lilongwe: Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation and Department for International Development (UK)

Oxfam International, June 2002, 'Crisis in Southern Africa', Oxfam Briefing Paper, 23. Oxford: Oxfam

PLAN International, 2002, 'Fighting off famine in Southern Africa', www.plan-international.org/wherewework/eastafricaeurope/famine/ [accessed 7 May 2003]

Republic of Zambia, March 2002, Zambia Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, 2002 - 2004. Lusaka: Ministry of Finance and National Planning

Scott, G., September 2002, 'Zambia: Structural adjustment, rural livelihoods and sustainable development', Development Southern Africa, 19(3): 405-418

Scott Wilson Central Africa, April 1999, Safety Nets Mechanism for Malawi: Public Works Programme Study. Harare: Scott Wilson Central Africa

Sen, A., 1999, Development as Freedom. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Simms, C., Milimo, J. and Bloom, G., 1998, 'The reasons for the rise in childhood mortality during the 1980s in Zambia', IDS Working Paper, 76. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies

Smith, W. and Subbarao, K., January 2003, 'What Role for Safety Net Transfers in Very Low Income Countries?' Social Protection Discussion Paper Series, No. 0301. Washington DC: World Bank

Social Protection Task Force, October 2002, Social Protection in Uganda, Phase I Report: Vulnerability Assessment and Review of Initiatives. Kampala: Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development

Sparrow, J., 6 May 2003, 'Home-based carers help protect Lesotho's orphans'. International Federation of the Red Cross [IFRC] [www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/, accessed 7 May 2003]

Subbarao, K., January 2003, 'Systemic Shocks and Social Protection: Role and Effectiveness of Public Works Programs', Social Protection Discussion Paper Series, No. 0302. Washington DC: World Bank

United Nations, 1948, Universal Declaration of Human Rights. New York: United Nations

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, November 2002, Update Regional Strategy: Crisis in Southern Africa. UN-OCHA: New York and Geneva

United States Agency for International Development [USAID], March 2002, Zambia: FY 2002 Annual Report. Washington DC: USAID

World Bank, 2000, World Development Report 2000/2001. Washington DC: World Bank