

Food security in Southern Africa: Changing the trend?

Review of lessons learnt on recent responses to chronic and transitory hunger and vulnerability

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Vegetable gardening in Zimbabwe, Aug. 2005

Table of contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
TABLE OF CONTENTS	3
LIST OF TABLES.....	3
ACRONYMS	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
1 INTRODUCTION	10
1.1 BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES	10
1.2 RESEARCH PROCESS	11
1.3 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT	11
2 THE FOOD SECURITY PROBLEM.....	12
2.1 THE ESTABLISHED CONSENSUS	12
2.2 BEYOND THE TRIPLE THREAT	15
3 THE INSTITUTIONAL AND POLICY CONTEXT	16
3.1 THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT	16
3.1.1 Responsibility and accountability	16
3.1.2 Linking relief and development.....	17
3.2 NATIONAL POLICIES AND STRATEGIES	18
3.2.1 Food security and nutrition	19
3.2.2 Social protection.....	21
3.2.3 Disaster risk reduction	23
4 PROGRAMMATIC RESPONSE.....	25
4.1 RESPONDING TO TRANSITORY FOOD INSECURITY	25
4.1.1 Cash and markets	27
4.1.2 Institutional arrangements.....	28
4.1.3 Risk reduction.....	29
4.2 RESPONDING TO CHRONIC FOOD INSECURITY.....	30
4.2.1 Social protection.....	30
4.2.2 Livelihoods development	33
5 FOOD SECURITY INFORMATION SYSTEMS	37
5.1 VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT COMMITTEES.....	37
5.2 EMERGING INFORMATION NEEDS	39
6 LESSONS LEARNT.....	40
ANNEXES	44
Annex A: Bibliography and Resources	44
Annex B Terms of Reference	47
Annex C Glossary of Disaster Risk Reduction Terms.....	50

List of Tables

Table 1: The dimensions of food insecurity and malnutrition in Southern Africa	13
Table 2: Poverty Indicators for Selected Countries in Southern Africa.....	14
Table 3: Contributions to reduction in child malnutrition	16
Table 4: A typology of food security interventions	20
Table 5: Flash Appeal Malawi 2005.....	26
Table 6: DFID Zambia Humanitarian Allocations, 2005-06.....	26
Table 7: Total Official Development Assistance (ODA) in Southern Africa	36
Table 8: Budget share of agriculture in southern Africa.....	36

Acronyms

ART	Anti Retroviral Therapy
AU	African Union
C-SAFE	Consortium for Southern Africa Food Security Emergency
CRIMP	Central Region Infrastructure Management Programme
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
DBS	Direct Budget Support
DFID	Department for International Development
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EMOP	Emergency Operations Programme — applied in six countries: Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe
FFP	Office of Food For Peace
FFW	Food For Work
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GAPVU	Mozambique Food Subsidy Programme
GoM	Government of Malawi
IEHA	Initiative to End Hunger in Africa
MAP	Market Assistance Programme (of C-SAFE)
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NEPAD	New Partnership for African Development
NEWU	National Early Warning Unit
NGO	Non governmental Organization
NSNP	National Safety Nets Program
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PEPFAR	The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
PLWHA	People Living With HIV and AIDS
PRRO	Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PWP	Public Works Programme
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SAFEX	South African Futures Exchange
SAP	Structural Adjustment Program
SGR	Strategic Grain Reserve
SWAP	Sector Wide Approach
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAC	Vulnerability Assessment Committee
WFP	World Food Programme
WFS	World Food Summit
WVI	World Vision International

Executive Summary

This study was commissioned and supported by a group of agencies involved in the humanitarian response in southern Africa; OXFAM, WVI, CARE, the Regional Hunger and Vulnerability Programme and OCHA. The central objective of this research is to benchmark progress in the southern Africa region in understanding, and appropriately responding to, transitory and chronic food insecurity.

The 2001/3 southern Africa crisis has highlighted the long term decline in livelihoods, which provides the context for the rapid development of an acute crisis. The livelihoods crisis has exposed the limitations of a humanitarian response, which is more attuned to managing a traditional food crisis. Consequently a widely shared consensus has emerged on the need for new, and more appropriate, intervention models.

This review examines the progress made since the 2001-03 crisis in addressing widespread chronic food insecurity. This involves an assessment of changes at sequential levels; changes in understanding of the *problem*, how this has been incorporated into *policy*, and how *programming* has changed to align with the stated policy objectives and the underlying analysis.

This study does not evaluate the adequacy or effectiveness of the overall food security response, but rather identifies *significant changes*, and significant failures to change. The lessons that emerge from this reflection are intended to inform the refinement of food security policies and programmes by all stakeholders, including national governments.

The food security problem

There is a considerable body of research that points to the multiple and interlinked roots of the 2001/03 crisis. While harvest failures in 2001 and 2002 provided the proximate trigger, a number of studies pointed to a much broader set of underlying causes. The growing levels of extreme poverty, the epidemic of HIV/AIDS and weaknesses in regional governance have been identified as region wide causes of food insecurity. This analysis provides a basic agenda for action – and illustrates that this is a complex problem, requiring a multi-dimensional response.

It is also important to critically consider the extent to which this knowledge has been internalized by the various stakeholders and the adequacy of this analytical consensus. Three key points emerge from this reflection:

- √ While this is commonly presented as a ‘regional’ crisis there is strong evidence that the underlying causes vary significantly between and within countries. An array of locally specific environmental, social and political causes has been enumerated. This implies the need for a more nuanced and nationally tailored solution.
- √ The appreciation of the relative severity of the transient and chronic crises is still limited. The transitory needs associated with climatic triggers continue to demand the most immediate and urgent attention. However, the reality is that the majority of the hungry suffer chronic hunger. This insight suggests a fundamental reorientation of strategies and programmes.
- √ The dominant analysis explains food security in terms of inadequate food access. While poverty reduction is critical to reducing food insecurity, there is strong global evidence on the importance of female education, womens’ empowerment and health. Again this suggests a reconsideration of policy and programme priorities.

The institutional and policy context

The need for a paradigm shift in food security policy and practice has been recognized for some time at the global level. The adoption of quantifiable targets in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for the reduction of hunger and poverty – and the alarming lack of progress in sub Saharan Africa – has stimulated a commitment to changing the aid relationships that govern

the delivery of development aid and emergency assistance. It can be argued from various perspectives (whether from a rights based approach or a consideration of aid efficiency) that greater government accountability is fundamental to establishing efficient and effective systems to meet needs and reduce vulnerability.

The current willingness of external partners to unconditional humanitarian assistance creates significant political disincentives to a government led response. There is now a priority on developing consensual plans of action that can be used to align resources from a variety of sources to implement national programmes. In this context the policy choices of national governments are of increased significance and all stakeholders – donors, governments, UN and NGO – are being challenged to contribute to the policy development processes.

A further cross cutting policy theme is the blurring of the distinction between relief and development interventions. The nature of the chronic crisis in southern Africa has highlighted the opportunity to increase the impact and sustainability of humanitarian work by rethinking the boundaries and linkages of these areas. This is a positive development that is broadly influencing the policy development and organization of donors, NGOs and governments. At a minimum this has resulted in more flexible budget guidelines and a greater willingness to address underlying causes within the scope of a humanitarian response.

RIACSO recognized this basic dilemma in responding to the 2005/06 crisis. The 2005 Strategic Framework for Humanitarian needs articulated the desire to respond through safety nets, in conjunction with a nationally led development response implemented at scale. Launching a parallel Consolidated Appeal Process in 2005 was avoided as counter productive to long term development, despite the major advantage of generating an immediate and tangible response.

The inter-sectoral nature of food security dictates that a large number of sectoral policies are germane to the food security debate. Recent policy developments are most evident in the areas of food security and nutrition policy, social protection policy and disaster risk reduction.

There has been widespread action in redrafting national food security policies away from a narrow focus on domestic self sufficiency to a more inclusive definition. Food availability, access and utilization are now widely accepted as necessary, but not independently sufficient, to ensure food security. This creates the necessary space for a dialogue around the range of causal factors identified in the analysis, although in practice this new consensus has had relatively little impact on practical strategic choices and action plans. A residual bias for agricultural development as a long term solution to food insecurity is evident at the national level.

Social protection provides a useful framework for considering a wide range of public actions to transfer goods and services (which could include food, cash or health and education services) to protect people from both transitory and chronic poverty and hunger. The interest in social protection has been directly motivated by the desire to achieve greater impact on chronic hunger and transition beneficiaries from ad hoc relief programmes to more predictable forms of social assistance. It is also directly associated with the goal of an on-budget national welfare system.

Several donors have advocated strongly for increased social protection. As a result early steps are being taken towards developing national social protection policies in Malawi and Zambia. However, national governments are noticeably more ambivalent. Important, and so far unresolved, policy questions hinge on the purpose, targeting, affordability and funding. Overall the development of a coherent social protection policy is proving to be a complex process. Building a national consensus and establishing a durable social contract will take time, require considerable consultation and a greater willingness to accept the validity of government concerns.

A third area of active policy discussion falls under disaster risk reduction. This encompasses improved disaster management, with a focus on emergency preparedness and response. Specifically it sharpens the focus on risk reduction and mitigation measures, to reduce the probability that natural hazards will result in a disaster. This policy process was initially promoted by the UN system at the global level and is now being rolled out at the national level. In practice few sectoral policies yet integrate disaster risk reduction.

A sub theme of particular concern is mitigating the impact of local harvest failures on the prices of staple crops. The large fluctuations in maize prices in the inland states of southern Africa have been a major factor in episodes of acute food insecurity (for example Malawi in 2002). However, opinion is sharply divided on how to resolve this fundamental problem. Some (including many governments) advocate for greater government intervention in markets backed by strong strategic reserves. Others (including many donors) argue that the market should be left to resolve the problem. In the absence of consensus the markets continue to fluctuate unacceptably.

Programme responses

This review attempted to identify major trends and changes in programme content and in particular major changes since the 2001-03 crisis. The southern Africa situation has highlighted the need to disaggregate the response, looking at how transient and chronic needs are met, and beyond this how underlying causes are being addressed.

The most striking finding is the lack of change in the *emergency response* at the aggregate level – as judged by levels of expenditure. The response to the crises 2001/03 and 2005/06 remained remarkably similar, dominated by the use of large scale food aid. An over emphasis on food aid is partly explained by the persistence of tied resources, but also by the absence of viable alternatives at scale, along with entrenched institutional arrangements and incentives.

While programme innovation has been considerable, it is still largely at the pilot scale. There has been considerable experimentation with alternative instruments to food aid. Several large scale cash transfer pilots have illustrated the feasibility of this alternative, but equally the necessary pre-conditions and limitations. Other pilots have involved the use of vouchers and commercial sales of food commodities. The conclusion is that there is no universally applicable instrument, but a need to tailor the choice of instrument to the specific circumstances and intervention objectives.

One of the most consistent trends has been the establishment of strong networks and coordination bodies. There are numerous examples throughout the region for information sharing, coordination, harmonization and joint implementation. Models of improved networking and coordination have spread swiftly and are being rapidly institutionalized, often under the leadership of national governments.

A number of pilots have explored the potential of integrating risk reduction into mainstream development programming – beyond the generic strategy of increasing household assets. These have looked at how risks of natural disasters can be reduced through community risk assessment and resilience building. Some of the most promising developments come from the work of the World Bank in piloting the use of insurance and futures markets. The pilot results have been positive, but the awareness of these products is limited and they have not yet been taken to scale. Overall there has been little progress in reducing risk levels, as demonstrated by the rapid escalation in emergency spending in Sub Saharan Africa.

The necessity of responding to *persistent, chronic needs* has prompted a flurry of donor funded social protection pilot schemes. These have focused on developing long-term social assistance to the most food insecure and destitute, and typically rely on the use of cash transfers. The preoccupation with the choice of instrument is somewhat misplaced, as the primary focus should be a proper analysis of needs with appropriate instrument then selected to fit the objectives of the programme. In comparison to other regions of the world there has been comparatively little experimentation with alternative forms of transfers (such as subsidies or fee waivers), or transfers conditional on human capacity development (such as health or education outcomes).

The Kalomo model developed in Zambia has been particularly influential to donor thinking and is being more widely replicated. This has demonstrated the importance of disaggregating the large target group and implementing a range of tailored social protection measures. However it is not clear if and how this experience will be incorporated into national schemes. The size of the potential chronically hungry case load is daunting and long term financial commitments by donors are not yet forthcoming.

National governments have invested considerably in social protection transfers. However, these have been markedly different to the donor model. Time bound, productive transfers (such as agricultural inputs) have proved more politically acceptable, despite the operational difficulties associated with such schemes. The most popular form of unconditional transfer is a basic old age pension, which has been incorporated into the national budget of several countries including Lesotho. This has several major advantages; the targeting criteria are simple and transparent, the targeting is socially acceptable and implementation is commensurate with national capacities. Similarly strong arguments have been advanced for social protection targeted to children, in particular AIDS orphans.

Ultimately resolving the chronic livelihoods crisis demands a development response. At the macro-level there is little evidence that development budgets to respond to the chronic and structural aspects of regional food insecurity have increased to match recent political commitments by donors. Nor have the political commitments of national governments been matched by increased expenditure on key sectors such as agriculture.

As donors have sought to improve long-term livelihoods in an emergency context there has been a considerable blurring of the boundaries between relief and development activities. 'Emergency' resources are being increasingly utilized in protecting and building of assets. This trend risks running counter to fostering harmonized nationally led development programmes.

A common set of interventions characterize the livelihood programmes of NGOs, UN agencies and government. These centre on enhancing agricultural productivity through improved technology use, water management, access to credit and markets. Again such interventions remain largely at the pilot level. Despite often enthusiastic individual endorsements the quantifiable evidence on impact remains extremely sparse. This in turn undermines the possible case for scaling up. Furthermore it is possible to critique the scope of the livelihoods programmes which maintain a strong bias on boosting agricultural – specifically crop – production. Fewer livelihood interventions target livestock keepers, traders, the landless and urban dwellers.

Successful livelihood interventions have the potential to benefit poor households at the margins. As such they deserve support and where possible to be scaled up. But equally it is hard to envisage that these innovations will kick-start the economic transformation in rural southern Africa. The humanitarian response cannot substitute for adequate long-term development. It is deeply worrying that there seems little agreement on how to achieve macro-economic growth and consequently chronic food insecurity is likely to remain an obdurate problem.

Information systems

Food security information is provided through a myriad of sources operated by governments, donors, multi-laterals and NGOs. However, the development of the national and regional Vulnerability Assessment Committees (VACs) has been the dominant information system innovation.

There is considerable consensus over the added value of the VAC system. The improvements in the information quality are cited as one of the most positive aspects in the handling of the southern Africa crisis. This includes providing timely and credible emergency needs assessments, methodological improvements, building consensus and reinforcing the capacity of national governments.

However, a major criticism of the VAC analysis is the continued primacy of a food response. The VACs are cognizant of their dual role in spanning responsibility for informing both relief and developmental actions. However, transforming vulnerability information into concrete recommendations to address underlying causes is technically challenging. It also move into the political realm – which sits uncomfortably with the non judgemental humanitarian perspective. Consequently the VACs have remained more confident in providing technical recommendations that estimate and respond to needs.

There is demand for the VACs to improve the technical quality of the analysis, for example by improving the accuracy of the estimates, widening the scope of the assessment to include urban areas, improved disaggregation of transient and chronic needs, providing tightly analysed response recommendations and evaluating the impact of previous interventions. However, the pressure to increase the complexity of the analysis needs to be balanced against the ability to sustain the analytical capacity within a government system.

It can be argued that the fundamental challenge for VACs occurs at the political, rather than the technical level. Currently national governments are often politically disinterested and secondary clients for the VAC analysis. Therefore the primary challenge is to build accountability and responsibility for food security at the national level.

Lessons learnt

The rich contextual analysis of the food crisis that has occurred since 2001-03 has challenged the humanitarian community to not only address the acute emergency, but to respond to the entrenched chronic livelihood crisis. The horrendous poverty rates of southern Africa provide a deeply unpromising context to work in. Consequently the signs of positive progress that are evident are all the more laudable.

However, it is clear that food security indicators in the region continue to worsen. Consequently urgent changes are needed to reverse the declining food security trend. The scale of the challenge cannot, and should not, be under estimated. It is therefore imperative to draw out and capitalize on the key lessons from the experience of the recent past.

The report concludes by summarizing the key lessons that have emerged in the region over the past five years. Stakeholders need to consider the implications of these findings in formulating their future food security actions at the analytical, policy and programme levels.

1 Introduction

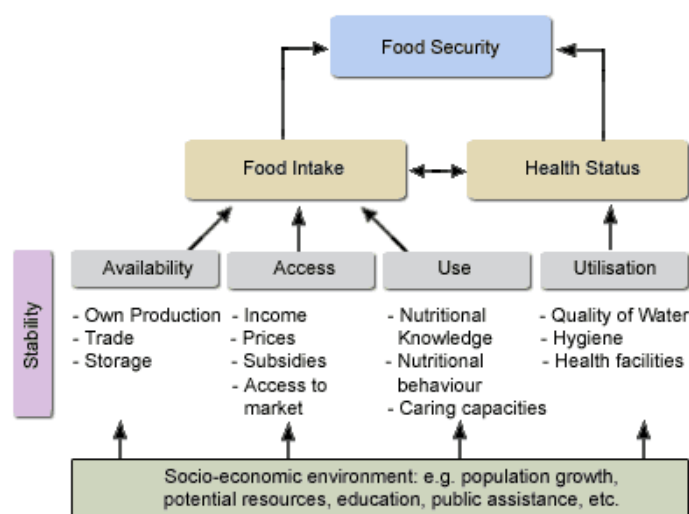
1.1 Background and objectives

This study has been commissioned and supported by a group of stakeholders involved in the humanitarian response to food insecurity in southern Africa. This includes several NGOs (OXFAM, WVI and CARE) the Regional Hunger and Vulnerability Programme (funded by the UK Department for International Development and AUSAID) and the UN system (represented by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs).

Southern Africa has experienced two major food crises during the last 5 years; in 2001/3 and 2005/6. Most assessments have understood these crises to result from an overall decline in livelihoods, rather than as ‘traditional’ food shocks. It was recognized early in the 2001/03 crisis that many more people now live ‘close to the edge’ and relatively minor shocks, such as a period of erratic rainfall at critical times during the cropping season, can be enough to trigger an episode of acute hunger. Furthermore there are a large number of people in southern Africa who experience chronic hunger even in ‘normal’ periods, and especially during the lean season. The limitations of using a traditional humanitarian response have become apparent in this context. Therefore the acknowledged challenge is to innovate and to adapt; at both the conceptual and implementation levels.

The central objective of this study is to benchmark progress in the southern Africa region in understanding and responding to both transitory and chronic forms of food insecurity. This study assesses the progress towards developing more appropriate forms of response. This analysis considers both humanitarian relief and the interaction of humanitarian and development actions.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Food Security



Source: FAO

The food security framework used in this study is the commonly accepted FAO food security framework (see Figure 1). This acknowledges that food availability, food access, food utilization and the cross cutting theme of stability are all pertinent to achieving food security. However, the primary emphasis of this study is on examining factors that most directly affect food intake. Health and nutrition issues are more fully explored in a parallel study conducted by UNICEF¹ which looks at complementary ‘non food’ humanitarian interventions.

The ToR for this study (Annex B) encompass changes that have occurred since 2001 in the six Countries most severely affected by the 2001-03 crisis; Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe². However, to place the findings in context it is necessary to relax the temporal and geographic dimensions of the study. Changes in southern Africa since 2001 cannot be understood in isolation. In many cases the processes that have their origins before this time period or have their genesis in larger global trends.

¹ See report by Penny Urquhart and Simon Ratcliffe on “Lessons Learnt on the Humanitarian Non Food Response in Southern Africa”.

² These countries were included in the original WFP Emergency Operation (EMOP) and regional appeal for southern Africa.

This study does not attempt to ‘evaluate’ the adequacy or effectiveness of the overall response. Consequently the full range of on-going regional food security policies and programmes are not documented. Instead the report attempts to succinctly identify the major analytical, policy, programme and institutional changes and trends which have occurred in the region in the last five years. In addition given the broad scope of the study, (thematically, spatially and temporally), it has not been possible to develop a detailed inventory of all innovative policies and actions. The extent of these omissions and limitations are acknowledged.

The report has been produced for a diverse readership that includes all humanitarian actors; NGOs, the UN, donors and those working for national and regional governmental organizations. The lessons learnt and that emerge from this reflection are intended to feed into the continual refinement of policies and programmes by the different stakeholder groups. The key issues for the future of food security programming in the region are identified and general conclusions are developed. However, the stakeholders are too numerous to provide specific and detailed recommendations in this brief overview.

1.2 Research process

The study examines a number of key questions in the development of the food security response;

- (i) What have been the analytical developments in understanding the problem?
- (ii) What have been the major policy developments related to food security?
- (iii) What have been the significant changes in the programmatic response?

A key question for the research is charting the linkages – or missing links – between these developments. For example, by asking how much of the analytical understanding has been incorporated into policy. It also asks how programming has changed in response to the stated policy objectives and the underlying analysis.

The study is based on a comparative analysis of the changes in the humanitarian response to the acute crises of 2001-03 and 2005-06³. But furthermore it assesses the continuous evolution of the response to the underlying chronic and persistent crisis. This crosses into the territory of the developmental response to food insecurity and critically examines the interface between relief and development. The analysis encompasses both technical and institutional aspects. The changing institutional relationships of all stakeholders, including government, are considered.

This study is the product of a relatively rapid review of the literature complemented by interviews with key stakeholders. Over 40 key stakeholders were interviewed representing international NGOs, UN agencies, donors, academia and government representatives. Informants were drawn from the international, regional and national level. Personal interviews were conducted with key regional stakeholders in Gauteng and Gaborone. Interviews with country informants were conducted by phone as country visits were not possible in the time frame. This method limited the participation of national government representatives. Further interviews were conducted by ODI in the UK with a number of international NGO and government representatives.

1.3 Structure of the report

The remainder of the report presents the findings in the following order:

Chapter 2 discusses how the understanding of hunger and vulnerability is evolving in this region. The major explanations for regional food security trends are summarized, the adequacy of this understanding is examined and the implications discussed. **Chapter 3** examines the extent to which the implications of the analytical findings are accommodated by policy; particularly key national policies. Critical policy debates are highlighted and progress discussed. Changes in the institutional context which affect policy implementation have been identified. **Chapter 4**

³ It should be noted that the two crises were not directly comparable as the 2001-03 crisis had a greater geographical extent (affecting large parts of six countries in the region) and impacted a larger number of people (with 13 million beneficiaries identified).

summarizes the key programme innovations in the region – both responses aimed at meeting immediate needs as well as responses aimed at addressing underlying causes. Equally, the persistence of established patterns of response are highlighted. **Chapter 5** looks at the contribution and limitations of information systems in supporting food security decision making. In particular the role of the Vulnerability Assessment Committees (VACs) is considered. **Chapter 6** summarizes the emerging lessons around reducing chronic hunger and vulnerability with implications for future policy and programme development.

2 The food security problem

The purpose of this review is primarily to assess what changes (policy, financial, programme and institutional) have occurred in regional food security responses. However, judgements on the relevance and effectiveness of these changes is based on an implicit specification of the objectives and the underlying (food security) problem to be resolved. It is therefore necessary to start by clarifying what has been learnt about the nature of the crisis – and by whom. This section summarizes the key debates on the character of the crisis.

2.1 The established consensus

As the 2001-03 crisis unfolded it was initially interpreted as a ‘traditional’ food crisis with its roots in a series of poor harvests. However, the crop deficit alone could not explain the severity of the crisis, especially when compared to the lesser humanitarian impact of the 1991/92 drought⁴. From this a widespread appreciation emerged that the region is facing a *chronic crisis*. In fact ‘chronic’ is a shorthand term to describe a complex set of interlinked problems.

There have been a number of retrospective analyses of the original crisis of 2001-03⁵ which helped highlight the multiple and complex roots of the crisis. The ‘Triple Threat’ paper developed by the UN in 2003 proved to be particularly helpful in acknowledging the wider structural changes in the regional economic, political and social context. The different dimensions to the crisis can be appreciated as a set of overlapping and interacting conditions (see Table 1). This description of the food security crisis has been widely accepted as capturing the key regional dimensions of the crisis and

Glossary of terms

Within this report key terms are used with the following definitions:

Food security...	<i>is achieved when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (FAO)</i>
Vulnerability ...	<i>to hunger is the predisposition of a household to become food insecure in future though until now able to maintain an acceptable food intake. It is usually understood to comprise of both the household's exposure to hazards and their resilience or susceptibility to these shocks.</i>
Chronic and transitory ...	<i>refers to the temporal dimension of food insecurity. Chronic food insecurity is long-term or persistent, while transitory food insecurity is short-term and temporary. Chronic food insecurity is often explained in terms of "structural deficiencies" in the local economy or food system while transitory food insecurity is primarily caused by short-term shocks and fluctuations in food availability and food access. The terms 'predictable' and 'unpredictable' food insecurity have also been introduced recently. (Devereux, 2006).</i>
Acute ...	<i>When applied to emergencies and health problems, acute means sudden and severe. It often implies short-lived, in contrast to chronic conditions that persist.</i>
Moderate and severe ...	<i>Are gradations of nutritional deficiency. When assessing height for age (stunting) or weight for height (wasting), those children aged under five years who are more than two standard deviations below the median are described as moderately malnourished, and those who are more than three standard deviations below the median are described as severely malnourished.</i>

A glossary of disaster risk reduction terms is also provided in Annex C

⁴ Crop losses in the 6 EMOP Countries averaged 66% in 1992 compared to only 34% in 2002. Yet there were minimal humanitarian needs as a result of the 1992 crisis.

⁵ Examples of this include work by SADC (Mano et al 2003), the ODI Forum for Food Security in Southern Africa (FFSSA 2004), a study commissioned by Oxfam and implemented by the HSRC (Drimie 2004), Christian Aid (Christian Aid 2004), Michigan State University (Tshirley et al, 2004) and the UK International Development Committee (IDC 2003a).

provides a commonly accepted framework for action.

The first and most obvious problem is the set of harvest failures that were seen in 2001 and 2002, and then again in 2005. The main consequence has been loss of (real) incomes to farmers, and rising costs of food staples to all. For the poor, staple food price rises of two times or more have meant very considerable hardship including reduced food intake.

Table 1: The dimensions of food insecurity and malnutrition in Southern Africa

Crisis	Who is affected [Population of 6 EMOP countries: 57.5M]	Consequences
Temporary: harvest failure leads to higher prices for food staples	Farming households (and those in closely linked occupations, such as farm labourers, some food processors and traders) [39.8M]	Suffer a double blow: loss of real income from harvest failure, plus rise in food prices. Cope by sale of assets, extra gathering, children taken out of school, reduced meals, distress migration — poor are at risk of destitution Young children and other physically vulnerable likely to become malnourished
	Poor households who are not farmers [7.5M?]	Hit by higher food prices and may have to reduce meals to cope and go hungry. Young children and other physically vulnerable may become malnourished
Chronic poverty	Working poor, without the assets, skills or opportunities to escape poverty [Not known: total extreme poor: 24.6M]	Unable to acquire enough food for a healthy diet. Problems may be severe in hungry season before the harvest when poor farming households run out of their own food supplies, food prices are highest and credit access is limited.
	Non-working poor, unable to work owing to age, illness, disability [Not known: total extreme poor: 24.6M]	Ditto Reliant on support from family and friends
	Young children living in poverty [3.9M in extreme poverty]	Ditto But also suffer from poor health conditions that contribute to malnutrition with consequences for their growth and survival. Alarming high rates of child mortality
HIV/AIDS	Direct effect on: • Adults in prime years, • Young children [4.7M adults HIV+; 0.4M children HIV+]	Illness and early death, particularly of women Costs of care in time and funds to affected households, reduction in on-farm labour For the poor, coping mechanisms often overwhelmed, households at high risk of destitution
	Indirect effect on households that are affected by the epidemic, having suffered a death, inherited an orphan, or offered support to a directly-affected household [say 25% of the population = 14.4M]	Costs of care in money and time, reduction in on-farm labour Care of children orphaned Reduced ability to cope with shocks [Costs throughout society and economy]
Political impasse in Zimbabwe	Population of Zimbabwe [12.9M]	Decline of the economy: economic contraction since 1998, v high inflation, unemployment, falling incomes Heavy loss of production in former commercial farms Exodus of skilled and professional staff Increased poverty and vulnerability for most Zimbabweans Loss of government capacity to maintain health and social welfare programmes

Source: Wiggins 2005⁶

To the temporary problem of harvest failures is added to the chronic condition of poverty and food insecurity that affects 40% or more of the populations of the EMOP countries – see **Table 2**. It is particularly notable that incomes have fallen and poverty risen in several of the countries during the 1990s, and in some cases since the 1980s. For several Countries the human

⁶ The estimates of the numbers affected in the second column have been derived from 2003 statistics on population and agricultural population from FAOSTAT, estimates of extreme poverty in the 1990s defined as US\$1 a day or less from the World Bank; HIV/AIDS data from UNAIDS.

development indicators peaked 20 years ago. Formal employment in mining, manufacturing industry and the public sector has been contracting. In some cases agricultural growth has stagnated, partly due to declining state support and unsustainable land use practices. At the household level this has reduced assets, constrained coping strategies and led to rising levels of vulnerability.

Table 2: Poverty Indicators for Selected Countries in Southern Africa

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

Source: World Bank Reporting on the Millennium Development Goals

Across these problems we can see a third layer, the horrendous epidemic of HIV/AIDS that intensifies the vulnerability and poverty of the many households affected by the disease. The pandemic contributes to the food crisis in three ways⁷. One, it reduces farm production and incomes as labour and capital are lost to disease and death. Two, it undercuts the ability of households to cope with shocks. Assets are likely to be liquidated to pay for the costs of care. Sickness and caring for the sick prevent people from migrating to find additional work. Three, there have been costly losses of scarce, skilled staff in the public service and private enterprise.

Finally, the fourth layer is a weakness in regional governance. Policies that have contributed, albeit unwittingly, to the problem include the fast-track resettlement programme in Zimbabwe that led to a fall in the planted area, state controls on maize marketing and the erosion of the value of official prices by inflation in Zimbabwe, and the selling of the public grain reserves in Malawi just as the 2001 harvest failed. Governments, keen to be seen to be responding to the harvest have been prone to announce market interventions that they lack the financial resources

⁷ Although HIV/AIDS is not a prime cause of a food crisis, it is, of course a crisis in itself, the effects of which dwarf the former. It is estimated that almost half a million persons lost their lives to HIV/AIDS in 2003. Not surprisingly some question why the food crisis attracted an international humanitarian appeal, while HIV/AIDS did not (Darcy et al. 2002)

to implement. This serves to deter private traders from moving grains to areas with deficits and may contribute to shortages and price rises.

The bottom line from the preceding analysis is that what was (and is) being witnessed *is a livelihoods crisis rather than a traditional food security crisis*. This interpretation of the problem has been widely accepted within senior UN, donor and NGO circles. The “Triple Threat” of food insecurity, HIV/AIDS and weakened capacity for governance (UN, 2003) provided an important statement of the complexity of the causes of the crisis, and highlights how these negative trends are mutually reinforcing.

This analysis underscores the complexity of the problems underlying food insecurity. By implication a diversity of solutions are needed. There is an evident tendency to look for an innovative “answer” to the problem of food security. In practice there is no simple fix to these layered concerns. The challenge is to deliver a balanced response using a number of different instruments, within the constraints of the available resources and capacities.

2.2 Beyond the triple threat

In the light of subsequent regional and global analytical developments it is useful to critically examine the adequacy of the explanation offered. Firstly, as more sophisticated analyses have been developed over time it has become clear that this schema offers an over simplified explanation of the crisis. While there are undoubtedly important common regional features to the crisis, equally there are significant nationally specific components. Given the distinct national environments and histories it is hard to generalize between Malawi (with poverty and price issues to the fore), Zimbabwe (where policy choices on fast track land reform and slum clearance have been highly significant), Lesotho (where unsustainable land use practices have resulted in a dramatic loss of arable land) and Mozambique (only just recovering from civil war and highly exposed to natural disasters of drought, flood and cyclone). The strong regional leadership provided by the UN at the outset of the crisis may have over emphasized the regional commonalities. Subsequently a more nuanced nationally based analysis is emerging, with the corollary that the appreciation that solutions should be adapted to the specific national context.

Secondly, despite the acknowledgement of the chronic dimension to the problem it is not always clear that the implications of this have been fully appreciated. The regional literature focuses on increasing *chronic vulnerability*. The implication is that the structural factors (such as poverty, HIV/AIDS and poor governance) are understood to increase the household susceptibility to transient shocks such as negative climatic events. Consequently the analytical focus remains on quantifying needs during episodes of acute food insecurity triggered by drought or floods. However, this underplays the significance of *chronic food insecurity*, where food intake and health status are compromised even in the absence of a transient shock. Consequently a large number of people have chronic needs that can be anticipated on a regular basis.

This is illustrated by the finding that regions with the highest chronic malnutrition (as estimated by stunting rates) occur in northern Mozambique, northern Zambia and central Malawi – whereas drought risk and variability in crop production are highest in the south. Global estimates suggest that chronic hunger attributable to structural causes explains 90% of worldwide hunger (FAO, 2005). Furthermore, there is evidence that chronic hunger leads directly to a major, yet little remarked crisis of child morbidity, mortality and malnutrition. It is estimated that this results in 150,000 excess deaths annually in the six EMOP countries (Wiggins, 2005). In comparison the only significant regional reports of drought related mortality come from Malawi where the maximum estimate was of 45,000 mortalities⁸ resulting from the 2001-03 crisis. However, the urgent need to respond to this long-term chronic crisis is relatively rarely remarked on.

⁸ See Stephen Deveraux, “The New Famines: Why Famines Persist in an Era of Globalization” (Routledge (2007).

Table 3: Contributions to reduction in child malnutrition
(1970 to 1995)

Factor	Percentage contribution
Womens' education	43
Per capita food availability	26
Health environment improvements	19
Women's status relative to men	12

(Smith and Haddad, 2000)

the declining quality and access to key social services such as health and education as a driver of structural food insecurity. An illustration of the relative significance of the importance of these basic services comes from the retrospective global research of Smith and Haddad (2002). This estimates that female education, access to clean water and the improvement in the position of women are statistically key influences (Table 3). There have been few attempts to quantify the significance of these factors specifically in southern Africa. Specifically, little is known of the incremental food security gains that might still be achieved through further investment in these areas. Consequently decision makers are poorly equipped with information to help allocate available resources in a way that maximizes the impact on food insecurity.

Thirdly, the current analysis focuses heavily on the economic and environmental causes of the problem. Clearly the regional governance 'crisis' is not confined to policy choices, but the declining ability of governments to provide their populations with key services. However, there has been relatively little analysis of the impact of

3 The institutional and policy context

The preceding summary confirms the complexity of the causes of food insecurity, and the diversity of needs of the affected populations. While the extent of this understanding remains variable, this section examines how far this understanding has been assimilated into key national policies and the institutional architecture for implementation. A facilitative policy and institutional framework is an important foundation for an effective response, even if it is not always sufficient in itself.

This chapter starts by identifying significant overall shifts in the strategy for the delivery of development and humanitarian assistance. At a global level there has been a major reconsideration of the institutional framework necessary to deliver effective aid. While not driven by the implications of the regional crisis, it is an extremely pertinent trend that is influencing how the chronic crisis is addressed. This is followed by a review of the status of key national policies relevant to food security.

3.1 The institutional context

3.1.1 Responsibility and accountability

The Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have kept food security high on the agenda of donor agencies. There is a renewed commitment to action – especially in sub-Saharan Africa where chronic hunger is still increasing. This is accompanied by a realization that the willingness of the international humanitarian community to respond to acute crises may create a disincentive to nationally led action. Given the fungibility of resources and constrained overall budgets, it is therefore rational for national governments to prioritize expenditure in other sectors. The consequence is a fragmented and inefficient food security response.

From a donor perspective there is a recognition that, to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), increasing aid volumes must also be accompanied by gains in aid effectiveness. The elements of the strategy for increased aid effectiveness are laid out in the Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness of March 2005 (OECD, 2005). This is a collective agreement amongst donors and their development partners that sets out objectives to govern the delivery of aid and support this with quantifiable targets for implementation. The key strategies for achieving this are (i) ownership and effective leadership of development policies and strategies by the national governments, (ii) alignment of donor support to partner countries' national development strategies, institutions and procedures, and (iii) harmonization of donors' actions to be transparent and collectively effective.

The goal is to enhance donors' and partner countries' respective accountability to their citizens and parliaments for their development policies, strategies and performance. This is intended to reduce duplication of efforts and rationalize donor activities to make them as cost-effective as possible. Implicit in this is the need to build the capacity of national systems at all levels. The commitments are supported by clearly specified targets to be achieved by 2010. Preliminary agreement has been reached, that by 2010, 85 per cent of aid going to developing countries will show up in developing country budgets and 50% of technical co-operation flows will be implemented through co-ordinated programmes consistent with national development strategies.

This strategy is being manifested by a shift of donor funds to Direct Budget Support (DBS) and Sector Wide Approaches (SWAPs) – which is principally driven by the European donors. Development assistance is increasingly directed straight into national budgets. Within the region progress towards DBS is mixed. It is most firmly established in Mozambique, with evident progress in Zambia and Malawi, but still seems some way off in Lesotho, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. As a parallel process the UN is undergoing a major exercise to align its' programming with national processes.

The eventual outcome of this process is uncertain. Not all donors support the process (for example the USG cannot give budget support) and success is threatened by the extremely limited national institutional and absorptive capacities. However, the current trend is real and observable. This is of most immediate relevance for longer term food security or livelihood interventions. However, given the humanitarian imperative it is inevitable that, to at least some degree, the emergency response will continue to fall outside of such a coordinated framework.

The practical consequence of this is that there are fewer donors and less money available for NGOs and the UN to work in an 'old style' direct service provision role. With the desire to show impact at the aggregate level, it is becoming harder to justify interventions simply on the basis of the benefits to the targeted households. The challenge is to replicate the success of community level interventions at the national level – using national institutions and structures. National policy debates provide the medium to make this linkage.

This trend is leading to a major re-examination of the roles of all stakeholders; governments, donors, UN and NGOs. In particular NGOs are having to develop very different competencies and becoming more adept at linking programme results to policy advocacy (see section 4.2.2 for examples). The adoption of a rights based approach by UN agencies and NGOs is reinforcing the common goal of empowering governments to fulfil their responsibilities (including the right to food). This is being addressed through the twin approaches of building government capacity for delivery and building the ability of citizens to demands their rights.

3.1.2 Linking relief and development

A second major institutional trend is a long running concern to improve the relationship between relief and development activities. Traditionally relief and development are separated within the architecture of all stakeholders; government, donors and NGOs. Development activities are usually seen to address the cause of poverty and vulnerability, whereas emergency relief responds to the symptoms of crisis and addresses immediate survival needs. However, the negative implications of this separation are well acknowledged and the potential benefits of improved integration are significant. Put simply this can be summarized as *"better 'development' can reduce the need for emergency relief; better 'relief' can contribute to development; and better 'rehabilitation' can ease the transition between the two"* (Buchanan-Smith and Maxwell, 1994).

It is increasingly appreciated that relief and development are not sequential but can occur simultaneously. Important opportunities for development actions exist even in the midst of a crisis. Relief operations, which are relatively well financed, provide an important opportunity for development actions. This shift in thinking has been incorporated at the policy level, in particular by the major donors. USAID Food for Peace (FFP) have put this at the heart of their 2006 – 2010 strategy (see box). For FFP this change provides a more flexible budgetary framework for addressing chronic food insecurity. Similar policy discussions are evident in both the EU and DFID, although there has been less institutional progress.

Development Relief – A strategy for USAID

Within USAID the concept of “development relief” has been used to reformulate the policy guiding the use of food resources – which are the largest US resource available for improving food security. The USAID Office of Food for Peace (FFP) Strategic Plan for 2004-2008 advocates much greater integration of emergency and development programmes. This acknowledges the concurrence of relief and development needs within households and communities, as well as the need to switch emphasis between these different modes, rapidly and seamlessly, in highly food insecure settings. The new strategy has prompted FFP to introduce greater flexibility in the use of emergency and non-emergency resources, fully integrating their use in USAID programmes.

Specifically the reduction of vulnerability to (future) hunger is used as a common goal to integrate the use of emergency and developmental resources within FFP. This unified objective has been used to bring together the previously discrete programmatic areas of provisioning immediate needs, on one hand, and promoting developmental activities on the other. This policy has led to a process of fairly wide ranging organizational reform.

The nature of the chronic crisis in southern Africa has highlighted the urgent need to rethink this relationship. Traditional emergency responses are grounded in the assumption that a limited injection of resources (through relief and rehabilitation) can successfully restore resilient livelihoods. However, the situation in southern Africa is one where *“the bulk of rural populations are left dependent on rain-fed farming, barely managing to subsist at poverty levels in years without shocks, leaving them highly vulnerable to the vagaries of the weather, as well as to those arising in the economy and from government policy”* (Wiggins, 2003). It is clear that merely aspiring to return people to the situation they were in before an immediate crisis took hold is too limited in ambition. At best this leaves people highly vulnerable to the next shock.

Rethinking the linkages of relief and development interventions has widespread implications for improving the design and impact of humanitarian programmes. Recent food security developments have the implicit goal of improving this integration and this optic is critical in analyzing the effectiveness of emerging policy choices – both amongst donors and their development partners. This concern was central in the development of a collective response strategy by the UN and their NGO partners (see box below).

The Strategic Framework for Humanitarian Needs in Southern Africa

Working under the leadership of OCHA, the UN and NGO agencies collaborated in the development of a new strategic framework to guide humanitarian action in 2005. This is an extension of the UN's ‘Triple Threat’ paper of October 2003 which identified food insecurity, HIV/AIDS and reduced capacity for governance as critical issues in southern Africa. Given the combination of short-term shocks and long-term challenges associated with the crisis, it is argued that the dichotomy of ‘humanitarian’ and ‘development’ assistance must be overcome; instead an approach should be composed of ‘developmental relief’ and ‘emergency development’.

Two types of humanitarian interventions are identified. The first one is addressing the ‘classic’ emergency situation, where a trigger event, often a climatic extreme such as flood or drought, stresses local communities to the point where external assistance is needed. The second one addresses the immediate impacts of the ‘new’ type of emergency caused by the HIV/AIDS crisis, interwoven with deepening poverty levels. The challenge of addressing the ‘new’ emergency scenario is that it does not fit the existing operational mould of delineation between emergency and development, a mould that carries through to institutional operations and funding mechanisms. The framework argues for immediate humanitarian actions to address both short- and long-term needs. As far as food and nutrition security is concerned, the immediate goal is preventing deaths from hunger and disease, protecting livelihoods and safeguarding nutrition of the most vulnerable population in the worst drought affected areas. Long-term goals for improved food and nutrition security are to increase production, increase incomes through economic empowerment and asset creation and improve the health status of individuals so that utilisation increases. This approach was influential in presenting the response to the severely reduced harvests of 2005 in more developmental terms (see 3.1.2).

3.2 National policies and strategies

As the institutional context aims to align multi-stakeholder support behind national food security programmes, national policies have a critical importance. Building consensus on well designed, appropriate and broadly acceptable policies is the first step towards scaled-up funding of nationally coordinated programmes.

Food security is by definition an inter-sectoral concern. A wide gamut of policies – including those relating to agriculture, trade and social services – has an important influence on food security outcomes. From within the wide range of possible topics the most relevant and active areas of policy development were identified as food security, social protection and disaster risk reduction. Regional developments are discussed further in this section.

3.2.1 Food security and nutrition

From self sufficiency to food security

The most visible recent trend in food security policies has been driven, not so much by the regional analysis, but rather the global process emanating from Rome and the World Food Summit (WFS). The original conception of food security from the 1970's was based on concerns of shortfalls in global food supplies. At a national level this translated into policies and strategies aimed at boosting agricultural production to ensure national self sufficiency. Until relatively recently a food self sufficiency agenda still characterized national food security policies⁹.

A growing awareness of the limitations of a food availability model in explaining food insecurity necessitated the expansion of the model. Subsequently the 1996 World Food Summit (WFS) reached near-consensus that expanded the concept to include the issues of:

- *availability* (ensuring that a wide variety of food is available in markets and fields)
- *access* (that people have enough money to purchase a variety of foods)
- *utilization* (ensuring positive nutritional outcomes through appropriate care, clean water, and good sanitation and health services)
- *stability* (ensuring that food security is maintained over time and in the face of a variety of natural, economic, social and policy shocks).

Over the last decade there has been considerable attention focused on either developing, or revising, food and nutrition policies to reflect this broader conception. Significant technical support has been extended by the EU and FAO. Nearly all Countries considered in this review now have a food security and nutrition policy in place – the exception being Zambia¹⁰ which is still guided by an agricultural policy. Malawi, Mozambique, Lesotho and Swaziland all reported that their food security policies have been recently updated, or are in the process of being updated, to incorporate the 'four pillars' of food security. There is a widespread recognition that the successive elements of availability, access and utilization are necessary, but not independently sufficient, to ensure food security. A corollary of this conceptual shift is a discussion on the best institutional placement for food security¹¹. Alternative Ministries which are better placed to coordinate a cross-sectoral endeavour, such as the Ministry of Planning or the Office of the Vice President/ Prime Minister are increasingly perceived as the appropriate institutional location.

⁹ Countries typically had an agricultural policy that discussed food security, rather than a food security policy *per se*.

¹⁰ Experience has shown the significance of this gap. For example, a decision to restrict maize trade proved to have significant but unappreciated food security impacts. Zambia has now established a food security working group (in August 2006) with the objective of working towards a food security policy.

¹¹ In some Countries the Vulnerability Assessment Committees (VACs) are effectively taking on a coordinating role for food security.

Table 4: A typology of food security interventions

Food availability	Increase domestic food production through input supply, credit, production technologies, storage and processing. Market development. International and intra -regional trade promotion Grain storage - the role and management of Strategic Grain Reserves (SGRs).
Food access	Incomes Social transfers Price controls and subsidies
Utilization	Care practices (food preparation and child care) Interactions with hygiene, sanitation and health Education Nutrition
Stability	Emergency response Risk reduction Safety nets

The shift from a food self sufficiency dominated policy is highly significant as it creates the necessary space for a dialogue which accommodates the wide range of causal factors identified in the preceding chapter. Furthermore these policies approach the problem of food security from a primarily developmental perspective – a fact that is sometimes a surprise to the humanitarian community with their focus on emergencies. This reflects the reality that although the hunger seen during famines and disasters demands much attention, it may represent only a small part—roughly 10 percent—of the world’s hungry. Most of the hungry, approximately 90 percent, are chronically undernourished (FAO, 2005).

The new generation food security policies are being transformed into food security strategies and action plans. Unsurprisingly, given the breadth of the policy the list of potential activities is long and inclusive (Table 4). At its worst such strategic action plans represent little more than a cataloguing system for a database of (largely donor funded) interventions in diverse sectors. The very scope of the policy means that a diverse range of existing interventions can be credited with a food security goal and there may be little prioritization or new thinking. However, in some countries (such as Lesotho) there has been considerable thought about how to tailor the policy and recommendations to the national context.

The imperative for agricultural development

Despite the official policy development a bias for promoting agricultural development as a long term solution to food insecurity remains. The underlying national policy preferences are apparent in the Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security by SADC member states issued in Dar Es Salaam (SADC, 2004). Here member states are committed to ‘promote agriculture as a pillar in national and regional development strategies and programmes in order to attain ... short, medium, and long-term objectives, on agriculture and food security’. This is supported by a commitment to allocate at least 10% of the national budget to the agricultural sector¹².

While agriculture is seen as the mainstay of the strategy there does appear to be a shift in the underlying rationale for this choice. Partly this reflects a strategic political concern to ensure national food supplies. Additionally the importance of agriculture for hunger and poverty reduction is seen to lie not so much in its role as a source of food production (thus its contribution to increased food availability and the stability of food supplies), as in its role as a driving force for overall rural development, employment and incomes for the rural poor. Therefore beneficiaries are targeted using poverty criteria, rather than their productive potential. In the under developed economies of southern Africa agriculture continues to be regarded as the motor of economic development.

¹² This is in fact a recommitment to an identical declaration made by member states of the AU in Maputo in 2002.

Mainstreaming HIV/AIDS

A major and highly visible policy development is the mainstreaming of HIV/AIDS into food security policy. In all countries in the region, national policies have been updated to incorporate the necessity of responding to the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Two main rationales are proposed for responding to HIV/AIDS from a food security perspective; first to raise the chances that food and nutrition security policies and programmes can achieve their original objectives despite AIDS, and, second, to contribute to the multi-sectoral response to HIV/AIDS. Specific policy issues concern HIV/AIDS nutrition inter-linkages (that may be overlooked in the focus on prevention) and the interaction of nutrition with antiretroviral therapy (ART) treatments.

3.2.2 Social protection

One of the most notable features of the post-2001 policy landscape has been the emergence of the social protection debate. Food security and nutrition policies have long included a discussion on the role of social transfers. However, the discussion was limited to their short term role as part of an emergency response and considers a limited number of instruments such as food aid and Public Works Programmes (PWP). Social protection provides a more inclusive basis for discussing the role of social transfers to meet different objectives, using a wider variety of instruments.

The interest in social protection has been directly motivated by the desire to impact on chronic hunger and vulnerability. The scope of social protection is extremely broad in definition (see box) and the sub-set of activities termed social assistance is most directly relevant to the needs of the food insecure. This framework has also been utilized to improve the response to AIDS affected households.

The basic arguments advanced for social protection are two-fold. Firstly, it ensures predictability. 'Traditional' humanitarian response systems fail to disaggregate the immediate needs of the chronically and transiently hungry. Such systems deliver large and irregular transfers which are poorly adapted to the needs of the chronically hungry. There are strong technical and moral arguments in favour of establishing a system that delivers long term social assistance to the chronically hungry in a more predictable way¹³.

Definitions of Social Protection

Social protection encompasses a wide range of public actions that transfer goods and services (which could include food, cash or health and education services) to protect people from both chronic and transitory poverty and hunger. This includes protecting poor people who have a chronic incapacity to work or earn (for reasons of age or health) and mitigating the vulnerability of the working poor to short-term shocks such as droughts, floods and illness. Operationally, it can be defined by dividing it into three components:

social assistance which involves non-contributory transfers to those deemed eligible by society on the basis of their vulnerability or poverty. Examples include social transfers (non-contributory pensions, child welfare grants, food vouchers) and other initiatives such as school feeding or fee waivers for education or health.

social insurance which involves individuals pooling resources by paying contributions to the state or a private provider so that, if they suffer a shock or a permanent change in their circumstances, they are able to receive financial support (for example, unemployment insurance, contributory pensions and health insurance). Social insurance is, in general, more appropriate for better-off individuals, although it can have an important role in preventing them from dropping into poverty.

standards which refer to the setting and enforcing of minimum standards to protect citizens within the workplace.

Based on Farringdon and Slater (2006)

¹³ DFID has a specific policy commitment in the 2006 White Paper to help transition 16 million people from ad hoc relief to long term social protection by 2009.

Secondly, it increases ownership by government and accountability to its citizens through the creation of a 'social contract'. This is a shift from the current reliance on ad hoc relief arrangements, to an institutionalized and sustainable system, with improved national coverage.

While the regional policy debate has so far tended to focus on building agreement on the immediate objectives of predictability and national ownership, proponents argue that social protection can contribute to two additional goals, viz:

- Social assistance schemes, which are a permanent feature of policy and programming, can be rapidly scaled up in the face of a transient shock to provide timely relief that protects assets, providing a 'safety net'. This addresses the criticism that traditional relief systems tend to be uneven in coverage and may deliver assistance too late to protect household assets.
- It is argued that social assistance should not be seen purely as a consumption transfer, but also as a productive investment. For many amongst the chronically food insecure (sometimes termed the 'capable' or 'viable' poor) safety nets may provide a 'ladder' out of poverty. It is argued that assuring incomes provides a foundation and opportunity for these households to engage in development processes – sometimes termed 'productive safety nets'.

There is significant donor and multi-lateral support aligning behind social protection (including the World Bank, DFID, EU, UNICEF, ILO and FAO), although there are important differences in perspective between these stakeholders. Overall donor influence has been very influential in driving policy developments in several countries, notably in Malawi and Zambia (see box for a discussion of the Malawi case). In the case of Zambia this includes both the development of a distinct social protection policy and its inclusion as a pillar of the National Development Plan. The Livingstone call to action (2006) demonstrates a growing region wide interest in social protection.

Social Protection Policy Development in Malawi

Malawi has a relatively elaborate National Safety Nets Strategy, which constitutes one of the four pillars of the national Poverty Reduction Strategy. A Safety Nets Unit is responsible for operationalising the framework through the National Safety Nets Program (NSNP). The NSNP seeks to institute ex-ante risk reducing, and risk mitigation mechanisms, as well as ex-post risk coping for those that are already affected by the shocks. Additionally there are interventions that seek to increase the capabilities of the poor to engage in productive activities to lift themselves out of poverty and vulnerability as well as those that are of a welfare transfer nature for the critically vulnerable.

However, the NSNP is regarded as a relatively ineffective programme. Apart from issues surrounding its implementation and management, its construction from a number of discrete projects fails to provide an effective system of relief at times of crisis. At the same time it has done little to reduce vulnerability to future risks. Furthermore, current social protection programmes (particularly targeted inputs, fertiliser subsidies and public works) are very expensive and consume a disproportionate amount of the national budget. The inputs subsidies are estimated to cost \$30 per participating household.

A 'high level' discussion between the government, DFID and the World Bank is occurring around the formulation of a new social protection policy as a precursor to establishing a national social assistance program. So far the focus has been on developing a model to provide assistance to the destitute. There is still considerable work to be done in terms of understanding how social assistance can benefit groups with slightly more potential to economically develop. There has also been little thought of the practicalities of how social transfers can be used, and scaled up, to address vulnerability to natural disasters such as drought.

As the social protection policy debate unfolds it has revealed the complexity of the decisions involved. This has been complicated by significant differences in perspective between key donors and national governments¹⁴. There is an evident reticence by governments to directly assume responsibility for long-term public support. Key policy debates include:

¹⁴ Barrientos et al (2006) provide an excellent analysis of the drivers of change in social protection in Zambia. A wider-ranging drivers of change study for Malawi is provided by Booth *et al* (2006).

- **Affordability** A key issue for national decision makers is the budgetary implications. These systems have been clearly presented as a long term 'social contract' which would bring expenditures 'on-budget'. There is a persistent tension at the policy level between welfare and growth objectives. Implementing such schemes competes for scarce funds and long term donor commitments of budgetary support are not yet forthcoming.
- **Links to economic growth** The question for decision makers is the best allocation of scarce resources – how much to invest in smoothing consumption compared to investing in economic growth? In this context the design and objectives of social protection are critical. The tools to help decision makers resolve these questions remain rudimentary and evidence on social assistance impacts is poorly developed.
- **Dependency** Some governments exhibit a preference to strengthen community based coping mechanisms over public systems of support. This is rooted in significant concerns of creating dependency.

National opinion on social protection remains somewhat divided. For some Countries (notably Mozambique) there is a policy decision to focus expenditure on growth and a reluctance to increase expenditure on social transfers. However, even the Mozambique position appears to be shifting. There does appear to be an increasing regional appetite for social protection as evidenced by the Livingstone declaration (DFID Zambia, 2006).

Social protection is also far from a panacea. The central argument for a more efficient method of meeting the predictable needs of the chronically hungry is persuasive. Establishing a national system, at scale, to deliver even on part of this would be an important step forward. However, while there may be important synergies with development, the primary objective remains meeting immediate consumption needs rather than addressing the underlying causes.

3.2.3 Disaster risk reduction

A third major strand evident in policy development concerns the formulation or refinement of disaster risk reduction policies. In 2004, the African Union (AU) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) developed the Africa Regional Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction and an programme of action for its implementation for 2005-2010. In January 2005, under the leadership of the UN, a global framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) has been formulated as the Hyogo Framework of Action (ISDR, 2005). The interpretation and adaptation of these policy guidelines is now occurring at the national level. DRR is a broad discussion that includes both measures to improve the management of disasters, through better preparedness and response, and measures to reduce the probability that disasters will occur, through risk reduction and mitigation.

Disaster management

Disaster management is uniformly reflected as a component of national food security policies. This includes provision for early warning systems and disaster management authorities. Stand alone disaster management policies have been recently updated in Mozambique, Lesotho and Zambia to strengthen the coordination capacity of government, although financing the disaster response itself still remains largely off-budget. Well established policy and programmatic elements of the response to disasters include the operation of early warning systems which continued to function relatively effectively since the 2001-03 crisis.

At a regional level there has been an active debate on the management of food stocks through the operation of strategic grain reserves (SGRs). SGRs serve two major functions – to provide buffer stocks for a quick response to an emergency and to control the food price spikes associated with harvest failures. As international food aid typically takes 5 months to arrive in-country the maintenance of a relatively small stock for this purpose is often justifiable. However, some countries with good private storage facilities and/or good infrastructure to connect to international markets do not feel it necessary to keep even this reserve – South Africa being an example.

Dealing with the consequences of harvest failure

Given the long standing recognition of the ramifications of crop production fluctuations on food security, conjoined with the considerable technical and human resources devoted to addressing this problem, the lack of progress in this field is disappointing. The current situation shows remarkable and depressing continuity: every time harvests fail, in 2001, 2002 and 2005, the response is pretty much ad hoc. Confronted with the imperative for quick action, the template commonly used is what was done last time — which may or may not be appropriate. NGOs and the donors scramble to mobilise emergency aid packages with food aid as the major component. Governments try to import additional food supplies; private enterprise may try and import more, although often these intents are cautious since quite what government and donors may do is unclear.

It is surprising, given the certainty that there will be harvest failures in the future, that countries in the region do not have strategies in place that broadly define the objectives of response, the likely measures to achieve such objectives, the role of the various stakeholders, and the resources that will be necessary. There should be road map for each country: a broad outline of what may happen, and the probable response to contingencies, agreed consensually with all the main stakeholders.

A critical element of such a road map concerns how to ensure that there are supplies of food on the market, widely available, and at a price that is relatively stable and affordable. While food aid is used to protect access, this often arrives too late to remove the price spike after the failed harvest. The need for some public intervention to ensure that food prices do not double or more in years of harvest failure is rarely grasped in debates on responses to food crises.



People queuing and then purchasing food at an Admarc depot in Malawi, 2005



Unfortunately there is no consensus on how to prevent price spikes. Preferred responses broadly divide into two camps. One favours government intervention in food markets; the other believes that allowing private enterprise scope to operate in free markets will do much to solve the problem, with minimal and strategic public interventions only when and where strictly needed. More clarity needs to be brought to debates about markets. Free markets in food may work well, but there would still be a public role to correct for undesirable outcomes. That does not mean repressing or replacing markets, but it does mean being clear about the limits of free markets. An alignment behind a consensus position would facilitate effective action.

Risk reduction and mitigation

The role of disasters (natural, technological and economic) in driving food insecurity (both transitory and chronic) is well established. In the southern Africa region droughts, floods and to a lesser extent cyclones are significant food security influences. The food security implications of climate change are a particular concern. Consequently there is a well developed global argument for focussing on reducing human vulnerability. This will reduce the probability that a shock such as a drought, will necessarily translate into a disaster.

Vulnerability reduction requires more than just emergency preparedness and response. In situations characterised by exposure to shocks, the goal is to move households from increasing vulnerability (i.e. declining ability to manage risk) to increasing resilience (i.e. an enhanced ability to manage risk) over time. This is primarily a developmental activity. This debate has been driven by the conceptual advances amongst the disaster reduction community. Recent global agreements (specifically the Hyogo framework) have emphasized the interactions of disasters with human development. Just as disasters can interrupt development, poorly planned development is understood to increase the risk of 'disasters'. This may occur at the micro-level (such building a house in a flood plain) or at the macro-level (such as macro-economic development accelerating climate change).

At the continental level, disaster risk reduction is a high policy priority. Disaster related losses are increasing and disaster impacts have become an impediment to sustainable development. The African Union (AU) and its New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) developed an African regional strategy for disaster risk reduction (AU/NEPAD, 2004). In this document the problem of disasters is increasingly viewed as a development challenge. Consequently the primary aim of the strategy is phrased around contributing to the attainment of sustainable development and poverty eradication by mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into development, which parallels the HIV/AIDS mainstreaming process. The objective is to ensure that all programmes consider how their activities impact on risk – rather than seeing this as a separate sector. While the need to mainstream disaster risk management is repeatedly referenced, the observed actions still fall some way short of a comprehensive package necessary to achieve this.

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

4 Programmatic response

The preceding chapter illustrates the wide recognition of an urgent need for change in the policy sphere. While there are a number of critical areas where a policy consensus is still lacking, in substantive areas the policy environment does appear to accommodate a more appropriate response to the complex regional crisis. This chapter examines subsequent changes in *programme implementation* that have occurred – in particular major changes since the 2001-03 crisis.

Changes in programme content are examined in response to both transient and chronic food insecurity. Firstly, the changes in response to the transient crises such as drought, and the accompanying surges in staple food prices, are examined. Secondly, it examines how the response to the underlying and longer-term livelihoods crisis is evolving, with a particular focus on the role of the humanitarian sector.

4.1 Responding to transitory food insecurity

Perhaps the most striking observation on the format of the emergency response is the apparent lack of change at the aggregate level. There is remarkably little difference between the content of the emergency appeals for the 2001/03 and 2005/06 crises. The 2005/06 Malawi Flash appeal remained heavily weighted towards ensuring access to food and continued to recommend the

large scale use of emergency food aid. For Malawi in 2005/06 two thirds of the total response was in the form of food aid (Table 5), compared to 80% in the 2002-03 and 2003-04 consolidated appeals.

Table 5: Flash Appeal Malawi 2005

Sector	Requirements	Funded	% of total
Agriculture	8,971,878	7,514,458	13%
Education	500,000	558,730	1%
Food	48,955,869	37,348,634	65%
Health	13,400,000	9,881,713	17%
Human rights	300,000	400,000	1%
Not specified	-	367,238	1%
Water and sanitation	1,700,000	1,659,341	3%
Grand Total	73,827,747	57,730,114	78%

Source: Relief Web¹⁵

This continuing predominance of food aid is being widely questioned on two major fronts. Firstly, it is clear that food insecure households have a wide basket of needs and ensuring food availability and access is only a partial solution. This strand needs to be balanced by increased agricultural, health and water interventions. Secondly, food aid is not necessarily the most appropriate and efficient way of transferring resources to food insecure households¹⁶, nor the best mechanism for ensuring food availability and access.

Table 6: DFID Zambia Humanitarian Allocations, 2005-06

Implementor	Amount	Sector
Oxfam	£1,000,000	Relief cash transfers
WFP	£460,000	Food aid
Programme Against Malnutrition	£520,714	Agricultural Input distribution
WFP (PRRO 10310)	£2,000,000	Food Aid
WFP (PRRO 10310)	£1,033,000	Food aid
UNICEF	£416,000	Emergency Health and Nutrition
Nutrition Advisor support	£30,000	Emergency Health and Nutrition
Real-time evaluation	£1,320	Food and cash relief
GRAND TOTAL	£5,451,034	

The continuing emphasis on food aid can be partly explained as the resources of key donors (principally the US government) remain heavily tied to this commodity. However, this is not an adequate explanation. For example the resources from the British government are officially untied, yet they have continued to invest the majority of their humanitarian response funds into food aid transfers in the region. For example in Zambia in 2005-06 two thirds of the total assistance went to food aid. The common explanation offered is that food aid programmes are often the only viable option for donors to disburse large amounts of assistance in a timely manner. While other instruments may be technically feasible, the institutional backbone to use them at scale is lacking. In particular proposals from the non-food sectors are perceived to lack credibility and the capacity for implementation.



Food Aid distribution, Malawi, 2005

¹⁵ Requirements, Commitments/Contributions and Pledges per Sector as of 28-August-2006 as reported on <http://www.reliefweb.int/fts>

¹⁶ Barrett and Maxwell (2005) provide evidence on the poor efficiency of food aid as a resource transfer and show that a high proportion of the value is lost.

4.1.1 Cash and markets

However, against the backdrop of limited change at the macro level there has been a flurry of innovation at the local and pilot level. Concerns over the market, production and political



Cash distribution, Zambia, 2006

disincentives of food aid have led to active experimentation with alternative transfer instruments. There are numerous examples of NGO led cash transfer pilot programmes to meet short term emergency needs. For example in Malawi during 2005-06 cash transfer schemes were operated in pilot districts by OXFAM, CONCERN Worldwide, World Vision and GOAL. WFP funded the latter two pilots and are piloting cash transfers on a regional basis in the current season.

These pilots have been extremely valuable in exploring the public acceptability, affordability, the necessary preconditions, targeting modalities and impacts of using cash transfers in emergencies. The experience has been largely positive.

Monitoring shows that the majority of the

cash is used to meet immediate food needs, but also allows other basic needs to be addressed, for example paying for transport to collect ARVs. Cash has not generally inflated the cost of staple food stuffs and is more cost effective than imported food aid.

However, such pilots have dispelled the hypothesis that cash is uniformly preferable to food aid. In times of staple price inflation or where food availability is constrained it remains preferable to make transfers in kind – for example during the emergency in parts of Malawi. It is acknowledged that well targeted food aid, provided in emergency situations where food is unavailable or expensive, continues to be an important emergency response tool.

There have also been innovative attempts to utilize synergies with local markets to improve food access. For example in Zimbabwe, established market channels were used to target the urban food insecure to good effect (see box on the MAP programme).

Market Assistance Program (MAP) C-SAFE Consortium Zimbabwe

The MAP program recognizes that markets are the major source of food to most households, especially within urban settings. However, access to the official Grain Marketing Board (GMB) grain has declined steeply over the last few years. While 88% of households reporting buying GMB maize in 2002, this had fallen to 41% by 2005. MAP (operated by the USAID funded C-SAFE consortium in Zimbabwe) is providing subsidized sorghum for sale through established retailers as an innovative response to urban food insecurity in Zimbabwe.

MAP appears to be a notable success on several scores. It has received wide recognition and usage – while sorghum is not a traditional staple over 80% of the population in targeted suburbs of Bulawayo had tried the MAP product. As a less preferred staple the product is self targeting benefits are skewed to poorer households.

The program avoids the constraints of attempting 'traditional' community based food security interventions in an urban setting. The need to work through communities is by-passed by using the market directly. Additionally the initiative has proved less politically sensitive than direct food distribution; this is attributed to the low visibility of the NGO and donor in the process. At this stage an assessment of the cost effectiveness of the approach and determining the replicability beyond the specific context of Zimbabwe is needed.

4.1.2 Institutional arrangements

Networking and coordination

One of the most clearly learnt lessons has been around the value of improved coordination in the delivery of the emergency response. There are numerous examples throughout the region where new institutional relationships have been forged. Networks vary in the inclusivity of their membership (whether membership is open or closed), the mandate (information sharing, harmonization, coordination or collaboration in implementation) and the formality of the structure (whether they are informal, have an established secretariat and the role of government). Examples include:

- ✓ The establishment of the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Support Office (RIACSO), which provided a forum between key UN agencies and NGOs, and donor missions at regional level.
- ✓ Networking homogenous groups of stakeholders. For example, within the UN system (the establishment of the Regional Directors Team has been significant in building a multi-sectoral and coordinated food security response within the UN), between NGOs (with joint implementation of the C-SAFE programme¹⁷) or harmonizing donor policies (donor coordination around budget support themes in Mozambique).
- ✓ Information sharing between different humanitarian stakeholders; for example the role of the UN Resident Coordinators' Offices supported by OCHA at country level and SAHIMS at the regional level. Such networks have mitigated the loss of knowledge inherent in a rapid turnover of humanitarian staff.
- ✓ Coordination structures chaired by national government; such as SETSAN in Mozambique and the Joint Food Security Task Force in Malawi.

While the efficiency of specific networks varies, the overall benefits of the approach are unambiguous. This lesson appears to have been well learnt. Like all good ideas, models of improved networking and coordination have spread rapidly and are increasingly institutionalized.

Integrated programming

Major changes in the organization of the NGOs to respond to emergencies are evident. Prior to 2001-03 most NGO programmes in southern Africa were primarily developmental. Only in Mozambique, which is exposed to regular cyclones and other extreme weather events, was there a well established disaster management capability. Consequently the 2001-03 response was typically provided through independent humanitarian programmes. Not only did these take time to establish, but they suffered from a limited interaction with on-going development programmes. Opportunities for synergy were poorly exploited and development gains were even undermined.

While these challenges have been far from resolved, several agencies (including WVI, Oxfam and CARE) placed far greater emphasis on responding to the 2005-06 crisis through using the structures and staff of on-going development. This resulted in much less disruption to the agency's regular programming and provided for a more streamlined and seamless scale-up.

The design of the new generation of 'development relief' programmes implemented through USAID funded NGOs integrate the flexibility to scale up the response in the event of an emergency occurring during the duration of the development program. Potentially this increases the ability to implement a rapid response, as well improving the impact by drawing on an intimate understanding of local livelihoods to design 'emergency' interventions. However, their flexibility has not yet been widely tested.

¹⁷ C-SAFE is a four year developmental relief program, involving implementation through a consortium of international NGOs in four countries (Lesotho, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Malawi). The three main initiators of this program were World Vision, CARE, and Catholic Relief Services. C-SAFE was mainly supported by USAID FFP with additional funding from OFDA, DFID and WFP.

Strengthening national delivery capacity

During the 2005 / 06 crisis there was a greater effort by the international humanitarian community to tailor interventions to country-specific needs. For instance in Mozambique the UN country Team is implementing an inter-agency plan to complement the government's interventions to mitigate food insecurity. The strategy, which draws from the annual Inter-Agency Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan, is multi-sectoral and includes activities, which are rolled into and consistent with the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and National Development Plan.

There is somewhat limited evidence of efforts to build national capacity to deliver emergency assistance. The main example of a systematic attempt to build capacity was observed in Malawi, where the government took greater direct responsibility for food aid distributions in 2005/06. Rather than funding WFP, DFID opted to fund the GoM handle distributions in the northern and central areas of the country. The argument was twofold; firstly, using the GoM channels was argued for on cost efficiency grounds, and secondly to build government responsibility and accountability. While the implementation was judged to be reasonably successful, the GoM appears to have a limited interest in institutionalizing systems for food aid delivery.

4.1.3 Risk reduction

The consequences of failing to reduce exposure to risk are evident in the rising vulnerability and the increasing cost of humanitarian response. CARE (2006) have estimated that given current trends the total expenditure on humanitarian response in sub Saharan Africa between 2000 and 2010 will total \$300 billion. This is a stark reminder of the costs of failing to deal with the root causes of disasters.

There have been a number of attempts to pilot measures to reduce risk and vulnerability – and so ultimately reduce the need for publicly funded emergency response. In particular the World Bank is taking a lead in piloting the use of a range of market based instruments to manage weather related risks (World Bank, 2005). In Malawi the World Bank is piloting the weather based insurance products.

At the micro- or farm-level, weather-based index insurance provides more stable income streams that protect peoples' livelihoods and improve their access to finance. A weather insurance product has been piloted to secure credit for groundnut farmers in the last season in Malawi. Nearly 1000 policies were sold in October 2005 for the 2005/2006 season. The insurance payout is based on rainfall recorded at the airport weather station in Lilongwe. A commercial loan is packaged with weather insurance into a single product. Farmers pay a higher rate of interest, but in case of a severe drought, the borrower repays only a fraction of the usual loan due. At this level the innovation is probably most relevant to emergent commercial farmers, rather than small scale food insecure producers.

However, the proposal is to use the same principle to establish a macro level scheme to provide the GoM with an index-based insurance policy. Specified rainfall levels would trigger a contingent credit line for the government. It has been estimated that an annual premium of \$7 million would be required to provide cover of \$70 million for large scale drought events. This cash would finance the governmental response to drought. The advantage to governments (and potentially donors) is that lumpy, unpredictable response costs can be converted to predictable insurance premiums.

A second major pilot tested the use of an options contract based on the South Africa Futures Exchange (SAFEX) in Malawi during 2005-06. Final food estimates indicated that Malawi would face a food gap of around 400,000 tonnes. In response, the government (with donor support) secured additional supplies of maize at a capped price from South Africa via a SAFEX white maize contract. The GoM took an option on the delivery of 100,000MT of maize at the end of the year - during the anticipated peak hunger months. While not committing the government to import or pay for the maize, a relatively small premium locks in the maximum maize price early in the season. Using this option the government was effectively insulated from subsequent maize price increases, on at least a part of their import requirement. Such a scheme has the additional

benefit that government policy intentions are transparent to traders who can then import commercially with more confidence.

Malawi's experience with options contracts was positive. The maize option was used to meet humanitarian needs – rather than the original intention to release it for commercial resale. The maize bought under the contract had the best delivery performance of all the maize imported into Malawi, and helped to avoid severe shortfalls in the humanitarian pipeline. By the time of delivery in December/January, prices had risen by between \$50 and \$90 a tonne above the ceiling price of the contract. Without the options contract, Malawi would have paid significantly more to secure South African maize in late 2005. Interest in replicating this pilot in future years is unclear.

There have been attempts to integrate disaster risk reduction into mainstream development programming. This goes beyond the generic strategy of increasing and protecting household assets as a primary coping mechanism. A number of pilots have looked at how risks of natural disasters can be reduced, for example the WV implemented LISTEN programme in Mozambique. This systematically assesses the hazards experienced at the community level and builds resilience through early warning, mitigation and contingency planning. However, these pilots have not been taken up to scale.

Overall there appears to have been relatively little success in translating the DRR policy agenda into tangible measures to reduce risk and vulnerability. The policy measures are establishing a set of enabling conditions through increasing political commitment, improving methodologies and knowledge management for disaster risk reduction, and improved governance of disaster risk reduction institutions. However the practical mechanisms to drive this forward are still lacking.

4.2 Responding to chronic food insecurity

The chronic dimension to the regional crisis – with its roots in poverty, HIV/AIDS and governance failures – has prompted a reconsideration of the (humanitarian) response in two regards. Firstly, as the needs themselves are chronic rather than transient, the duration of assistance, delivery mechanisms and 'exit strategies' have been reconsidered. Secondly, it has emphasized the imperative of addressing the underlying developmental failures even within an emergency context. In practical terms the key trends have been in the use of social protection measures to deliver longer-term assistance, and livelihoods programmes to address the structural underpinnings of long term food insecurity.

4.2.1 Social protection

There has been a flurry of social protection scheme pilots in the region by NGOs. In many instances the pilot projects have been used to influence policy development, rather than vice versa. As noted earlier (section 3.2.2) there are a wide number of potential objectives and instruments for social protection. However, regional pilots have focused on developing social assistance instruments, specifically long term assistance to the food insecure and destitute.

Social assistance

An influential model, particularly for shaping donor thinking on delivering social assistance, is the Kalomo project in Zambia, supported by GTZ (see box). The essential features of this scheme are being replicated in the region; by CARE in other districts of Zambia and UNICEF in Mchinji district, Malawi. Essentially these schemes target the poorest 10% of the community with a small transfer primarily aimed at partially meeting immediate consumption needs. The objective is to provide predictable, public support to the chronically poor and malnourished, where informal protection mechanisms have been overwhelmed.

Kalomo Social Protection Programme: GTZ and government of Zambia

The Kalomo pilot social cash transfer scheme is financed by GTZ and implemented by the Public Welfare Assistance Scheme (PWAS). The goals are to:

- ✓ Reduce extreme poverty, hunger and starvation in the 10% most destitute and incapacitated (non-viable) households in the pilot region (approximately 1,000 households)
- ✓ Focus mainly – but not exclusively - on households that are headed by the elderly and are caring for OVC because the breadwinners are chronically sick or have died due to HIV/AIDS or due to other reasons
- ✓ Generate information on the feasibility, costs and benefits and all positive and negative impacts of a Social Cash Transfer Scheme as a component of a Social Protection Strategy for Zambia.

The scheme was rolled out in 2004 and within a year was paying monthly cash transfers to 1,027 households with a population of 3,856 persons. The target group is not individuals but households, which are either critically poor (suffering from chronic hunger and in danger of starvation) or incapacitated (with no labour assets).

Each household approved by the Scheme receives monthly ZMK 30,000 (US\$ 6) in cash. This is the equivalent of the average price of a 50kg bag of maize. If the beneficiary households spend the transfer on buying maize, this will permit them to increase food consumption from one to two meals a day. The transfer does not lift the beneficiary households out of poverty. It just lifts them from critical poverty, which is life threatening, to moderate poverty.

DFID is considering supporting the scale-up of the pilot in Zambia to the national level on the basis of an evaluation of the pilots planned for 2008.

See Schubert (2004) for a more detailed description

So far regional social protection schemes have mainly piloted unconditional transfers. The potential of making transfers contingent on human development – for example through attendance at schools or health facilities – has been attracting considerable attention in Latin America. However, it has not yet been substantively tested in this region, although this is mooted for Zambia.

To an extent the discussion of social protection has been erroneously confounded with the specific issue of the use of cash transfers. However, the primary question is one of policy – the desirability of instituting a national, publicly funded, long-term social protection programme. The choice of instruments is secondary to this and should be driven by the objectives of the program.

The lessons that have been learnt around the *long-term* use of cash transfers appear to be essentially similar to lessons learnt from the use of cash for short term relief (see section 4.1.1). There has been less experience and analysis of the comparative benefits of other forms of transfers, such as subsidies or fee waivers. Such conditional transfers have been enthusiastically promoted in other regions – particularly South America – by the World Bank.

The Kalomo pilot has raised a number of challenging issues. Targeting methods and choices remain a thorny issue. This partly replicates the same targeting dilemmas long seen in humanitarian programmes¹⁸, and is overlaid by the need for a system that is commensurate with the capacities of a national system to operate. Furthermore the long term nature of social protection increases the sensitivity of beneficiary selection and ramifications at the community level.

Many countries in the region have a long and well established history of social assistance programmes and some level of attendant policy commitments. Perhaps somewhat ironically, given the current renewed donor interest, relatively extensive social protection schemes have been only relatively recently scaled back under structural adjustment programmes. This includes

¹⁸ Administrative and indicator-based targeting require an enormous investment of staff time and money. Self-targeting sometimes works—particularly with food for work—but often excludes the most vulnerable who have no surplus labor. Community based targeting risks real differences in the criteria of the distributing agency and the recipient community. In short there are no universal recommendations with regard to targeting and the choice is context specific (Barrett and Maxwell, 2005).

prior experience with the use of cash transfers, for example Mozambique's Food Subsidy Programme (GAPVU), an urban-based cash transfer programme for the destitute, Zambia's Public Welfare Assistance Scheme is a social safety net initiative that has existed for over fifty years and cash transfers for the destitute in Zimbabwe. National programmes still exist but are generally under capacitated and under funded. Consequently they are generally considered ineffective at the national level. The possibility of revitalizing these national schemes is being actively investigated by donors, for example GAPVU in Mozambique.

The main substantive recent development of a national cash based scheme is the introduction of a modest oldest age pension in Lesotho¹⁹. This provides 70,000 households with M150²⁰ per month. This is entirely financed from the domestic budget. Given the challenges of targeting a non contributory old age pensions is an attractive alternative as the targeting criteria are simple and transparent. This is a critical consideration given the constrained capacity of government agencies. Furthermore, it is far more politically acceptable to provide support to this category of 'deserving poor' as opposed to households with available labour – 'the undeserving poor'. The first evaluation of the impacts of this scheme is expected later this year, but early indications suggest a positive correlation between the grants and child nutrition.

Productive safety nets

A key aspect of the social protection debate rests in the assertion that social protection is not just consumption smoothing but also a productive investment. This is a particularly compelling argument for national governments who are tasked with the allocation of scarce resources. governments are demonstrably keener on supporting schemes that integrate a pathway or participants to 'graduate' from long term public support.

So far there has been relatively little consideration of how to link regular social assistance transfers to a process of development – so that hunger may not be just alleviated, but eventually reduced. An illustration of the possibilities comes from CRIMP project in Malawi (see box).

Central Region Infrastructure Maintenance Programme (CRIMP) CARE Malawi

Although a discontinued pilot, the CARE model of the Central Region Infrastructure Maintenance Programme (CRIMP) is still highly informative. This project operated between December 1999 and January 2002.

Most Public Works Programmes (PWP), including the Malawian government public works program, work through two channels to reduce poverty: short-run income boosts through receipt of wages, and longer-run potential income boosts to the entire community from the improved infrastructure services. In addition to these standard objectives CRIMP trained participants to save, identify potential economic activities, invest and work in a group. A portion of their wage went into compulsory savings in order to emphasize the lessons learned in the training and form a habit of saving. CRIMP did not simply aim to alleviate poverty by short-term transfers. Rather, CRIMP enhanced poor women's productive capacity to lift themselves and their families out of long-term poverty; it is therefore a poverty reduction scheme rather than a poverty alleviation programme.

An ex-post evaluation was carried out three years after the end of the program (Scharff, 2005). This identified sustainable economic benefits amongst the original beneficiaries, who had higher and more diversified income sources than comparable control groups. Furthermore, in the intervening period beneficiaries have experienced two major shocks; the droughts of 2001-03 and 2005. They were better able to withstand these shocks and recover in the aftermath – indicating that the activity had a demonstrable impact on increasing the resilience of some of the poorest members of society. Additionally there is evidence that CRIMP has had a socially transformative impact, changing the social status and networks of the previously marginalized beneficiaries. This pilot has important lessons which resonate in the search for effective models of 'productive safety nets'.

It is notable that under the rubric of social protection transfers, governments have proved far more committed to financing 'productive' transfers. By far the largest example in financial terms is the fertilizer subsidy programmes of the Malawian and Zambian governments. During the 2005/06 season 147,000MT of subsidized fertilizer was provided in Malawi alone, equivalent to 75% of the national fertilizer market. This was financed entirely out of the domestic budget and without donor support. There have been mixed assessments of the success of this program; to the government the 2006 bumper harvest validated the decision. To other commentators the

¹⁹ Swaziland is also expanding grants to the elderly.

²⁰ Equivalent to approximately \$20 per month at current exchange rates.

failure to work in synergy with commercial suppliers (a lesson learnt from previous donor funded programmes) was a major short coming of this programme²¹ as the effect is to undermine markets. It was also largely untargeted. However, given the political attractiveness of such schemes a policy decision has been taken by the GoM to continue to support targeted fertilizer subsidies in the coming year.

Bringing social protection to scale

While considerable experience has been gained in piloting of social protection approaches it is not always clear if and how these experiences will be incorporated into national schemes. Pilot designs usually include feedback links between the programme and policy development. Implementing NGOs are becoming more creative in purposively making these linkages. For example in Zambia the CARE social protection team is working directly with the government in developing the chapter in the new National Development Plan on social protection. A multi-stakeholder regional Partners' Alliance for protection of OVCs, is working to understand the pre-conditions for successful scaling up of boutique type social protection pilots.

However, very practical obstacles are commonly expressed, not least the fiscal constraints. Governments are particularly wary of increasing social expenditure, even where the additional expenditure may be relatively modest. From the NGO perspective it has proved relatively easy to access funds to operate pilot schemes. However, reliable funding (from donors or governments) to scale these pilots up into national programmes is proving far more problematic. In the absence of long term commitments from donors, progress in establishing national social protection schemes remains limited.

4.2.2 Livelihoods development

The realization that southern Africa is confronting a broad livelihoods crisis, rather than a food crisis, has reinvigorated the efforts to protect and promote livelihoods. As donors have sought to increase the livelihoods impact of humanitarian expenditures 'emergency' resources are being increasingly utilized towards the protection and building of assets. Large programmatic examples of this include; the USAID funded regional C-SAFE program, the DFID funded Protracted Relief Programme in Zimbabwe (see box) and the work of the FAO emergency unit. All of these share a common goal of working to improve long term livelihoods in an emergency context. Similarly agencies with a strong traditional focus on strictly humanitarian interventions have acknowledged the necessity of maintaining a longer-term developmental presence²².

Department for International Development (DFID) The Protracted Relief Programme (PRP)

DFID has provided over US\$100 million of humanitarian assistance to Zimbabwe since 2001; mainly food aid. The PRP recognizes that continuing hunger and vulnerability is not just caused by unreliable rains, but also by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the deteriorating macro-economic environment and the declining productivity in the agricultural sector. Consequently whilst acute malnutrition has been in decline chronic malnutrition appears to be worsening.

In 2003/4, 80% of DFID's humanitarian funding was in the form of food aid. The balance has now shifted and resources are more focused on improving production and an increased emphasis on other types of resource transfers and safety nets that promote self-reliance.

The Protracted Relief Programme (PRP) is providing £18 million (US\$32 million) over an initial two-year phase with the objective of improving food security in the poorest households. The programme's purpose is to improve food security and the livelihoods of some 1.5 million people in Zimbabwe particularly households affected by AIDS.

The programme is being implemented through the Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in collaboration with local institutions who are targeting some of the poorest communities in Zimbabwe. These include households affected by HIV/AIDS, those affected by erratic rainfall, and the elderly and orphan-headed households. Longer-term programming will enable more

²¹ An EU funded evaluation argued that, while targeted fertilizer distributions have a positive impact on food security, the 2005/06 transfer modality failed to learn from previous programmes and consequently crowded out commercial imports and did not increase net use (Spooner, 2006). The bumper harvest could be interpreted as a result of good weather.

²² For example the IFRC have established long term livelihoods programmes in several southern African states to build on what were initially humanitarian interventions.

capacity building for NGOs and community based organisations (CBOs) and promote closer linkages with government service providers at all levels.

The PRP approach will support community-based safety-nets that promote production as well as support basic consumption needs. This will include a range of interventions including agricultural inputs, promotion of low input technologies (such as conservation farming, micro irrigation and rehabilitation of water holes). Limited targeted food assistance will be provided, with particular emphasis on AIDS-affected households. In the drier zones, food security will be promoted through better livestock interventions and the utilisation of natural resources e.g. the harvesting and marketing of wild produce such as baobab fruit, marula fruit and mopane worms. Micro livestock such as chickens will also be promoted for the poorest groups.

A focus on agricultural livelihoods

A relatively common set of intervention options characterize the livelihood programmes of NGOs, UN agencies and government. These revolve around enhancing agricultural productivity through techniques including improved technology use, water management, access to credit and markets. Conservation farming, key-hole gardens and micro irrigation schemes are consistently cited as being extremely important.

However, the content of these livelihood programmes has been critiqued on several counts. For on-going interventions there is a lack of rigorous evidence of the impact, especially the longer term impacts. The preconditions for success are not always clear and the extent to which the benefits have been able to percolate down to poorer strata of society is questionable. Maybe partly as a consequence there is limited success in scaling-up (though government) effective pilots to reach a large proportion of the overall population²³.

Furthermore there is an apparent emphasis on supporting agricultural livelihoods – in particular crop based interventions. The significance of livestock is generally underplayed²⁴. Often the emphasis remains on increasing production with limited parallel effort to develop markets for any surplus production. Most of all there are few effective interventions, beyond savings and loans, to support diversified livelihoods of urban populations or those not directly involved in primary agriculture in rural areas.

Finally, the analytical questions on the effectiveness of increased agricultural production, or even falling income poverty, in reducing food insecurity (see section 2.2) are not widely reflected in the programme response. There is relatively little evidence of increased investment in education and health systems – in particular with a focus on empowering women – as a food security strategy²⁵.

HIV/AIDS and livelihoods

The major donor funding trend has been an increase in funding by multiple donors for HIV/AIDS related activities. While the majority of these funds have been allocated to treatment and prevention campaigns, there has also been a considerable increase in funding for food security related interventions. HIV/AIDS related food security interventions include; ARV compliance, home based care, feeding orphans and junior life skills training. At a regional level there has been a massive expansion of experimentation in how and what to target to PLWHA to build food security and on incorporating HIV awareness into intervention modalities. There is

²³ However, there are increasingly serious attempts to work towards this goal. For example the work of C-SAFE in Lesotho has resulted in nutrition gardens being formally adopted into the policy and practice in the Ministry of Agriculture.

²⁴ Livestock accounts for 20–40 percent of the agricultural gross domestic product (GDP) in the region and it is estimated that 60 percent of the SADC population depends on livestock – yet is relatively neglected. One of the reasons why households in areas such as Southern Province Zambia, were less resilient to the ‘mild’ shock of the 2001/2 drought was that livestock diseases had taken hold in the late 1990s, wiping out their buffer/assets. SADC now has a 15 year SADC animal disease programme with both “emergency” and long term perspectives (ref. personal communication Margaret McEwan, FAO Regional Emergency Coordinator).

²⁵ An exception to this generalization is that several of the USAID funded and NGO implemented Development Assistance Programmes (DAPs) integrate both agricultural and health components under a food security objective. Education is not well represented as a food security intervention.

now a wealth of practical knowledge on mainstreaming HIV/AIDS into emergency and development settings. However, there is remarkably little evidence on the added impact of mainstreaming on either HIV prevention, AIDS mitigation or HIV/AIDS on reducing overall food insecurity.

Overall trends and impacts

There is an apparent agreement that successful livelihood interventions have the potential to benefit poor households at the margins. Blurring the distinction between relief and development can potentially improve the long term impact of humanitarian investments. As such they deserve support and where possible to be scaled up. But equally these technologies are unlikely to be sufficient to kick-start the economic transformation of the rural hinterland of southern Africa. The improved design of humanitarian response should not be mistaken as a substitute for long term development. This dilemma was recognized by RIACSO in packaging the appeal to the 2005-06 crisis (see box).

Emergency appeal or development interventions?

The 2005 strategic framework identified the goal of "immediate action to address longer-term needs". Responding through an emergency appeal was perceived to undermine the development of coordinated, nationally led, long-term development actions. At a regional level a decision was taken not to utilize the Consolidated Appeal Process in response to the 2005-06 crisis, but to work within an expansion of the protracted relief response.

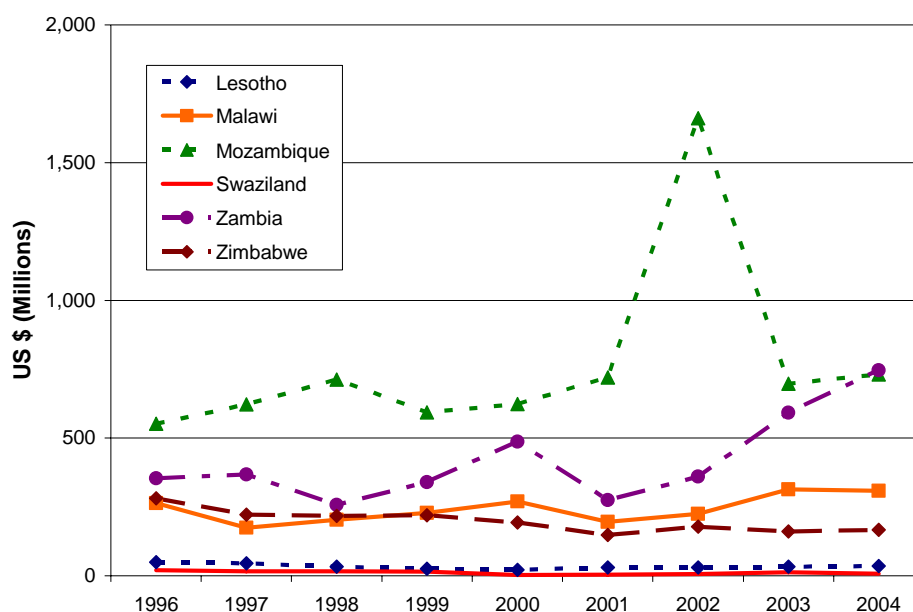
Conversely, an emergency appeal format is often a necessary pragmatic choice to encourage donors to release resources to meet urgent needs. A choice was made to issue a flash appeal for Malawi in 2005. The challenge is ensuring that the longer-term objectives are not sidelined in the implementation of an emergency programme.

At the macro-level there is little evidence that development budgets to respond to the chronic and structural aspects of regional food insecurity have increased over the last few years. A paucity of data makes it particularly hard to gauge the trends in government expenditure. Overall ODA flows show a mixed trend in development financing. The trend has been for increases in development aid flows to Zambia and Mozambique, whilst elsewhere flows have been more stable or even declined. Lack of recent data makes it hard to judge conclusively if recent political commitments from developed countries to scale-up aid have yet been transformed into increased flows of ODA.



Blurring the line between relief and development
– goat distribution in Malawi, 2006

Table 7: Total Official Development Assistance (ODA) in Southern Africa
(All donors: 1996 – 2004)



Source: Data extracted from OECD.Stat

At the national level, despite the strong political support to promoting agricultural development at the national level, this has rarely been reflected in budget prioritization. In the SADC region only Malawi has exceeded the 10% target. This is attributed to its large commitment to agricultural input subsidies.

Donor money has not been forthcoming to support agricultural (or livelihood) development and the long term trend shows a sharp decline in funding. Many of the key donors appear to be disillusioned by the poor returns to previous investments in this sector. USAID is one of the few major donors whose policy argues positively for agricultural development as a means to reduce food insecurity in sub Saharan Africa. However, high profile measures such as the Presidential Initiative to End Hunger in Africa (IEHA) do not necessarily bring in new money. In real terms overall USAID support for African agriculture declined between 2000 and 2004 (Taylor and Howard, 2005).

Table 8: Budget share of agriculture in southern Africa²⁶

Country	Target % of total budget	2003/04 (%)	2004/05 (%)	2005/06 (%)*	2006/07 (%)
Lesotho	10	Na	5	4	
Malawi	10	6.6	12.7	11	Not yet Approved
Mozambique	10	6.2	4.4	3.4	3.9
Swaziland	10	Na	6	4.7	3.7
Zambia	10	7	4	5	
Zimbabwe	10	11.9	Na	Na	

Source: SADC (2006)

²⁶ Includes overall budgets for crops, livestock, fisheries, forestry, irrigation, agricultural research and development, agricultural extension and wildlife.

5 Food security information systems

A specific question for this review was to assess the role of information systems in influencing policy and programming choices – and the trends in the development of information systems.

5.1 Vulnerability assessment committees

Information is used at various stages of policy and programme cycles; to identify the problems that need to be addressed, to guide the design of interventions or strategies and to assess the impact of the course of action which was followed. Consequently food security information is provided a myriad of systems operated by governments, donors, multi-laterals and NGOs. From this the national and regional Vulnerability Assessment Committees (VACs) have been selected for detailed consideration in this chapter²⁷, given the central role that they have played in influencing food security policy and programmes.

At the outset of the 2001-03 crisis it quickly became apparent that the established information systems were not well adapted to providing recommendations on the response to the *acute* crisis. Previous investments in information, through SADC, focussed on the establishment National Early Warning Unit (NEWUs) in Ministries of Agriculture. The NEWUs main task is to develop and update national food balance sheets. While an important part of the total information needs, this clearly falls short of a comprehensive information system. While early warning capacities were relatively well developed, both in the NEWU and allied systems such as the USAID funded FEWS NET program, these systems did not have a primary mandate for needs assessment nor does it help to understanding food insecurity at the household level.

In the wake of the 2001-03 crisis the need for better information became urgent and the VACs provided the vehicle for this analysis²⁸. The VACs provide a platform to bring together existing capacities at the regional and national levels, with donor support to facilitate data collection and analysis. Various government departments, UN agencies (including WFP, FAO, UNICEF), donors (FEWS NET, DFID) and NGOs (notably Save the Children UK) have been important supporters.

There is considerable consensus over the added value of the VAC system, although the performance has varied considerably between countries. Indeed, the improvements in the information quality are cited as one of the most positive aspects in the handling of the southern Africa crisis. The major elements of this have been:

- Establishing a capacity to conduct emergency *needs assessments* to follow-up on early warning signals.
- Providing timely and credible figures of the population in need of immediate assistance on an annual basis and building consensus around these estimates to improve confidence and so the speed of decision taking.
- Introducing methodological improvements to incorporate a rigorous understanding of a households' ability to *access* food, which adds to understandings of food availability.
- Networking together capacities from a number of sources (Government, UN, NGO and donor) as an innovative solution to the capacity constraints within the government system.
- Reinforcing the role of national governments in coordination - where government representatives chair the VACs and SADC chairs the Regional Vulnerability Assessment Committee (RVAC).

²⁷ There have been numerous specific reviews of the VAC system and there is a continual process of reflection and self critique led by the Regional VAC (RVAC). This includes the 'Three Step Process' (national, regional and internal consultations) of 2004 and the methodological review of 2005. These conclusions were incorporated into the new 5 year SADC RVAC programme mooted in 2006. Readers interested in more detail on the VAC process may wish to consult the associated reports.

²⁸ The VACs had been operational for some time (since 1993 in Zambia) but rose to prominence during the 2001-03 crisis.

Needs assessment information is clearly a vital component of an efficient emergency response capacity. In the hazard prone and highly vulnerable context of southern Africa it has been a valuable innovation to establish this capacity at the regional and national levels. Technically the analysis, especially on the scale of the needs – are generally considered as credible. This analysis is widely appreciated as it provides a good overview of the distribution and intensity of the current problem.

However, in the context of the evolving understanding of a chronic livelihoods crisis, the broader question is how adequate is the VAC system in servicing the decision makers emerging information needs? Is the system successfully evolving to analyze and provide recommendations on responding to both the transitory and chronic dimensions of the crisis?

The VACs are undoubtedly cognizant of their dual responsibility for informing both relief and developmental actions and there has been a major effort to adapt both the analysis and recommendations. For example the current reports from Mozambique and Zambia provide a large number of suggested short- and long-term interventions. In Lesotho the VAC data was integral to developing the new national food security policy. However, the headline recommendations in relation to immediate needs remain couched in terms of the number of beneficiaries and immediate *food response needs*. This is principally based on an analysis of the impact of the transient problems – what has happened to agricultural production and prices.

The main criticism of the *analysis of needs* is the continued primacy of food response needs – in particular food aid numbers. One positively received development has been the co-presentation of food and cash alternatives²⁹. While supporting the use of a novel instrument, this still suggests a symptomatic response to the problem of harvest failure. Such recommendations may reinforce the continued use of established response interventions – irrespective of their effectiveness. There is very little expertise in analyzing and quantifying health and nutrition based responses.

The analysis and recommendations of responses to the *chronic dimensions* of the food security problem is far less well developed. When VACs have attempted to advocate for livelihood interventions to address underlying causes these are generally perceived to be too generalized to be of practical use for policy makers or programmers, and lack a rigorous analytical base. Users consulted were unanimous in requesting the VACs to offer diversified response recommendations³⁰. However, it is not clear that the VACs have a comparative advantage, compared to community level assessments, for identifying livelihood interventions to reduce food insecurity.

The reasons for the relative (or apparent) lack of progress in moving away from recommendations around food responses / food aid are complex. This was attributed to a number of factors:

- ✓ There is a widely held perception that the membership of the VAC serves to reinforce an emergency, food aid bias in the recommendations. There is a concern that the key analytical skills are provided by agencies whose core business is the delivery of food aid. However, as the VAC membership includes a wide range of organizations and objectives, suggesting a more complex explanation.
- ✓ There are undoubtedly large methodological challenges. Transforming the VAC information into diversified and feasible recommendations on longer-term responses is a global challenge. Southern Africa is in many ways at the forefront of technical advances.
- ✓ The VACs are not yet institutionalized. Consequently resources are constrained and VACs have few staff. Furthermore, VACs may lack the necessary platform within government to advocate, especially for cross sectoral interventions (see box).

²⁹ In Malawi since 2004; Lesotho and Swaziland since 2006.

³⁰ VAC members articulated the opinion that the failure has been of decision makers to heed their advice. This suggests that at a minimum there is a need for the VACs to adapt a better communication and advocacy strategy.

Institutionalization of the NVACs

There has been a consistent push towards the institutionalization of the VACs within government. This is partly driven by the desire to provide a reliable source of long term funding. But there is also the underlying issue of ownership. The implicit assumption is that if governments have greater ownership of the analysis then they will also have greater responsibility for the response. However it can also be argued in reverse, that the primary issue is greater national accountability for food security and that this would necessarily create the willingness to institutionalize the VACs.

While the need for institutionalization has been long recognized there has so far been little progress and no VAC yet receives operational resources through the national budget. However, there seems to have been little explicit consideration of the needs and capacities of governments – what products are appropriate to their needs and the level at which they would be able to sustain it. Without an innovative approach it seems hard to foresee a different future for the VACs than a multitude of other donor driven food security information systems that have been ‘institutionalized’ in the past, such as the Household Food Security and Nutrition Information Systems or Early Warning Systems.

If governments are to pay for and sustain such systems then it would seem logical that such systems need to be reconfigured around government needs. They must also be necessarily modest to ensure affordability. It is not realistic to expect governments to pay for complex analyses to supply the needs of donors. Therefore an implicit tension between the goal of institutionalization and the pressure to deepen and broaden VAC analysis. One possible resolution is to institutionalize a ‘minimum’ VAC configuration in government and use this as a platform for additional donor funded analyses.

5.2 Emerging information needs

A number of priorities for improved information emerged from surveying the users.

Firstly, while the improvements in the quality of analysis are acknowledged there is considerable potential to improve further. The *accuracy* of the emergency needs assessments could be improved. For example, the major role of remittances is still to be factored into the analyses³¹. The *scope* of assessments is still limited. The VAC assessments only cover rural areas. While most of the food insecure may reside in rural areas it is estimated that 20% live in urban areas globally (Sanchez, et al, 2006).

One of the most obvious demands and opportunities is a better disaggregation of those affected by transient and chronic hunger³². Currently both categories are aggregated into a single food insecure population. Separating and quantifying these target groups is an important step to designing more appropriate forms of predictable transfers to the chronically hungry. However, this issue touches on a fundamental tension in the VACs. Some argue that they should focus exclusively on the emergency response to transient needs, while others argue that the VACs should also contribute to the development of long term social protection programmes.

Secondly, there is a demand for an *improved analysis of the causes of chronic food insecurity*. There has been some excellent analysis of causality, however this has generally occurred outside of the VAC structure. This existing knowledge base needs to be assimilated by the VACs who have an important role in disseminating this information and transforming it into policy and programme recommendations. But it is also clear that the understanding remains far from complete. There are important and largely unexplained patterns of chronic food insecurity (as measured by the incidence of stunting in Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe). The incidence of stunting often cannot be well explained by drought, poverty or AIDS. This suggests that novel explanations are needed, and that these in turn may lead to novel recommendations.

Thirdly and most importantly in the context of an emergency response users would like to see a diversified set, of tightly analysed, *response recommendations*. A good starting point would be a sound market analysis to underpin recommendations on the appropriate relative role of in-kind and cash responses and other ‘non-food’ responses that need to be considered. There is a particular desire to focus recommendations on addressing causes of vulnerability rather than the symptoms or

³¹ A recent survey estimated that remittances represent a major source of income for 50% of urban Zimbabwean households (Bracking and Sachikonye, 2006). However, this is not factored into the VAC analysis.

³² Arguably a necessary preceding step is to agree a definition of the boundary between these target groups. Devereax (2006) argues that the distinction insecurity and so in reality there is a continuum between chronic and transitory rather than being distinct groups.

outcomes of vulnerability – such as hunger. However, it is recognized that such decisions rightly extend into the political realm and technical analysis may not be sufficient to formulate clear recommendations.

Fourthly, there is the need for *better measures of progress* in combating transitory and chronic food insecurity. We lack the information to judge with any degree of confidence progress at the aggregate level. At the programme level evidence on impact is very thin making it hard to discriminate and advocate for the most effective interventions.

These challenges are recognized and accepted by the VACs to a varying degree. However, it remains far easier to identify the challenges than identify and implement the solutions. Given the multiple information demands there is a need to reach consensus on immediate priorities for the VACs as not all of these issues can, or should, be addressed within the structure of these committees. Given the institutional division of responsibilities for emergency and long term food security within government, accepting a dual mandate will almost inevitably generate tensions for the VAC.

Two pertinent considerations were pointed out. Firstly, given the intention to institutionalize the VACs it is appropriate to consider not just what is desirable – but what is commensurate with the capacity and resources of the government system. Secondly, it is important to acknowledge and support the mandates of existing information systems. Centralizing responsibilities within the VAC may be an attractive short term solution, to by-passing many of the institutional weaknesses elsewhere in national systems. However, it may do a disservice in diverting resources from established data collecting agencies and ultimately the institutional challenges of national systems need to be addressed and resolved.

6 Lessons learnt

The rich contextual analysis of the food crisis that has occurred since 2001-03 has challenged the humanitarian community to broaden its' goal from addressing the acute emergency to incorporate a response to the entrenched chronic livelihood crisis. Clearly this is a mammoth task. The horrendous poverty rates of southern Africa alone provide a deeply unpromising context for working towards food security. Given this, the signs of positive progress that have occurred are all the more laudable.

However, it is clear that substantive gains in long term food security remain elusive. Much remains to be urgently done to reverse the declining food security trend. The scale of the challenge cannot, and should not, be under estimated and there is no need for complacency. It is therefore imperative to draw out and capitalize on the key lessons from the experience of the recent past.

The key lessons identified in this review are summarized below. Consideration of the implications of these lessons can assist individual food security stakeholders in formulating their future strategy in the southern Africa region.

Analysis of the food security problem

1. There is a widespread consensus on the existence of a complex livelihoods crisis; where increasing poverty, the HIV/AIDS nexus and poor governance provide a ripe context for an acute food security crisis to rapidly develop.
2. While these are important common regional issues, the significance of a range of localized and diversified local factors in driving food insecurity at the national level is increasingly appreciated. This has implications for the response: the original response was driven regionally, whereas the importance of developing more nuanced national programmes is understood.
3. The significance of chronic needs, related to structural factors and occurring irrespective of a proximate trigger such a climatic shock, is increasingly appreciated. This insight suggests that responses need to change to a more 'predictable' delivery of assistance .

4. While income poverty is a key cause of food insecurity, it is apparent that a range of social and political factors are also important. Ensuring the delivery of basic services such as health, water and education is critical to food security. However, there is still limited evidence on the relative impact of these different investments to guide decision makers.

The institutional and policy context

5. There have been considerable advances in a number of key policies related to food security; in food security and nutrition, social protection and disaster risk reduction. Many of these innovations have been primarily driven by global processes but are highly relevant to improving the regional food security response.
6. Policy developments broadly reflect the major issues underlying the regional food crisis, encompassing the management of harvest failures, poverty and the HIV/AIDS-food security nexus. However, addressing weaknesses in governance has proved particularly challenging.
7. A cross cutting theme is the recognition that the artificial institutional barriers between relief and development need to be dismantled. This goal has been incorporated into policy development in several spheres, but requires further elaboration.
8. Significant differences of opinion on key policies exist between national governments and their development partners. This includes the role of agricultural production and input supply, social protection and government interventions in food markets. The lack of consensus is hampering the development of coordinated national programmes and the release of resources for scaled-up implementation.
9. In particular the need for some public intervention to ensure that food prices do not double or more in years of harvest failure is rarely grasped in debates on responses to food crises. Consensus on how to ensure the availability of food on the market at stable and affordable prices is often lacking. More clarity needs to be brought to debates about markets; free markets in food may work well, but there would still be a public role to correct for undesirable outcomes.
10. Developing coherent and consensual policies is a complex process. In particular building a national consensus, rather than imposing a donor led solution, takes time and requires considerable consultation to fully appreciate the constraints that Governments operate within. Multi-agency forums to build policy consensus are often absent or poorly developed. Given the right discussion forums, the participation of a wider selection of stakeholders could strengthen the policy making process.
11. Devising comprehensive action plans to tackle simultaneously all the problems of the food crisis is perhaps to expect too much of governments given their limited resources and political energy. They are arguably better off keeping a focus on key problems, where they can have an impact.

The programme response

12. There is an evident lack of change in the aggregate response to the emergencies of 2001/03 and 2005/06. An appreciation of the limitations of food aid has proved hard to translate into a more diverse response at the macro-level – partly due to the lack of feasible alternatives for resource transfers in an emergency.
13. There have been several pilots of using cash in emergencies which have illustrated the feasibility and limitations of cash distributions. It is now acknowledged that no single tool is universally applicable and a variety of instruments (cash, food and other options) need to be considered and selected according to the specific context. Despite this evidence, large scale emergency cash distribution schemes have not yet been implemented in the region.

14. An important lesson has been drawn on the value of improved networking and coordination in the delivery of the emergency response. Numerous networks have been established for a variety of purposes including information sharing, harmonization, coordination or collaboration in implementation.
15. The experience of 2001-03 pointed to the limitations of independent emergency programmes and the need for greater integration of relief and development. The implications of this have been considered by donors and NGOs and consequently more of the response to the 2005-06 crisis was implemented using the structures of on-going development programmes. This resulted in much less disruption to the agency's regular programming and provided for a more streamlined and seamless scale-up.
16. The failure to reduce underlying risk and vulnerability are evident in the rising cost of humanitarian response. The use of insurance and the futures market to manage weather related risks has been piloted, but again these pilots have not been successfully scaled-up.
17. The insight that food security needs are both chronic and transient has been translated into piloting social protection measures to deliver longer-term assistance. There has been a focus on exploring the use of cash transfers for social assistance. However, choice of instruments is secondary to the primary aim of instituting a national, publicly funded, long-term social protection programme, and must be driven by the objectives of the programme.
18. There are clear differences in the design and content of donor funded and government funded social protection programmes. The main differences include; the targeting criteria used and the duration of the assistance. There is the danger at present that there is too little dialogue amongst the various interested parties — government, NGOs, civil society, donors — and that donor preferences are foisted on to governments indiscriminately. However, there are strong reasons to encourage governments to look to provide some minimal and universal support to two groups: the old, and the very young to ensure that all get a decent start in life.
19. The realization that southern Africa is confronting a broad livelihoods crisis, has resulted in positive efforts to address long term livelihoods in an emergency context. The scope of these interventions is limited as it focuses on agricultural livelihoods – in particular crop based interventions – livestock, markets and off farm livelihoods are often neglected. The lack of rigorous evidence on impact of these livelihood interventions, especially the longer term impacts, is a major gap.
20. Change can occur relatively quickly where there is a policy consensus backed by donor resources. This is most evident in the progress seen in establishing programmes to address the *HIV/AIDS food security nexus*. While HIV/AIDS has been successfully mainstreamed into policy and programmes, there is little evidence on the impact that this has had on regional food security.
21. Livelihood interventions implemented by humanitarian agencies may be effective in improving food security of vulnerable households. However, it cannot be expected to result in large-scale poverty reduction. In the absence of national economic growth chronic food insecurity is likely to remain an obdurate problem.
22. It is important to acknowledge the importance of delivering basic social services. Adequate health, education and clean water supplies (with a focus on empowering women) can potentially make an enormous contribution to reducing food insecurity. The preference for finding innovative interventions, rather than grappling with the difficult institutional problems of building capacity for service provision, needs to be guarded against.

Food security information systems

23. The 2001-03 crisis highlighted the need for improved needs assessment systems. A capacity to produce timely and credible estimates of the population in need of immediate assistance has been developed through the VAC system.
24. The need for improved and additional information has been well articulated by different stakeholder groups and is acknowledged by the VACs. This includes; disaggregating the transient and chronically food insecure groups, improving the scope and accuracy of needs assessment, clearer recommendations on diverse responses to address needs and underlying causes, and assessment of the impact of past interventions.
25. Progress on this agenda has been limited by the methodological and resource constraints of the VACs. However, the failure to provide a more diversified analysis may have helped to perpetuate a predominantly food based response.
26. The criteria for clarifying the mandate of the VACs is best determined with reference to the needs and resources of government – as the intended primary client – rather than other users and technicians. These needs have to be assessed and articulated in on-going dialogue with the VAC and other relevant stakeholders. While this dialogue will increase the probability that VACs may be institutionalized and sustained, ultimately the level of accountability amongst national governments for food security is a critical factor in building political commitment and ownership of the VAC system.

ANNEXES

Annex A: Bibliography and Resources

(NB titles shown in [blue italic text](#) are hyper-linked to the web references)

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Annex B Terms of Reference

RIACSO / IASC Review and Lessons Learned on recent responses to acute and chronic vulnerability in Southern Africa

Terms of Reference

Background

Southern Africa has experienced two major food crises during the last 5 years (in 2001/3 and 2005/6). Most assessments have understood these crises to result from an overall decline in livelihoods, rather than being simple food shocks. The rising levels of vulnerability in the region mean that a period of erratic rainfall at critical times during the cropping season can trigger widespread hunger.

Although the number of food insecure people rises dramatically during crises years, it is estimated that around 8 million people are chronically hungry at any time, especially during the lean season, in southern Africa. Understanding of the nature of chronic vulnerability has significantly increased in recent years. There is growing consensus among key stakeholders that we need a different kind of response, which provides a combination of mutually supporting interventions to address both chronic and short-term acute vulnerability. Different responses are relevant for different people in the same community; a single household may need mechanisms that protect livelihoods and build resilience. However this is raising immense challenges for institutions in the region.

A group of RIACSO/IASC members want to carry out a review of lessons learned in the region, since 2001. This review will analyse the evolving responses to vulnerability and make recommendations for progress in policy and practice in tackling this recurring problem.

Objectives

The overall objectives of the lessons learned initiative are:

1. To determine the extent to which the tools and capacities used to respond to the food insecurity needs in the region have evolved since the first crisis took hold
2. To understand how the programmatic response in food security has changed or developed since that time
3. To determine what needs to be done to improve the effectiveness of appropriate responses to address acute and chronic vulnerability, in terms of food insecurity

These objectives are based on the following assumptions held by RIACSO / IASC partners:

- a) we have made progress in developing a deeper and collective understanding of the causes of vulnerability in the region and the way these contribute to the chronic and acute manifestations on peoples lives and livelihoods
- b) we have tried to adjust our programming accordingly and have developed more sophisticated / integrated approaches to addressing needs
- c) these activities are making a difference in addressing both acute and chronic vulnerability
- d) these activities need to be scaled up and integrated within regular development programming modalities and in the context of the new aid environment
- e) policies need to be reviewed and strengthened based on our improved understanding – this includes policies of national governments, donors and implementing agencies.

Tasks

Prepare an overview of the current evidence base, key debates and trends in addressing food insecurity in Southern Africa, with respect to the following:

- ✓ information systems for collection and analysis
- ✓ actual programmatic responses on the ground
- ✓ the funding environment
- ✓ the role of governments in addressing vulnerability and building resilience in the region and support from the international community

Present the findings of the work at a stakeholder meeting to be held in Johannesburg.

Specific Tasks

The review will address the following specific questions, through an overview of the current evidence base, key debates and trends:

1. Information systems for collection and analysis

How have the VACs evolved since the 2001/3 crises, in terms of (agreement on appropriate) methodologies, institutionalization (broadened financial support and government ownership), understanding and measuring chronic vulnerability, links to other data sets (e.g. markets and poverty data), and presenting clear information for decision-makers?

What more needs to be done before the national VAC systems are able to provide information that can be replicated (both annually and between annual assessments) on a cost-effective basis?

Although the VAC-led assessments have been central in providing information for planning and programming humanitarian interventions, some partners have relied on their own assessments of needs. What have been the main assessment initiatives developed by partners? To which extent were they articulated with or conducted to complement VAC-led assessments? To which extent did results from these assessments converge with or diverge from the VAC-led assessments?

2. Actual programmatic responses on the ground

How have responses to acute food insecurity changed since the 2001/3 crises? What evidence is there of 'appropriate responses' to acute food insecurity, linked to vulnerability analysis, rather than resource-driven interventions? What was the impact of these programmes during the 2005/6 crises?

What kinds of programmes have been put in place as a result of improved understanding of chronic vulnerability in the region? What is the evidence of improved impact, compared to more traditional responses?

What are the institutional challenges that agencies face in changing programmatic responses based on an increased understanding of vulnerability in the region? What is the evidence to show that agencies are addressing these challenges effectively?

3. The funding environment

How is the donor environment changing in response to improved understanding of vulnerability in the region? To what extent do donors recognize a need for longer-term funding to support governments to become more accountable for addressing chronic hunger and vulnerability?

What advocacy strategies have stakeholders developed in response to hunger and vulnerability to food insecurity in southern Africa? How effective have they been?

4. The role of governments in addressing vulnerability and building resilience in the region and support from the international community

What evidence is there that improved information around vulnerability has translated into better government policies around addressing chronic and acute food insecurity at national level? In which countries has progress been made? How can we learn from countries which have already made progress in terms of policies to address chronic hunger e.g. Lesotho, Namibia, and South Africa?

What role are national governments playing in debates around the need for better vulnerability assessment and analysis and appropriate responses to hunger? What more should the international community do to support governments to be more accountable around these issues? How has hunger been “mainstreamed” into wider poverty reduction strategies? What evidence is there that hunger issues – the assessment systems (e.g. the VACs) and a broader understanding of the nature of hunger – are better linked to wider policy and resource allocations since the last food crisis? E.g. to PRSP discussions and resource flows?

The study should focus on the following six countries: Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

Outputs

A synthesis report, including a short (2-3 page) executive summary. The target audience for this work is key stakeholders in the region (National governments, UN, donors, NGOs).

Conduct of Work

The lessons learned initiative will be completed using 25 days consultancy time, by 31 October 2006.

Annex C Glossary of Disaster Risk Reduction Terms

Capacity: A combination of all the strengths and resources available within a community, society or organization that can reduce the level of risk, or the effects of a disaster.

Disaster: A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society causing widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses which exceed the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources.

Disaster risk management: The systematic process of using administrative decisions, organization, operational skills and capacities to implement policies, strategies and coping capacities of the society and communities to lessen the impacts of natural hazards and related environmental and technological disasters. This comprises all forms of activities, including structural and non-structural measures to avoid (prevention) or to limit (mitigation and preparedness) adverse effects of hazards.

Disaster risk reduction (disaster reduction): The conceptual framework of elements considered with the possibilities to minimize vulnerabilities and disaster risks throughout a society, to avoid (prevention) or to limit (mitigation and preparedness) the adverse impacts of hazards, within the broad context of sustainable development.

Hazard: A potentially damaging physical event, phenomenon or human activity that may cause the loss of life or injury, property damage, social and economic disruption or environmental degradation.

Mitigation: Structural and non-structural measures undertaken to limit the adverse impact of natural hazards, environmental degradation and technological hazards.

Natural hazards: Natural processes or phenomena occurring in the biosphere that may constitute a damaging event. Natural hazards can be classified by origin namely: geological, hydro-meteorological or biological. Hazardous events can vary in magnitude or intensity, frequency, duration, area of extent, speed of onset, spatial dispersion and temporal spacing.

Preparedness: Activities and measures taken in advance to ensure effective response to the impact of hazards, including the issuance of timely and effective early warnings and the temporary evacuation of people and property from threatened locations.

Prevention: Activities to provide outright avoidance of the adverse impact of hazards and means to minimize related environmental, technological and biological disasters.

Recovery: Decisions and actions taken after a disaster with a view to restoring or improving the pre-disaster living conditions of the stricken community, while encouraging and facilitating necessary adjustments to reduce disaster risk.

Resilience / resilient: The capacity of a system, community or society potentially exposed to hazards to adapt, by resisting or changing in order to reach and maintain an acceptable level of functioning and structure. This is determined by the degree to which

the social system is capable of organizing itself to increase its capacity for learning from past disasters for better future protection and to improve risk reduction measures.

Risk: The probability of harmful consequences, or expected losses (deaths, injuries, property, livelihoods, economic activity disrupted or environment damaged) resulting from interactions between natural or human-induced hazards and vulnerable conditions.

Risk assessment/analysis: A methodology to determine the nature and extent of risk by analysing potential hazards and evaluating existing conditions of vulnerability that could pose a potential threat or harm to people, property, livelihoods and the environment on which they depend.

Sustainable development: Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts: the concept of "needs", in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and the future needs. (Brundtland Commission, 1987).

Technological hazards: Danger originating from technological or industrial accidents, dangerous procedures, infrastructure failures or certain human activities, which may cause the loss of life or injury, property damage, social and economic disruption or environmental degradation.

Vulnerability: The conditions determined by physical, social, economic, and environmental factors or processes, which increase the susceptibility of a community to the impact of hazards.

*Drawn from ISDR "Living with Risk: A global review of disaster reduction initiatives" (2004)
Annex 1: Terminology: Basic terms of disaster risk reduction*