

Country Food Security Options Paper No. 2



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Food security options in Malawi: good neighbours make good friends?

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Table of contents

i

Acronyms	iii
Preface and acknowledgements	iv
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Food security in Southern Africa 2001–03	1
1.2 Food security policy arena	3
1.3 FFSSA Country Food Security Options Papers	5
2. Food security in Malawi	6
2.1 Key nutrition indicators in Malawi	6
2.2 Food availability	8
2.2.1 Domestic agricultural production	8
2.2.2 Commercial imports	9
2.2.3 Food aid	12
2.2.4 Strategic Grain Reserve	12
2.2.5 Prices and stability	12
2.3 Access to Food: Poverty and vulnerability	14
2.4 Food utilisation	16
2.5 HIV/AIDS	19
2.6 Conclusions	20
3. Existing policies for food security in Malawi	22
3.1 Agriculture	22
3.2 Food trade and food aid	23
3.3 Stocks and prices	23
3.4 Poverty	24
3.4.2 Social protection	24
3.5 Food utilisation	25
3.6 Food security and nutrition information	25
3.7 Policy processes	25
4. Looking Ahead: Strengthening food security in Malawi	27
4.1 Agricultural production	28
4.2 Food imports	29
4.3 Management of the Strategic Grain Reserve	30
4.4 Market-based economic development	31
4.5 Employment	32
4.6 Social protection	33
4.7 HIV/AIDS	34
4.8 Health and nutrition	35
4.9 Food and nutrition information	36
4.9.1 Early warning systems	36
4.9.2 Vulnerability assessments	36
4.10 Policy processes	36
5. Conclusions	40

Annex 1: Food security and vulnerability – Key definitions	44
Defining food security	44
A1.1 Types of food insecurity	44
A1.2 Measuring food insecurity	46
A1.3 Vulnerability and food insecurity	47

References 50

Tables

Table 1. Nutritional status of children under five years of age, by percentages	2
Table 2. Prevalence of stunting, underweight and wasting among children under five years of age	7
Table 3. Undernourishment (% of population)	7
Table 4. Estimate of maize imports, Malawi, 2001-03	11
Table 5. Incidence of poverty in Malawi	14
Table 6. Poverty, food poverty, non-food-poverty and ultra poverty lines and spatial price indices at April 1998 prices, by poverty line area	14
Table 7. Sources of income (Percentage of mean per capita daily income)	15
Table 8. Malawi's changing poverty picture	16
Table 9. Childhood mortality rates for five-year periods prior to 2000 MDH Survey	17
Table 10. Prevalence of nutrition-related diseases - Malaria, Acute Respiratory Infections (ARI) and diarrhoea	18

Figures

Figure 1. Policies affecting food security	4
Figure 2. Maize production in metric tonnes 1982/83 – 2001/02	9
Figure 3. Trade in maize, Malawi, 1984 – 2003	9
Figure 4. Comparison of retail maize price in Malawi and four northern provinces of Mozambique	11
Figure 5. Dowa maize price April 1999 to April 2003	13
Figure 6. Proportion of households buying (or trying to buy) maize	15
Figure 7. Front line factors affecting food security in Malawi	21
Figure 8. The RAPID framework: evidence-policy links	37
Figure A1.1. The overlapping concepts of hunger, food insecurity and undernutrition	45
Figure A1.2. Risk of food insecurity, hazards and vulnerability	47

Acronyms

ADMARC	Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation
APIP	Agricultural Productivity and Investment Programme
ARI	Acute Respiratory Infections
ARVs	Anti-Retrovirals
EHP	Essential Healthcare Package
ETIP	Extended Targeted Inputs Programme
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FFC	Farmer Finance Corporation
FFSSA	Forum for Food Security in Southern Africa
FFW	Food for Work
FSNIS	Food Security and Nutrition Information System
GOM	Government of Malawi
IMR	Infant Mortality Rate
MDHS	Malawi Demographic Health Survey
MPRSP	Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
MRFC	Malawi Rural Finance Corporation
NFRA	National Food Reserve Agency
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
OI	Opportunistic Infections
PWP	Public Works Programme
RAPID	Research and Policy in Development, Overseas Development Institute
SACA	Smallholder Agricultural Credit Association
SACCO	Savings and Credit Co-operative Organisation
SGR	Strategic Grain Reserve
SIP	Supplementary Inputs Programme
SP	Starter Pack
TIP	Targeted Inputs Programme
UMR	Under-five Mortality Rate
WFP	World Food Programme

Preface and acknowledgements

This paper discusses the food security situation in Malawi over the last twenty years and potential policy options for strengthening food security in the light of the findings to date of the Forum for Food Security in Southern Africa across the region as a whole. Please send comments to foodsecurity@odi.org.uk

The Forum aims to contribute to analytical and strategic thinking on longer term food security options in Southern Africa following the 2001–03 crisis, by providing a platform for improved linkages between food security analysis, policy making and implementation in the Southern Africa region.

The Forum is a consortium of international and regional institutions committed to achieving food security for all in Southern Africa. To find out more about the work of the Forum for Food Security in Southern Africa, the consortium, or to access full versions of the Forum's Country Issues Papers, Theme Papers, and other information products, visit:

www.odi.org.uk/food-security-forum

This paper and other information produced by the Forum are intended to stimulate informed debate about issues and options for food security policy in the countries of Southern Africa. They do not necessarily represent the views of all Forum consortium members and funders.

We wish to acknowledge our grateful thanks for the contributions made to the work of the Forum for Food Security by colleagues at FANRPAN, and for the contributions to the FFSSA 2003 Malawi country issues paper <http://www.odi.org.uk/Food-Security-Forum/docs/MalawiCIPfinal.pdf> by Osten Chulu and colleagues at APRU and Diana Cammack.

In addition, each Country Food Security Options Paper has benefited from consultations with a wide range of stakeholders in each country and across the region during 2004. In Malawi, we particularly wish to record our thanks for the contributions made during the National Food and Nutrition Security Review and during the civil society consultations organised by CISANET members.

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1. Introduction

In the first half of 2002 it became clear that Southern Africa was at risk of a food and humanitarian crisis. Between February and April 2002 the governments of Lesotho, Malawi, and Zimbabwe declared emergencies, while in Mozambique an emergency plan to combat the effects of drought was begun. Subsequently in July 2002 the UN issued a consolidated appeal for US\$611 million to address the crisis in the six countries most affected: Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

At the height of the crisis, in late 2002 and early 2003, nearly 15 million people, fully 25% of the population of the six countries, were considered food insecure. In response large amounts of additional food were shipped into the region, including food aid provided by donors.

These events prompt three sets of questions, namely:

- What exactly took place during the crisis?
- What were its causes? And,
- What policy lessons are there to be learned to prevent or mitigate similar occurrences in future?

Addressing these questions is the purpose of the Forum for Food Security in Southern Africa (FFSSA). Food security problems in Southern Africa have arisen due to what combination of lack of food, inability to access plentiful food, or food utilisation problems? Why are there such divergent narratives concerning the causes of food insecurity in the region and appropriate policies to strengthen long-term food security? Why has there been a pre-occupation with food production at the expense of other components of food security? Why has the policy process, and the political will and institutions that drive it, not received the attention it deserves?

The Forum has tried to take a broad approach, looking beyond the immediate concerns of emergency relief to embrace longer-run issues, and beyond a narrow focus on food supplies to wider considerations of food security and vulnerability. In particular, the Forum has sought the views of a wide range of stakeholders in each country and across the region, with a particular focus on soliciting the views of civil society.

Annex 1 sets out and discusses various terms and concepts relating to food security and vulnerability used in the publications produced by the Forum.

1.1 Food security in Southern Africa 2001–03

What did happen from 2001 onwards in the region to provoke the crisis seen? The immediate facts are not in doubt. Food supplies faltered owing to harvest failures in some countries in 2001 and in most countries in 2002. Stocks were run down, so food prices soared upwards. The poor would not be able to afford food, and so would go hungry or even starve; they might also fall into destitution – both lives, it was thought, and livelihoods were at risk. Hence the declarations of national emergencies and the organisation of large-scale international relief effort.

In the event, the worst consequences were averted. Deaths were limited, mercifully extremely so. On the face of it, the relief effort succeeded. But did it?

Despite disruptions to the food aid pipeline that eventually meant that no more than three-quarters¹ of the food considered to be necessary was delivered in time, rates of malnutrition did not increase to emergency levels, except in what proved to be isolated locations. People, it seemed, coped better than expected with the crisis. Or perhaps the degree of need was exaggerated. Or a combination of the two.

Two points however are reasonably clear, one well understood amongst the policy community of governments, donors and NGOs in the region; the other less widely appreciated.

First, the crisis was a shock to all concerned: the immediate triggers, the climatic variability in the cropping seasons of 2000–01 and 2001–02, were not that bad and the subsequent harvests were not that poor. In 1991–92 the region had suffered a much harder blow. Yet the current crisis has been more severe than that event. It seems that the population of the region has become more food insecure, probably as a result of a widespread increase in vulnerability to bad weather and economic and social trends. If this is the case, development efforts over the last decade have clearly failed on a considerable and worrying scale.

Second, a look at child nutrition statistics – and it has to be said that the collection and analysis of nutritional data has lagged behind assessments of needs and programming of relief efforts – reveals another dimension to food security in the region. As Table 1 shows, child nutrition is poor in the region, with several countries having rates of stunting similar to that seen in Ethiopia.

Table 1. Nutritional status of children under five years of age, by percentages

Country	Survey date	Stunting	Wasting	Underweight
Lesotho	2002	34.4	n/a	18.0
Malawi	2000	49.0	5.5	25.4
Mozambique	1997	36.0	n/a	26.0
Zambia	2001-02	46.8	5.0	28.2
Zimbabwe	1999	26.5	6.4	13.0
<i>Ethiopia</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>51.2</i>	<i>10.7</i>	<i>47.1</i>

Source: Demographic and Health Surveys, most recent years <http://www.measuredhs.com/>

Notes: Stunting compares height against age; wasting, weight against height; and underweight, weight against age. The percentages record those who had indices more than two standard deviations below the median for the population.

Surveys of the nutrition of adults, however, do not show the same kinds or rates of malnutrition. Indeed, in Southern Africa there appear to be more adults overweight than underweight. There are two interpretations possible of this data: either children suffer from specific conditions of nutrition that are different to those of their elders; or, conditions are deteriorating.² The second possibility does not correspond with historical nutrition data: the

¹ No more than 77% of estimated food aid needs had reached beneficiaries by end of March 2003, and probably and perhaps substantially less (MSU 2004).

² Yes, child nutrition statistics in Southern Africa have worsened of late – but since 1998 or so. For much of the 1990s there was improvement in these statistics, albeit slow improvement. UNICEF Nutrition Fact Sheet June 2004, at: <http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/0/d85614da7e2f75fbc1256ee4004bb76f?OpenDocument>

adults of today were not significantly better nourished when they were five years or younger. That leaves the first proposition.

Could it be that while adults are reasonably well fed, children are not? This is hard to believe: parents, and mothers in particular, take great pains to feed their children. To be sure, there are problems with the energy density of weaning foods, but are they so large? A more likely explanation for the divergence lies in health and sanitation conditions. Young children are much more susceptible to the problems of poor sanitation, contaminated water, and to diseases such as malaria and measles. If this is correct, then there is a continuing, chronic problem – perhaps a crisis – of child health in the region.

One of the major implications of the evidence accumulated by the Forum for Food Security, as we shall explain in more detail later, has been that the 2001–03 crisis in Southern Africa was a manifestation of an expansion in food insecurity, not temporary hunger of the kind traditionally addressed by international humanitarian response. Around 8 million individuals across the countries of Southern Africa are food insecure year in year out (CARE SWARMU, 2003). For many other households, however, food insecurity can occur when they are unable to cope with a particular hazard or combination of hazards. It is this latter group that appeared to be expanding significantly during 2001–03, as a result of localised climatic events in combination with longer-term economic trends and the HIV/AIDS epidemic: in Southern Africa as a whole, by late 2002 doubling the number of food insecure people to approaching 16 million.

Current thinking suggests that the root causes of food insecurity lie in poverty (lack of social capital as well as physical assets) and negative physical, economic and social trends, rather than in unpredictable shocks. Failure to access food, because of lack of income or access to social welfare as well as problems with own-account production, and to utilize it effectively, are major problems over and above harvest shortfalls. The negative influence of vulnerability on households' livelihood decisions is increasingly recognised: persistent vulnerability can produce extreme risk aversity (seen, for example, in high levels of livelihood diversification amongst poor people) and sale of assets. These may allow households to cope over the short term, as they did in Southern Africa in 2001–03, but jeopardise investment by the household for the longer term. These problems occur at the level of individuals and households and persist regardless of the availability of food at national level.

Better policies and stronger and better governed institutions have a major role to play in strengthening access to food. Strengthening food security is likely to be achieved only through a combination of production, market, and consumption-based interventions: a long-term commitment to social protection for those who are unable to feed themselves, and more productive agriculture for subsistence, and more efficiently functioning markets. Not only responding to temporary hunger, which can conflict with effectively addressing high levels of food insecurity over the longer term. Food insecurity – and the fear this induces – can be a major determinant of coping strategies, producing a downward spiral for affected households. The necessary public policy response is to attempt to address the underlying factors contributing to the risk of food insecurity.

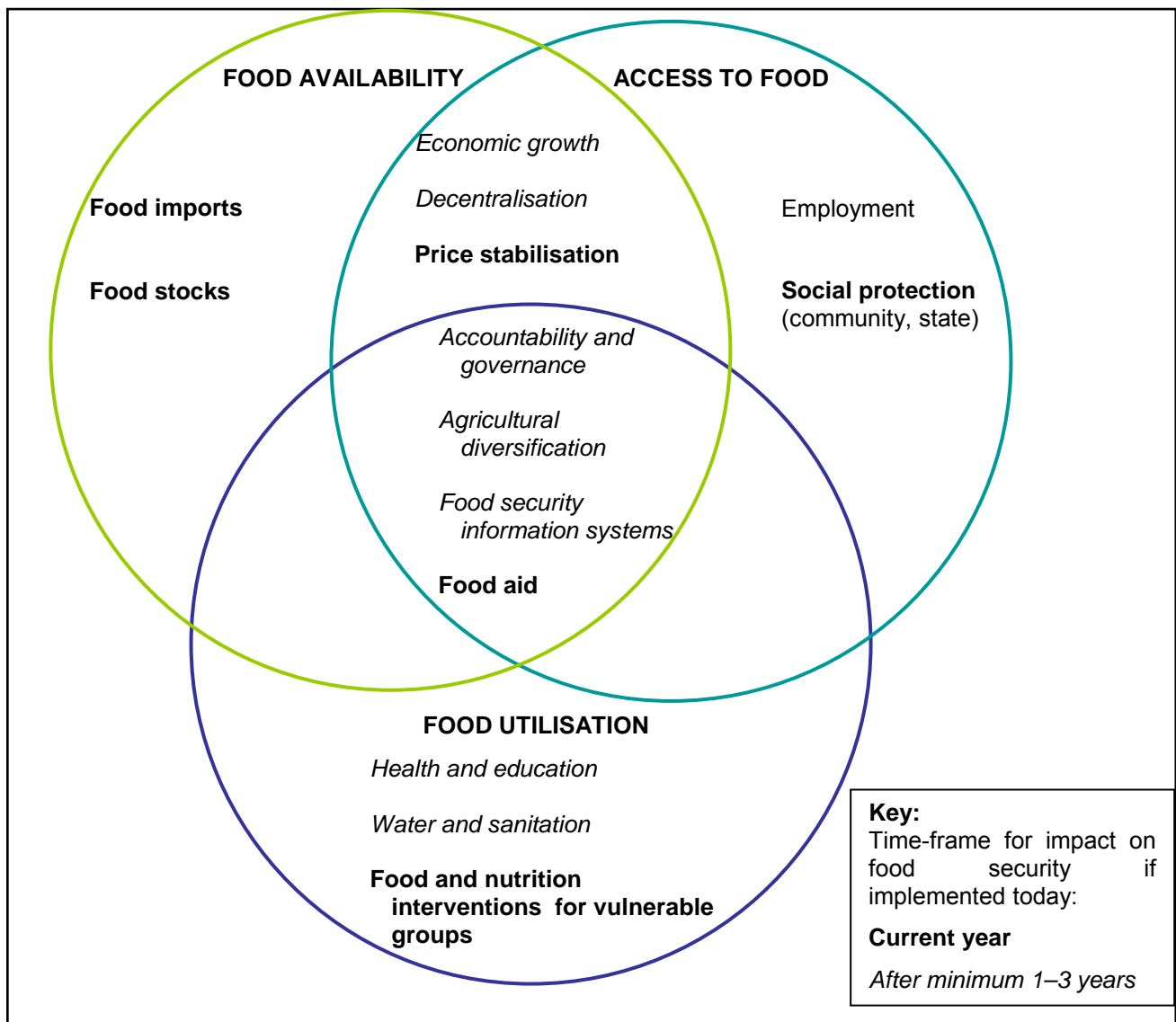
1.2 Food security policy arena

All this implies that strengthening food security in Southern Africa requires action across a broad front. Figure 1 shows how the Forum has conceptualized the policy arena for strengthening food security. A number of points are worth emphasising:

- this scheme promotes equal attention to the three components of food security;
- it shows the importance of longer-term policy options as well as short-term response to food crises, as may apply widely across Southern Africa;
- it shows clearly the wide range of policies that can have a significant impact on components of food security. Many of these policies may have primary objectives unrelated to strengthening food security, and yet impact on a number of components.

A full discussion of this conceptualization is included in the Forum *Synthesis Paper* (FFSSA, 2004a). We have used this conceptualization as the basis for highlighting potential policy options for strengthening food security within selected countries in Southern Africa and across the region as a whole. Appropriate policy objectives and activities will, of course, vary significantly between countries according to underlying causes: our analysis for Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe is presented in these Country Food Security Options Papers.

Figure 1. Policy entry points for strengthening food security



Source: FFSSA (2004a)

1.3 FFSSA Country Food Security Options Papers

The purpose of these Country Food Security Options Papers is to discuss food security in particular countries of Southern Africa over the last twenty years or so; and, based on this, to identify public policy options for strengthening food security in the light of emerging findings across Southern Africa as a whole.

The Papers are *not* intended to be prescriptive. Rather, they are intended to make observations for consideration by policy-makers, drawing on the best of the considerable good practice in the Southern Africa region and internationally, and the views of civil society. The Papers have benefited from contributions from a wide range of stakeholders in each country and across the region during 2004. A number of countries in the region have put in place mechanisms for conducting thorough reviews and overhaul of policies for supporting food security, and a number will be re-examining policy in connection with mid-term PRSP reviews in the immediate future. Both these provide ideal opportunities for standing back and re-assessing what we know about food security and how better food security can be strengthened by effective public policy in the future.

The papers follow a common format. Following this Introduction, Chapter 2 provides a historical perspective on the food security situation within the country, presenting information on food availability, access and utilisation going back two decades where data permit, to put in context the events of and response to the 2001–03 crisis. In particular, we have attempted to identify key factors which appear to affect food availability, access, and utilisation in each country. These vary significantly between countries and thus critically influence appropriate policy response.

Chapters 3 and 4 set out the main components of the policy response to food insecurity over the last twenty years and in response to the 2001-03 crisis and the events that have contributed to the outcomes seen. These Chapters also discuss aspects of how policy affecting food security has been made, because issues to do with political will and implementation capacity are critical determinants of policy response.

The final Chapter 5 concludes with observations on the policy response to date, commenting on fit of response to the identified key factors affecting food security in each country, and on policy implementation issues, including discussion of the similarities and contrasts between the specific case and other countries in the region. Chapter 5 draws on the findings to date of the Forum for Food Security to make observations about potential policy options in each country for strengthening long-term food security.

2. Food security in Malawi

This Chapter collates the available facts and figures about food security status in Malawi and the factors contributing to it.

Malawi declared a National Food Crisis in February 2002. Estimates at this time indicated that around 3.5 million people (30 per cent) of the population of around 11.9 million were affected by the crisis. While the poor seasons in Malawi in 2000-01 and 2001-02 led to production levels that were lower than the previous two good years, overall, they were very close to the 12 year average. Following the 1991-92 food crisis, it had been hoped that new thinking on food security, in the context of structural adjustment and market liberalisation, would generate economic growth, and would make Malawi and the other countries of Southern Africa less vulnerable to food crisis (FFSSA, 2004a). Why then did Malawi experience one of its worst food security crises in recent memory?

Factors that will be explored in this paper include Malawi's focus on ensuring food supplies through domestic production, which exacerbated the impact of mismanagement of the national Strategic Grain Reserve; and the high levels of vulnerability across the population, arising from income poverty and the impact of HIV/AIDS and other diseases. Evidence will be presented which implies that inappropriate policies and weak implementation have been important factors contributing to the high level of food insecurity in Malawi.

2.1 Key nutrition indicators in Malawi

Table 2 shows that the prevalence of stunting amongst children under five in Malawi – indicative of long-term malnutrition - appears to have declined over the last two decades, but still remains at very high levels, particularly amongst rural children. Levels of wasting – indicative of short-term malnutrition – appear to have increased and, for rural children, are now at the +5% internationally recognised “warning” level. Although the reduction in prevalence of stunting is positive (and may be related to reductions in disease arising from improved access to water and sanitation), the increase in wasting, which is closely associated with inadequate consumption of food, is alarming. Taken overall, Malawi's child nutrition indicators give cause for concern.

Table 2. Prevalence of stunting, underweight and wasting among children under five years of age

Year	Source	Stunting (height for age <-2 z score) %	Underweight (weight for age <-2 z score) %	Wasting (weight for height < -2 z score) %
1981	NSSA ³			
	Pre-harvest	56.5	34.6	4.0
	Post-harvest	56.3	27.4	3.5
1994	NSSA ⁴			
	Pre-harvest	57.7	32.4	3.9
	Post-harvest	56.7	28.7	3.7
	Overall	57.3	30.6	3.8
1992	MDHS			
	National	48.7	27.2	5.4
	Urban	35.0	15.4	2.6
	Rural	50.3	28.6	5.8
2000	MDHS			
	National	49.0	25.4	5.5
	Urban	34.2	12.8	4.9
	Rural	51.2	27.3	5.6

Source: NSSA (1991, 1994), DHS (1992, 2000) cited in GOM (2004)

Table 3 shows changes in the incidence of undernourishment in the adult population over time.⁵ Malawi appears to have made considerable progress in reducing the proportion of the adult population that is undernourished. Indeed the 2000 Malawi Demographic Health Survey reports that 18% of the adult population is in fact overweight. Nonetheless, in a recent survey cited in Malawi's 2004 *Situation Analysis for Food Insecurity and Malnutrition in Malawi* (GOM, 2004), only 34% of households reported consuming sufficient calories to meet FAO minimum daily requirements of 2,100 KCals per person.

Table 3. Undernourishment (% of population)

Country	1990–2	1998–2000
Lesotho	27	26
Malawi	49	33
Mozambique	69	55
Zambia	45	50
Zimbabwe	43	38
Low-income average*	35	34

Source: FAO (2003) The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2003. Available at: http://www.fao.org/sofi/sofi/index_en.htm

³ Covers rural population only

⁴ Covers rural population only

⁵ The methods for calculating these figures produce less accurate results than the anthropometric measurements used to estimate the indicators of child nutrition.

2.2 Food availability

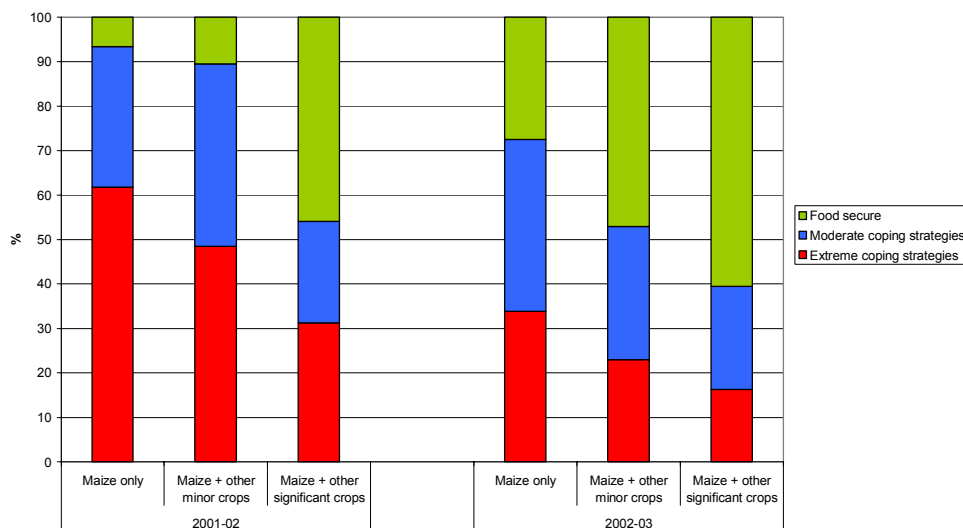
2.2.1 Domestic agricultural production

Agriculture is the mainstay of Malawi's economy, employing approximately 85 per cent of the labour force, generating about 40 per cent of GDP and 90% of export earnings (of which tobacco accounts for about 60%; tea, sugar and coffee for a further approximately 20% (GOM, 2002)). Historically, most cash crops have been produced in the estate sub-sector, although following liberalisation there has been a significant increase in small farm production, particularly of tobacco.

Most small farm agriculture in Malawi is rain-fed. This makes domestic food availability and the economy as a whole highly vulnerable to climatic variation. Since 1990, Malawi has experienced severe food shortages in 1992, 1994, 1997, 2001 and 2002 precipitated by drought or heavy rains (GOM (2004) (see Figure 2). Poor weather conditions coupled with high population growth and low maize productivity are believed to be major contributory factors to deteriorating food security in Malawi (GOM, 2004).

The dependence on maize, using current production techniques, appears to compromise food security in Malawi. Figure 2 shows how those Districts with the greatest dependence on maize had the largest number of food insecure households during the 2001-03 crisis.

Figure 2: Food security by diversity of food crops grown, 2001-02 and 2002-03



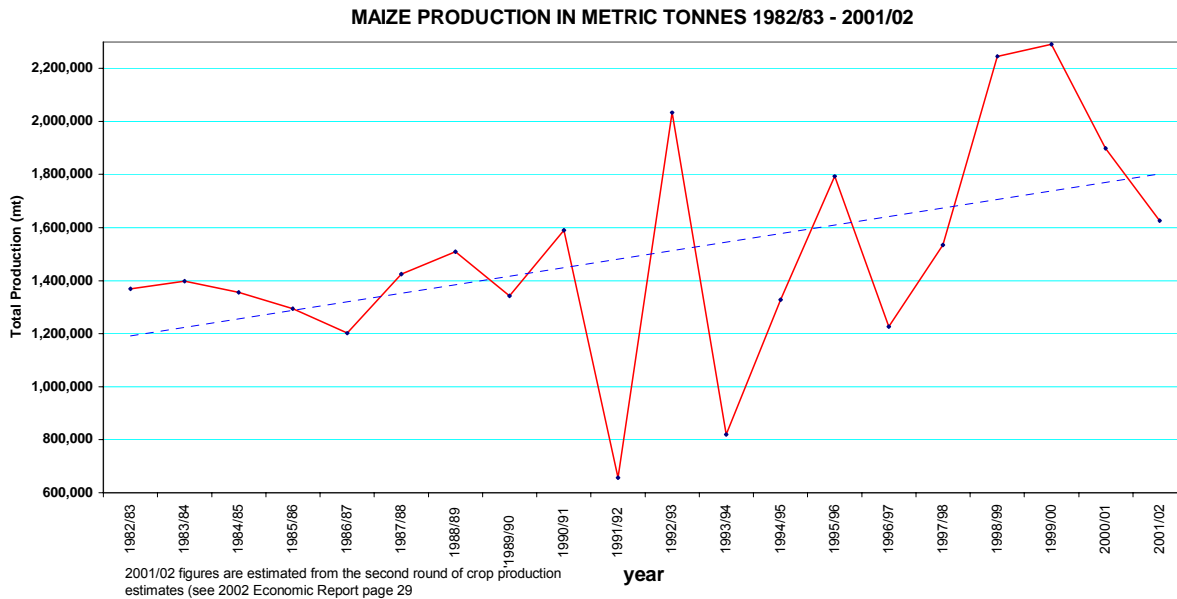
Note: To produce this graph, districts were grouped by diversity of food crops grown.

Source: 2002 and 2003 TIP evaluation surveys reported in Levy, 2003.

Although total maize production has trended upwards over the last two decades, population growth of 2 per cent per annum (1995 to 2002) has led to a decline in per capita maize availability. The end of fertiliser subsidies in the early 1990s, coupled with devaluation, has limited the use of fertiliser: this is a major supply-side factor explaining low maize productivity in Malawi. It has been estimated that maize yields in the small farm sector are currently about one third of potential.

Thus, under normal circumstances, Malawi barely produces the circa 1.75 million tonnes of maize needed to feed itself. The situation improves slightly when other crops such as rice, cassava, sweet potatoes and sorghum are considered, but in overall terms Malawi faces a chronic problem of food availability from domestic sources. As we shall explore in more detail later, this has arisen due to a number of inter-connected supply and demand side issues, including the economics of fertiliser use; the effectiveness of institutions serving food logistics (storage, distribution and marketing); the overall macroeconomic framework; and constrained demand for purchased food arising from poverty.

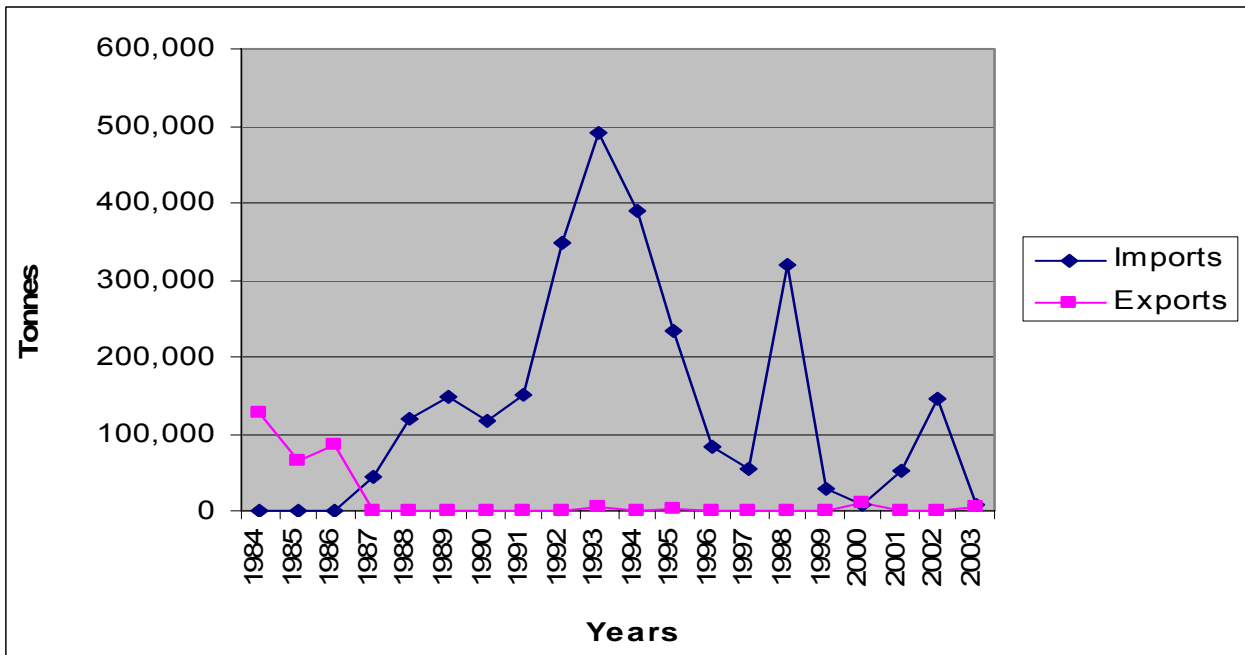
Figure 2



2.2.2 Commercial imports

Figure 3 shows official FAO estimates of Malawi’s maize imports and exports over the last twenty years. As the impact of population growth and removal of fertiliser subsidies began to bite in the mid 1990s, imports of several hundred thousand tonnes have been made in poor seasons to make up the shortfall in domestic production.

Figure 3. Trade in maize, Malawi, 1984 – 2003



Source: FAOSTAT

With official maize imports estimated to cost up to five times as much as domestically produced maize (Levy, 2003), importing food has historically been seen as a high cost approach to ensuring food availability in Malawi.

However, there is some evidence of significant quantities of informal trade, particularly between Northern Mozambique and Southern Malawi, at considerably lower prices. Table 4 gives estimates of different categories of food imports into Malawi in the two most recent marketing years: unrecorded (informal) trade is estimated to have accounted for between one third and one half of total maize imports.

Table 4. Estimate of maize imports, Malawi, 2001-03

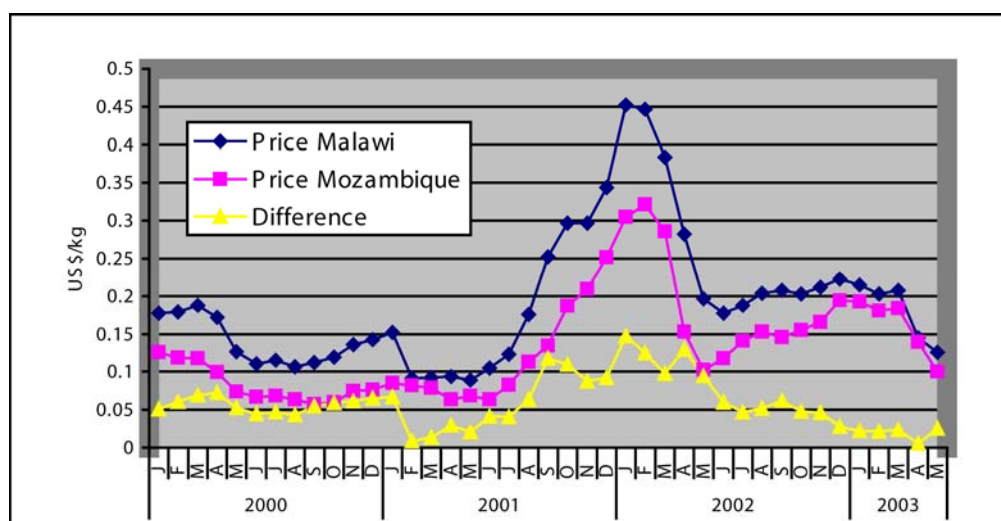
Crop Year	Trade Year	Country maize entered through/Institution	Institutional Imports	Commercial Recorded Trade MT	Unrecorded Trade MT
2000/1	2001/2	Tanzania	25,000		3,000
		Zambia	-		15,000
		Mozambique	137,000		
		WFP	18,000		
		NFRA	62,000		
		Total	80,000	82,000	155,000
2001/2	2002/3	Tanzania	134,000		7,000
		Zambia	9,000		16,000
		Mozambique	305,000		223,000
		WFP	158,000		
		NFRA	272,000		
		Total	430,000	17,000	246,000

Source: Whiteside et al, 2003

As of mid-2004, early indications from the new informal cross border trade monitoring initiative for Southern Africa suggest that, although retail maize prices in Malawi are amongst the lowest in the region, significant trade from Northern Mozambique to Southern Malawi is continuing. For example, between July and September 2004, it accounted for over 70% of total recorded informal food trade in the region, or some 28,000 tonnes (FEWSNET, 2004).

A recent study (Whiteside et al, 2003) documents average maize prices that are lower in Northern Mozambique than in Malawi, aided by the fact that most maize production there is extensive and without fertiliser (see Figure 4). As long as this persists, there would appear to be considerable potential for informal cross-border trade with Northern Mozambique to contribute to food availability in Malawi.

Figure 4. Comparison of retail maize price in Malawi and four northern provinces of Mozambique



Source: Whiteside et al, 2003. Calculated from MADR and FEWSNET figures

More data on price elasticities of supply for informal cross-border trade from Northern Mozambique to Southern Malawi is urgently needed to assess the long term potential for Malawi to rely on maize imported by this route.

2.2.3 Food aid

WFP have operated an on-going programme of school feeding and food for work in Malawi, which was significantly scaled up during the 2001-03 crisis, accounting for over a third of food imports (see Table 4 above).

[to be completed]

2.2.4 Strategic Grain Reserve⁶

In 2001 a large part of Malawi's Strategic Grain Reserve (SGR) was sold off in part to recycle old stock; partly to repay a debt of MK1 million incurred by the National Food Reserve Agency (NFRA); and partly to reduce the SGR from what was perceived to be an 'unsustainable' level of 165,000 tonnes to 60,000 tonnes.

However, this donor advice was based on what turned out to be over-optimistic first-round production forecasts from the Ministry of Agriculture, and enabled some private traders to profiteer for the sale of SGR maize at a time when market prices were high.

As a consequence of these problems, government was unable to implement timely food distribution programmes and donor response was delayed until the food crisis was brought to international attention by civil society organisations. Even then, donor response was affected by continuing concerns about SGR management.

Government attempts to cover the maize shortfall by importing maize were not successful owing to delays in the import programme, increasing prices, and adverse exchange rate movements. Logistical constraints, including the effects of floods on national and regional infrastructure, added to the delays.

The impact of SGR mismanagement on the food crisis in 2002 appears to have been exaggerated by Malawi's policy emphasis on ensuring food availability from domestic production. It is estimated (Whiteside et al, 2003) that informal cross-border trade could have contributed significantly to filling Malawi's maize deficit in 2002. If cross-border imports prove a reliable sources of food (see Section 2.2.2), this could significantly reduce the need for buffer stocks to be held at national level. A recent study by Tschirley et al (2004) concludes that over the region as a whole Strategic Grain Reserves played no constructive role in the 2001-03 crisis response.

2.2.5 Prices and stability

Most poor Malawian households, rural as well as urban, are net purchasers of maize, so the ability to buy supplementary maize becomes a key determinant of food security. But as noted earlier, maize production in Malawi is unstable as most agriculture is rain-fed. Furthermore, SGR mismanagement and inaccuracies in the FSNIS have meant Malawi has not benefited from grain reserve capacity which could help to compensate for production shortfalls. As a result, although average prices are amongst the lowest in the

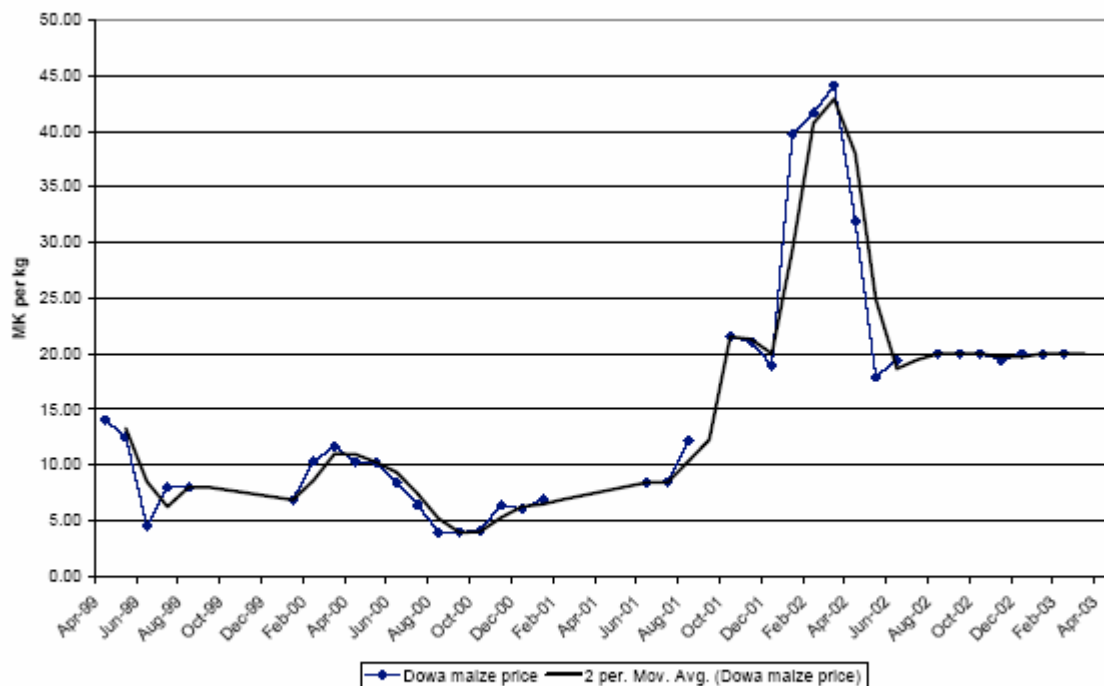
⁶ This description of events surrounding the sale of the SGR draws on Stevens et al, 2002.

Southern Africa region, Malawi often experiences significant maize price fluctuations over seasons and between seasons.

A large part of the food security problems experienced in the 2001/02 season were due to increased demand pressure in the market from small farmers looking to buy food⁷. Survey results indicate that while the proportion of households buying, or attempting to buy, maize was relatively low in the harvest and post-harvest months, it rose sharply as the season progressed towards the next harvest. “By February 2002, 96 per cent of households had run out of maize from their own production and were trying to buy maize in the market” (Levy 2003:6). It can be inferred that the ‘additional’ households that ran out of own food before the 2002 harvest were better off than the rest, and unlike poorer households, would have been unlikely to run out of own production food so soon or at all in a moderate/good year. “As households with relatively strong purchasing power came into the market, this bid up the price of what little food was available, driving the poorer households out of the market” (Levy 2003:6-7), such that while food might have been available, these households were unable to access it.

The worst affected part of Malawi was the central region. In January 2002, the price of maize reached over MK40 per kg in Dowa as compared to MK6-7 in the same month of the previous year, and well above prices in the previous four years (see Figure 5 reproduced from Levy, 2003).

Figure 5. Dowa maize price April 1999 to April 2003



Note: The series is broken in places owing to field staff failing to collect/report the data.
Source: FEWS (using MoAIFS price data).

Where domestic production fails to meet demand and neighbouring countries have produced a surplus, commercial imports can seek to cover the production shortfall. However, price is key: if prices are high, the poorest and most vulnerable will be priced out

⁷ This description of events is taken from Levy, 2003.

of the market and may not therefore benefit from commercial imports (Whiteside et al, 2003) (see Section 2.2.2).

2.3 Access to Food: Poverty and vulnerability

Malawi is amongst the poorest countries in the world. It is also has very high levels of inequality. Consequently, poverty is both widespread and deep, making many Malawians highly vulnerable and often leaving them unable to cope with even a moderate production shock.

The poverty mapping constructed from the 1997-98 Integrated Household Survey (IHS) and the 1998 Housing and Population Census shows nearly 65% of Malawi's population lives in poor households and over one third of the population lives in ultra-poor households (GOM (2004) (see Table 5).

Table 5. Incidence of poverty in Malawi

Area	Poverty Headcount (%)	Ultra-poverty Headcount (%)	Depth of Poverty	Severity of Poverty
Malawi	64.3	36.3	0.282	0.157
Northern Region	61.1	31.9	0.252	0.134
Central Region	63.9	36.5	0.283	0.160
Southern Region	65.4	37.1	0.288	0.161
Rural	65.3	37.0	0.2385	0.1220
Urban	55.8	31.0	0.1913	0.0967

Source: GOM (2004)

Note: Based on local poverty line of MK 11 per person (1997-98 Malawi Integrated Household Survey)

Poverty is higher in rural areas, and in the Southern region, although there is considerable variation in poverty levels within regions with both very poor and relatively more affluent districts found in the same region.

Table 6. Poverty, food poverty, non-food-poverty and ultra poverty lines and spatial price indices at April 1998 prices, by poverty line area

	Poverty line (MK)	Food (MK)	Non-Food (MK)	Ultra (MK)	Food share of the poverty line (%)	Spatial price Index
Southern Rural	7.76	6.53	1.23	4.65	84.1	74.1
Central Rural	9.27	7.76	1.51	5.56	83.7	92.3
Northern Rural	11.16	8.90	2.26	6.69	79.7	112.4
Urban	23.38	16.95	8.90	15.23	66.8	222.1
National Weighted Average poverty line	10.47	-	-	-		100.0

Source: 1997-98 Malawi Integrated Household Survey

Given the high share of food in the poverty line (see Table 6), the 36% of the population (equating to over 4 million people) below the ultra poverty line can be assumed to be chronically food insecure: regularly unable to access sufficient food. Those below the poverty line but above the ultra poverty line (a further 28% of the population, equating to 3.3 million people) are likely to experience transitory food insecurity, i.e. to be unable to access adequate food all year round.

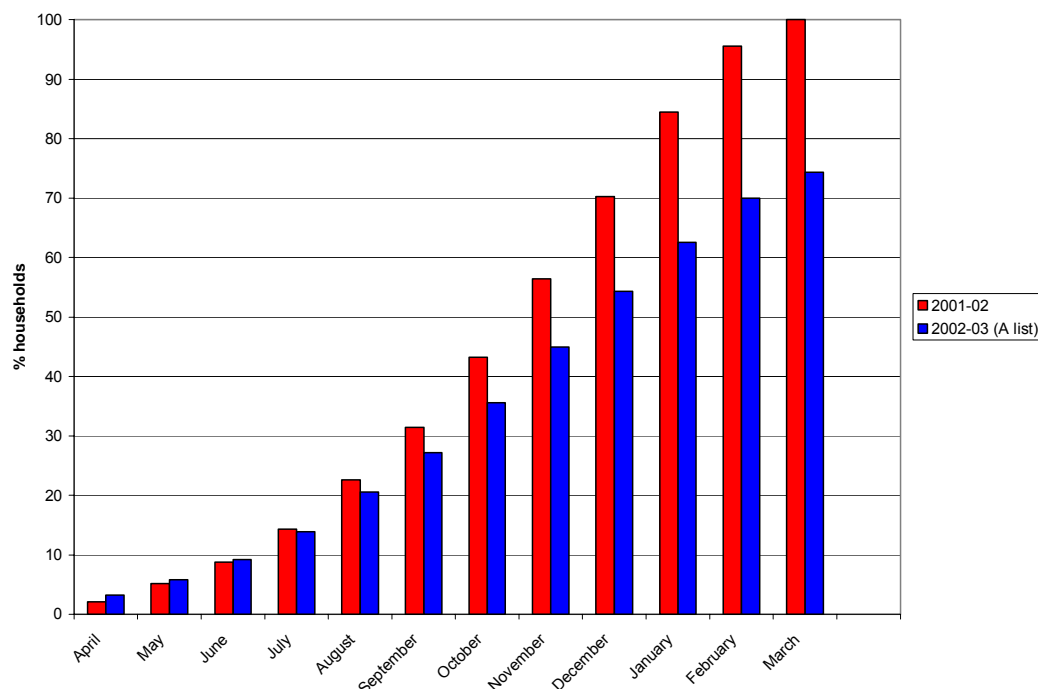
Table 7. Sources of income (Percentage of mean per capita daily income)

	Rural		Urban	
	Poor	Non Poor	Poor	Non Poor
Agricultural sales (net)	9.5	7.6	-0.6	0.7
Non-farm business (net)	1.3	2.6	8.1	23.6
Salary/wages	13.0	17.3	69.2	53.7
Rental income	0.6	0.8	3.6	2.9
Other income	5.2	6.7	3.5	12.8
Incoming Gifts	6.5	6.0	4.6	3.2
Value pf home production consumed	63.7	59.1	11.8	3.1
Mean income (MK)	4.62	13.11	8.56	55.57

Source: GOM (2004)

In rural areas, the value of own production equates to about 60% of daily income (see Table 7). Wages are a more important source of income than agricultural sales, and incoming gifts are also significant.

Population pressure has led to mean holding size in the small farm sector falling from 1.53 ha per household in 1968 to 0.80 ha per household in 2000 (GOM 2001 cited in GOM (2004)). A majority of rural households are now unable to feed themselves from own production for the entire year. The 2002-03 figures given in Figure 6 for the proportion of rural households buying maize and other staple foods during the course of the season give an indication of the pattern, although prices were still higher than normal following the disastrous 2001-02 marketing season. During the 'hungry season' from December to March, many rely on *ganyu* (casual labour) to purchase additional food from the market. However, rural unemployment is very high and rural wage rates very low.

Figure 6. Proportion of households buying (or trying to buy) maize

Source: Levy, 2003

There is confusion on poverty trends in Malawi: international indicators (see Table 8) appear to suggest a modest improvement over time. Local evidence (for example, in Frankenburger, et al, 2003) suggests the depth and extent of poverty is increasing.

Table 8. Malawi's changing poverty picture

Indicators	Early 90s	Late 1990s
GDP/capita (constant US \$)	147	168
Human Development Index	0.36	0.40

Source: HDI data

Poverty in Malawi is being affected by a number of developments:

1. A population that is increasingly less dependent on subsistence agriculture; partly because there has been a shift into cash crops on the part of smallholders
2. Growing landlessness as a result of population pressure and the sub-division of holdings and therefore a greater dependence on off-farm incomes
3. The dismantling of the previous system of state-controlled maize distribution and pricing of agricultural inputs, which has resulted in greater volatility in prices and incomes within and between seasons.

In Malawi the vulnerable are broadly defined as those individuals and households that are HIV/AIDS affected, in households with high dependency ratios, vulnerable to natural disasters, disabled, or very young or old. Generally speaking, women are more vulnerable than men, although there is an important distinction between de facto and de jure female-headed households (Peters, 1988): households headed by absent men (de facto female-headed) are often better off than average, benefiting from remittance income; whilst households headed by women (de jure female-headed) are often worse off than average. Individuals and households belonging to these vulnerable groups often do not have effective economic access to food, being poorer than others, with less access to resources, less educated and thus less able to assert their voice, or having insufficient political capital to demand their rights.

Over the last decade, Malawians have faced numerous hazards, including high inflation, poor growth, and failures in democratic consolidation, as well as climatic variability. Exposure to these hazards has been particularly high in rural Malawi, where many households are highly dependent on rainfed agriculture. At the same time, ability to cope is deteriorating as a result of poverty and the HIV/AIDS epidemic. It is this combination of vulnerability and hazard that has increased the risk of food insecurity amongst all poor people in Malawi, particularly in rural areas. See Annex 1 for more on the relationship between vulnerability and food insecurity.

2.4 Food utilisation

There is a close and two-way relationship between health and food utilisation: poor health has a significant influence on malnutrition, over and above limited food availability and constrained access to food. At the same time, malnutrition affects health status, in particular increasing susceptibility to nutrition-related diseases such as respiratory infections, diarrhoea, and malaria. What do we know about the relationship in Malawi?

There has been a reduction in the prevalence of child stunting in Malawi, but an increase in wasting (see Table 2). Reductions in stunting can be indicative of the impact of improved access to water and sanitation on the incidence of disease, however the incidence of wasting is closely associated with inadequate consumption of food. The increase in wasting in recent years suggests that food insecurity in Malawi, unlike a number of other countries in Southern Africa, remains closely associated with poor food availability and access.

Table 9. Childhood mortality rates for five-year periods prior to 2000 MDH Survey

Indicator	Period		
	1986 – 1990	1991 - 1995	1996 -2000
Infant Mortality Rate (IMR)	135.5	122.7	103.8
Under-five Mortality Rate (UMR)	247.4	219.7	188.6

Source: MDHS cited in GOM (2004)

Certainly **mortality rates** amongst children under five and infants have declined significantly over the last two decades (see Table 9) and are no longer amongst the highest in the Southern Africa region, although they remain considerably above the average for low-income countries (HDI data). This is indicative of an improvement in overall health status, albeit from a very low level.

At 3.6% of GDP, Malawi's **expenditure on health** is relatively high compared to other low income countries, and at 4% of GDP, private health expenditure is notably high (HDI data). However, there remains a lack of qualified medical staff particularly in rural areas, insufficient access to drugs and an acute shortage of clinical and technical support services in health care facilities. The primary health care system, the level at which the poor most often access health services, has suffered disproportionately.

Approximately 90% of the urban population and about 50 % of the rural population have access to safe **water supplies**, although only 40 % have access to safe drinking water within 1 km. About 80 per cent of households have "reasonable" access to a latrine (GOM 2002). Data is not available to compare change over time. In comparison with its neighbours in Southern Africa, Malawi performs well on access to **improved sanitation**, although less well on access to improved water supplies (HDI data).

Taking the declining child mortality rates, relatively high health expenditure,⁸ and credible performance in terms of access to water and sanitation, it could be suggested that Malawi's continuing poor health status has more do with poor nutrition than vice versa.

Indeed Table 10 shows the high incidence in Malawi of nutrition-related diseases, particularly amongst infants during the critical weaning period between 6 months and one year of age, and in rural areas.

⁸ In terms proportionate to Malawi's relatively low GDP.

Table 10. Prevalence of nutrition-related diseases - Malaria, Acute Respiratory Infections (ARI) and diarrhoea

Background Characteristic		ARI (%)	Diarrhoea (%)	Malaria ⁹	
Child Age	<6 months	29.2	13.0	Age	%
	6 –11 months	34.8	35.9	< 1 Year	46.6
	12 –23 months	29.2	31.5	1 – 2 Years	49.0
	24 –35 months	26.4	13.8	3 – 4 Years	29.6
	36 – 47 months	21.6	7.4		
	48 –59 months	21.9	5.9		
Child Sex	Male	25.8	18.4	N/A	
	Female	27.5	16.9		
Residence	Urban	15.7	14.3	31.9	
	Rural	28.3	18.1	43.0	
Region	Northern	24.3	12.8	33.8	
	Central	28.7	19.1	43.6	
	Southern	25.3	17.3	41.6	
Mother's Education	None	24.3	18.0	42.0	
	Primary 1 –4	29.1	19.1	46.1	
	Primary 5 – 8	27.5	16.3	39.1	
	Secondary+	22.6	13.6	31.0	
Total		26.7	17.6	41.6	

Source: GOM, 2004

The high incidence of nutrition-related diseases in children 6 – 11 months old may in part be explained by poor infant weaning practices.¹⁰ According to the 2000 Malawi Demographic Health Survey (DHS), wasting is most common in the 6-23 month age period, indicating that complementary feeding practices during weaning periods are inadequate. While breastfeeding is almost universal in Malawi, exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months is not universal. The introduction of complementary foods before 6 months of age can lead to an increased risk of mother-to-child transmission of the HIV virus¹¹. Moreover, the main complementary food for infants in Malawi is a plain porridge which has low energy and nutrition content to satisfy babies' requirements, and is often offered at a low meal frequency. Practices of weaning young children onto adult diets are also poor. The adult diet is often bulky and follows the same low meal frequency. These weaning practices leave infants and young children vulnerable to malnutrition.

These practices may have their origins in poor food availability and access to food. As we described earlier, average daily calorie intake in Malawi is below the recommended minimum. In general, rural diets are relatively undiversified. In a 2002 survey, nearly 80% of the rural population had taken maize porridge as their main meal for lunch and supper the previous day - and between 5 % and 10% had taken no meal at all (GOM, 2004).

⁹ Fever being proxy for malaria

¹⁰ The following section draws on GOM, 2004.

¹¹ Via lesions in infants' immature gastrointestinal tracts.

2.5 HIV/AIDS

Table 11 illustrates a comparison of the HIV/AIDS prevalence rates in Southern Africa in 2001: Malawi is not amongst the highest yet, which indicates that the worst impacts are still to come. Already, excess deaths due to AIDS during 1980-2000 equate to 16% of total deaths (UNAIDS 2004). “Many stakeholders, including the UN Special Envoy for Southern Africa, assert that the real crisis in the region and Malawi in particular is the impact of HIV/AIDS” (FFSSA, 2003b:20).

Table 11. Prevalence of HIV/AIDS (%)

Country	2001
Lesotho	31.0
Malawi	15.0
Mozambique	13.0
Zambia	21.5
Zimbabwe	33.7
Low-income average	8.4

Source: UNAIDS (2004)

HIV/AIDS is likely to have a devastating impact on food security in Malawi¹² due to its effect on labour dynamics in farming, reducing labour supply both in terms of the loss of the output of the sick individual and also in terms of the opportunity cost of caring responsibilities of other household members. Increasing dependency ratios exert increased pressure on food availability at the household level. In addition, community productivity is adversely affected because individuals and households spend time and money assisting affected households and attending funerals.

HIV/AIDS not only adversely impacts on food availability owing to reduced household labour, but also impacts on other household resources which are spent for example on health care, funeral expenses, and leads to the divestment of assets and increased indebtedness. Reduced resources decrease households' ability to purchase food from the market, this being compounded by reduced ability to exploit *ganyu* and honour reciprocity agreements. In a civil society consultation conducted by CISANET members in collaboration with FFSSA (CISANET 2004), communities indicated that loss of breadwinners had forced some female family members into prostitution in order to obtain food, thus increasing the pandemic.

HIV/AIDS and malnutrition are also inextricably linked: malnutrition and HIV form a vicious cycle where each condition worsens the other¹³. Perhaps no other disease has a more dramatic and obvious effect on nutritional status. Evidence shows that malnutrition both increases the risk of HIV/AIDS transmission from mothers to babies (particularly in individuals with micronutrient deficiencies such as vitamin A), and speeds the progression of HIV to AIDS at a time when individuals have increased nutritional needs. AIDS and the associated opportunistic infections cause marked anorexia, diarrhoea, malabsorption as well as increased nitrogen losses.

Overall, the ability of the already highly vulnerable Malawi population to deal with a shock of this scale and severity is likely to be limited: HIV/AIDS is likely to increase the food insecurity of people living with AIDS, their households' and their communities.

¹² For more on this in Malawi, see for example Thangata et al (2002).

¹³ For more on this, see for example Slater 2004; Harvey 2004.

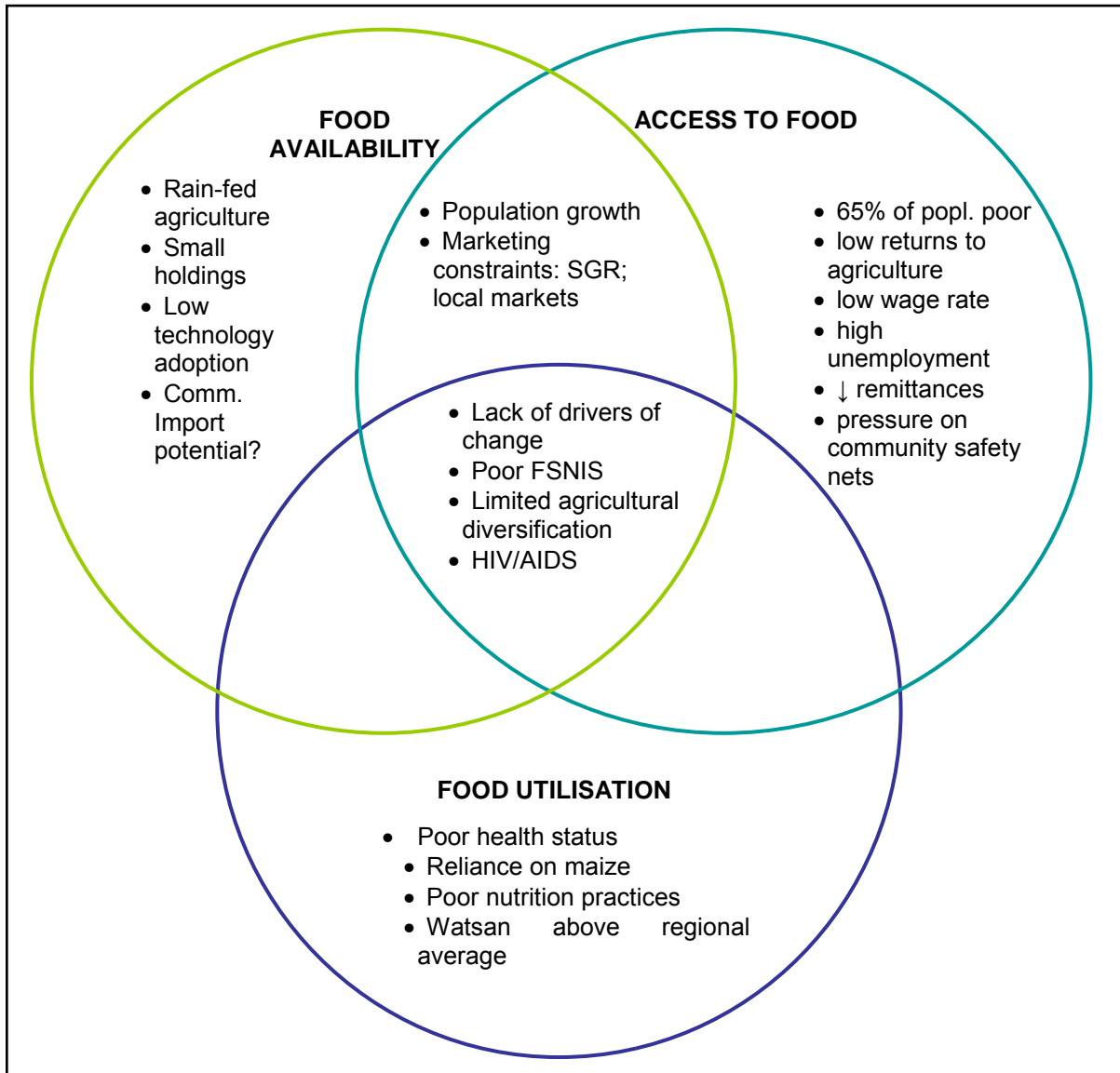
2.6 Conclusions

Malawi has a high incidence of child stunting and wasting, although there has been some improvement in stunting over time, and also in under nourishment. Malawi appears to be unusual in Southern Africa in that its food security problems are directly related to inadequate food availability, as well as access to food and utilisation problems. This arises from Malawi's dependence on rainfed agriculture which results, in the absence of complementary inputs, in highly variable production between seasons and low yields. More data is needed on the potential for informal cross-border trade to contribute to food availability.

Access to food is severely constrained. Own production is limited, so most small farm households as well as others are net purchasers of maize. But incomes are low, due to high unemployment and low wage rates, so fully 65% of the population live below the local poverty line of MK 11 per day, and 36% form a group of ultra poor. Traditional safety nets are under pressure from mounting population pressure, declining incomes, and the increasing impact of HIV/AIDS.

Improvement in child stunting suggests Malawi's good (above regional average) access to water and sanitation is perhaps reducing the influence of disease on child stunting. But the high incidence of wasting and nutrition-related diseases are indicative of continuing problems with food availability and access to food.

Figure 7. Factors affecting food security in Malawi



3. Existing policies for food security in Malawi

This Chapter gives a historical overview of the main policies that affected food security in Malawi over the 1980s and 1990s, as a precursor to discussion in Chapter 4 of recent policy changes and their likely impact on food security. Where possible, we have relied on government sources of information, complemented where necessary by supplementary information from independent sources.

As the FFSSA Malawi Country Issues Paper (Chulu et al, 2003) pointed out, without any single agency responsible for food security, food-related policies have been made by a variety of ministries, departments and institutions. Moreover, there has been little co-ordination between them except in so far as they all relate to the nation's broadest programmatic goals such as poverty alleviation.

The underpinning assumption throughout the 1980s and 1990s has been that food security is best achieved through domestic food self-sufficiency. Until the late 1980s this was supported by input credit and producer price stabilisation over seasons and between Districts, backed up by grain reserves. Intensification of smallholder agriculture, using these same policies, was also seen as the main route to economic growth and poverty alleviation. The economic liberalisation policies pursued from the late 1980s onwards have not been successful in transferring responsibility for agricultural growth and food security to the private sector, as hoped: input prices have increased dramatically; producer prices have fallen, particularly in more remote areas; and a competitive private sector has not developed. In the 1990s, there was increasing attention to provision of safety nets, and reliance on food aid, although on a largely ad hoc basis reflecting the interests of particular stakeholders and in response to immediate crises. Throughout the period, the influence of neo-patrimonialism on policy formulation, implementation and accountability was marked.

3.1 Agriculture

The national system of rural credit, operated from the late 1980s under the Smallholder Agricultural Credit Association (SACA), collapsed in the early 1990s and SACA defaulters were permanently excluded from alternative suppliers of input credit, such as the Malawi Rural Finance Corporation (MRFC). In any case, unlike SACA, which was subsidised, MRFC interest rates are commercial and at 45-50 per cent are too high for the majority of farmers. At the same time, successive devaluations significantly increased the domestic prices of fertiliser, putting it out of reach of most small farm households.

Maize self-sufficiency only became an issue in Malawi once input subsidies were removed: this gave credence to the hypothesis that lack of access to affordable inputs is a major cause of low production and food availability at household level (GOM (2004): 10). Over the last decade, it is only in the production seasons in which Government has intervened through universal free input distribution (1998/99, 1999/2000 and 2002/2003) that the country has been able to produce surplus or near surplus maize. As we shall see later, however, domestic food self-sufficiency may no longer be an imperative goal of agricultural policy in Malawi.

From the 1998/99 season onwards, government and donors responded to the challenge of helping poor households enhance their food security by implementing the Starter Pack

programme (SP).¹⁴ The main objective of the SP was to provide food insecure households with the means to increase productivity of rain-fed crops. The universal SP (1998/99 and 1999/2000) was successful in ensuring two or three months of additional food security for poor smallholder farmers, partly by increasing the availability of maize in markets. In the years when distribution was targeted, its food security impact was reduced (and the targeted programme did not successfully reach the poorest). Furthermore, there are concerns that, whilst free inputs programmes can provide income as well as production gains, these are insufficient to drive longer-term growth without market promotion and organisation development to overcome economic coordination failures (Kydd and Dorward in Levy, forthcoming).

In addition to SP, the government expanded the Agricultural Productivity and Investment Programme (APIP). APIP started as a pilot programme in 1997/98 when over 150,000 credit-worthy small farmers received hybrid seed and fertilizer on loan to plant 0.2 ha, and was implemented through the private sector and NGOs. While APIP did lead to incremental maize production of an estimated 150,000 tonnes, it was later reduced in size apparently due to non-participation of ADMARC and FFC (GOM (2004)).

3.2 Food trade and food aid

[to be completed]

3.3 Stocks and prices

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, government used price policy to stimulate growth in the production of some crops.¹⁵ However, in 1987/88 the Government liberalised agricultural pricing and introduced private sector trading. In the early 1990s, the fertiliser subsidy removal programme was implemented. The Special Crops Act was repealed in 1995, which lifted restrictions on smallholder production of burley tobacco and allowed smallholder farmers access to this lucrative crop. The liberalisation of burley tobacco production is estimated to have generated around US\$185 million revenue for the rural sector, and to have stimulated the growth of trading, transport and other income (although latterly prices have declined and there is increasing competition from Zambia and Mozambique). In 1995/96 the Government introduced a price band within which maize prices were free to fluctuate, although this system was later abolished.

The result of these reforms was not encouraging. Malawi's agricultural liberalisation and privatisation programme, designed to lower marketing costs, reduce consumer food prices, raise producer prices and generally stimulate farm technology adoption and agricultural productivity, was incomplete (Chilembwe 2001). ADMARC still played a role in pricing that discouraged investment by the private sector due to the uncertainty caused. As a result, the expected gains that the food market reforms could provide to farm productivity growth and food security were not realised. Moreover, while still expected to play a role in food marketing and pricing, ADMARC did not have the means to do so adequately, resulting in small opportunistic traders filling the gap left by ADMARC.

¹⁴ For more on Starter Pack, see Levy (forthcoming), and http://www.rdg.ac.uk/ssc/workareas/development/mala_fip.html

¹⁵ This section draws on GOM, 2004.

Furthermore, for a long time, Malawi's SGR has not been handled cost-effectively. While famine was avoided when the SGR was the responsibility of ADMARC, the cost of achieving this was not readily identifiable. Following liberalisation in the 1990s, ADMARC faced increasing cash constraints until a decision was finally made in 1999 to ring-fence its SGR activity as part of a standalone entity, NFRA, a common law trust.

3.4 Poverty

Given that only 15 percent of Malawi's population is urban based and approximately 10 per cent of the labour force is engaged in formal sector wage employment, the economic growth strategy that has been pursued is one of intensification of smallholder agriculture. It is recognised that fundamental constraints will need to be overcome, including the absence of private markets, low levels of education, and historical reliance on hybrid maize and fertiliser.

Since the mid-1990s, Malawi embarked on a series of macroeconomic adjustment and structural reforms supported by the IMF and World Bank, with the objective of promoting private sector growth. The liberalisation of the agricultural market, as described earlier, has formed one of the key programmes in this effort (GOM (2004)). This was intended to foster competition and ensure that smallholder farmers received higher input and producer prices. However, over time, these benefits have been offset by input prices increasing faster than producer prices, in part due to lifting of price controls and the elimination of fertiliser subsidies. The failure to foster competition in both the input and output markets in response to the liberalisation is seen as having compromised the agricultural sector's contribution to pro-poor growth (GOM 2002:15).

3.4.2 Social protection

Significant resources started to be spent on social protection in Malawi from the 1990s onwards, until 1999 mostly through individual donor programmes. For example, in 1999/00, Malawi spent in the region of US\$73 million on social protection (WCD 1999), equivalent to 4% of GDP (WDI data).

Various short-term food distribution programmes were implemented, originally as a response to natural disasters, but increasingly substantial volumes of food aid are being distributed in both drought and non-drought years. In addition, various government, donor, and NGO sponsored public employment and food-for-work programmes were implemented. Government and donors also supported a number of initiatives to distribute free seed and fertiliser, such as the SP.

In 1999, the government approved a comprehensive Safety Net Strategy including components of public works, targeted inputs, child nutrition, and direct welfare transfers to disadvantaged groups. However, in its early years, Malawi suffered from the absence of a clear institutional home for its Safety Net Strategy. Responsibility nominally fell under the National Economic Council, but it did not have sufficient power to set policy, direct the design of interventions and co-ordinate programmes of financing. In this vacuum, donors designed and implemented programmes in isolation resulting in an ad hoc collection of programmes with limited impact.

3.5 Food utilisation

A Food Security and Nutrition Policy was formulated in 1990. As part of the policy, the government identified several functional groups of households based on their socio-economic vulnerabilities so that, within the overall strategy framework, specific plans could be designed to cater to the specific needs of the different groups. However, the overall policy framework failed to capture how Malawi should best deal with food availability, access and utilisation issues holistically, and has been the subject of review recently.

3.6 Food security and nutrition information

The magnitude of the food gap in 2000-01 was underestimated by government and donors because of exaggerated forecasts of roots and tubers production and inadequacies in Malawi's Food Security and Nutrition Information System (FSNIS).¹⁶ The misguided belief that Malawi had a 'maize deficit' but not an overall 'food deficit', persisted until early 2002, and probably slowed the public response (Stevens et al 2002).

3.7 Policy processes

Malawi conforms to the classic description of a neopatrimonial state: a 'hybrid regime' where modern bureaucracies coexist beside 'political authority [that]... is based on the giving and granting of favours that go from the village level to the highest reaches of the central state' (van de Walle, 2001). For more on this, see the Forum for Food Security Theme Paper on politics and the policy process (Bird et al, 2003). In addition to this, neopatrimonialism has resulted in a significant lack of voice amongst those that do not belong to certain clientelist networks.

Clientelism is at the core of relationships in a neo-patrimonial state. The formal bureaucratic system is 'subverted' and office holders 'almost systematically appropriate public resources for their own uses'. The system is 'residential' in that power is centralised around a single individual, with ultimate control over most clientelist networks. This person 'personally exerts discretionary power over a big share of the state's resources'. In Malawi, it is often observed that the weakness of organised civil society facilitates the creation and maintenance of this system of rule, and the government's lack of accountability to the public has been one of its prime characteristics (Cammack 2004).

There are three notable ways in which the political logic of neo-patrimonialism may have contributed to food insecurity in Malawi over the last two decades:

1. Food security policies are formulated and implemented with a view to maintaining patronage networks for guaranteeing political support, rather than to improve food security – usually entailing *inefficiency in the use of scarce resources*

¹⁶ Methodological errors resulted in the maize crop being estimated at levels which should have compensated for the maize gap. Furthermore, some government and donor officials blamed Malawian's 'inflexible food habits' (white maize preference) for their 'failure' to switch to other food alternatives.

2. State resources that could be targeted for food security are diverted towards other areas in which there exist stronger political and personal interests – that is, important *opportunity costs* are implied by the logic of neo-patrimonialism
3. Government is accountable primarily for its performance as dispenser of patronage, and not for the effectiveness of policies – so that, even when food security is a clearly recognised policy objective, *political responsiveness to indications of food insecurity is weak* (Bird et al 2003:12).

These factors combine to influence the policy formulation, policy implementation and accountability for results of the policy process.

While there has been progress in developing institutions to consolidate democracy, strengthen governance and accountability and keep in check any violations of the constitution since the 1994 multi-party elections, the adoption and implementation of policies and legislation aimed at achieving the goal of public trust and good governance is hampered by inadequate capacity in the public sector to implement measures which will guarantee accountability, transparency, personal integrity and financial probity (GOM, 2004). Some observers (Cammack, n.d; Lwanda, n.d.) suggest that these constraints to effective policy formulation and implementation are manifestations of the patrimonial process, which resists a more complete transition from subsistence to formal economy in Malawi in order to maintain clients' dependence on patrons' cash resources.

4. Looking Ahead: Strengthening food security in Malawi

This Chapter summarises the major recent policy responses to strengthen food security in Malawi and comments on their likely impact, based on the findings of the Forum for Food Security. Policy responses are summarised from government sources. Our commentary uses the Forum Theme Papers (available at <http://www.odi.org.uk/food-security-forum/Publications.html>) and in-country seminars (proceedings available at http://www.odi.org.uk/food-security-forum/Key_Events.html).

Based on what we know about the situation in Malawi, it would appear that policy options for strengthening food security over the longer-term that are worthy of serious consideration include:

- **Food availability:** policies to facilitate cross-border trade in food, including informal trade from Northern Mozambique to Malawi;
- **Access to food:** policies to increase purchasing power, including policies to promote greater economic coordination in rural areas to enable increased rural employment and wages; and policies to provide safety nets for the non-able-bodied rural and urban poor, and those in remote, marginal areas;
- **Food utilisation:** continued policy emphasis on improved weaning practices, whilst recognising that poor infant weaning may be related to inadequate access to food; and an increased emphasis on limiting the spread of HIV/AIDS and mitigating its impacts.

Development policy in Malawi is shaped by the four pillars of the MPRSP (GOM 2002:xi). The first pillar promotes rapid sustainable pro-poor economic growth and structural transformation; the second, enhances human capital development; the third, improves the quality of life of the most vulnerable; and the fourth, promotes good governance. The MPRSP also mainstreams key cross cutting issues such as HIV/AIDS, gender, environment, and science and technology. Although the MPRSP recognises the crucial link between food production and nutrition, it does not incorporate food security as an explicit goal.

Subsequently, in response to the 2001-03 crisis, government instituted six multi-stakeholder sub-committees in 2003 to identify short and medium term solutions for food security. As part of this effort, the Ministry of Agriculture was charged with the responsibility of developing a food and nutrition security policy, with a view to providing a framework for all participating stakeholders, which were mainly civil society organisations, government Ministries, the private sector and donors.

Thus, the recent food crisis has had the beneficial effect of generating a multi-sectoral approach to dealing with food security, as it has brought together health practitioners and agriculturalists to go beyond the food availability aspects of food insecurity to consider issues of access to food and food utilisation.

The new food security policy currently under preparation recognises the need for increasing access to food through increasing income and employment opportunities, particularly in rural areas, by facilitating trade and investment; and through providing adequate social protection for those in need. However, it does not question the underpinning assumption that economic growth, poverty alleviation and food security in Malawi will remain dependent on smallholder agricultural production. As regards implementation, whilst the policy formulation process has been characterised by multi-

stakeholder involvement and consultation, it is not clear that Malawi's long-standing policy implementation problems will be directly addressed.

4.1 Agricultural production

Historically, domestic maize production has been emphasised for food availability in the belief that this is significantly cheaper than imported maize. With the ending of the civil war in Mozambique and the substantial increase in maize production in Northern Mozambique, there is evidence that this is no longer the case (see Section 2.2.2). In this situation, the role of domestic agriculture in contributing to food security is as much to provide employment and incomes to increase purchasing power, so policy priorities for the agricultural sector must change accordingly.

Malawi suffers from both supply side and demand side constraints to increasing agricultural production. We consider supply side issues here, and demand side issues in Section 4.4.

The key to agricultural production in Malawi is economic access to **fertiliser**. Attempts to resolve Malawi's underlying problem of soil fertility have included promoting animal manure and compost, as a substitute and complement to fertiliser. These efforts have been frustrated by the fact that livestock holdings are generally low, limiting the availability of animal manure; by the high labour demands of these technologies; and by the low level of nutrients produced in comparison with soil fertility needs. Whilst suitable in certain circumstances, improved access to chemical fertiliser is also needed in the Malawi context.

Historically, this was assured by relatively widespread access to seasonal credit. However, this collapsed in the early 1990s. In the light of the current lack of access to affordable inputs, it is perceived that the sensible strategies to follow are:

- Providing all smallholders with small packs of improved seed and fertiliser, as is currently done under the SP/TIP programme.
- Ensuring that commercial supplies of improved seed and fertiliser are readily available for purchase in all rural markets in small bags
- Providing opportunities for able-bodied individuals to increase their purchasing power for seed and fertiliser through a structured fertiliser (and seed) for work programme implemented during the dry season (GOM (2004):73).

Limited commercial imports of fertiliser, and trader uncertainty of the longevity and scale of the SP initiative, have contributed to fertiliser shortages, high prices and low uptake. Questions of access also arise for remote rural communities where poor infrastructure and high transport costs are a significant disincentive for private sector suppliers.

SP/TIP had some success in contributing to food security in the years it was universal, but has been dogged by delays in procurement, poor quality inputs, and inadequate extension support (see below for more on extension). These factors, together with the fact it is an annual programme and has been expected to meet social protection as well as agricultural productivity objectives, have limited its lasting impact on fertiliser uptake.

In an attempt to expand and strengthen access to agricultural inputs, Pillar 1 of the MPRSP proposes that access to farm credit is increased, with more emphasis being laid

on reaching the productive poor who have historically been considered non-creditworthy. It is proposed that farmer groups and associations formed throughout the country will be organised into village-level Savings and Credit Co-operative Organisations (SACCOs). The SACCOs will also be used as collateral for accessing credit from commercial banks and other financial institutions. Limited financial support will be provided by Government for the capitalisation of these village-based credit schemes (GOM 2002).

Agricultural extension services in Malawi have suffered from lack of resources, confused messages and top-down approaches: there are a lot of technologies in research centres that await communication to end-users, while those that have been communicated have not been adopted or fully utilised. The effectiveness of the Starter Pack programme was reduced by confused messages and inadequate extension support. As a result, a new extension policy has been formulated to make extension delivery more effective and responsive to farmers' needs, and also correcting the high farmer to extension worker ratio owing to high attrition rates (GOM 2002:23). Its impact remains to be seen, but will be influenced by the more general problems of weak capacity and poor implementation that have affected government services in Malawi.

The impact of these sector specific policies on agricultural growth is likely to be limited unless more fundamental problems of economic coordination in rural Malawi are also addressed (see Section 4.4).

4.2 Food imports

Malawi continues to under-produce maize in relation to its population. Could food security be more easily achieved through imports and food aid?

While the 2002 harvest was slightly worse than the 2001 harvest, the government and donors managed to cut in half the number of people affected by extreme food security. In the 2002/03 season, the World Food Programme (WFP) led a massive food aid distribution exercise whereby the government imported maize commercially and agreed with the IMF on a consumer price subsidy which allowed it to fix the price of maize at around MK17 per kg. "The food aid effort helped reduce demand pressure in the maize market, while maize imports added to supplies" (Levy 2003:8). As a result, food prices remained moderate throughout the 'hungry period' in 2002-03 (Levy 2003).

While official imports and food aid helped to reduce food insecurity in 2002-03, they were expensive; widely publicised estimates (Levy, 2003) suggest the cost of imported maize in 2002-03 was \$220 per tonne and food aid \$450 per tonne, compared to less than US \$ 50 per tonne for producing maize with SP/ETIP. In considering the sustainability of food aid or official imports, it is important to note that most rural households do not have the purchasing power to buy maize imported at such high cost unless the government continues to provide price subsidies, which in turn exerts considerable pressure on public finances (Levy 2003).

In addition, concerns have been raised that food aid has negative impacts on potential informal cross border imports: food aid and official imports were seen as major disincentives to informal imports in 2002-03. This is important because there is growing evidence that informal imports may be cheaper and readily available. But cross-border food trade into Malawi is faced by a number of challenges, at least some of which could be

addressed by greater policy consistency and specific government support (Whiteside et al, 2003):

- Sudden import/export bans which can act to reduce volumes, as is perceived to have happened in 2002-03
- Changes to import/export procedures for example the relaxing or tightening of licences and documentation such as phyto-sanitary certificates (which can be a politically motivated decision)
- Potential competition from other regional markets (for example DRC for Western Tanzania and Northern Zambia in 2002, and Northern Tanzania and Kenya for Southern Tanzania in 2003)
- Changes to infrastructure such as improvements to road and rail links which could dramatically affect import costs, volumes and source areas
- Changes to trader capacity which can vary from year to year according to the availability of credit, fuel and competition for transport.

4.3 Management of the Strategic Grain Reserve

Very little changed initially after the establishment of the National Food Reserve Authority in 1999: ADMARC continued to manage the SGR. The Government guaranteed seasonal credit facilities to NFRA to fund the purchase of the greater part of the large maize crop of 1999. The purchased crop remained in country, however, and overhung the market during 2000, a year in which a good crop was also produced. The SGR stocks that could have been exported profitably in 1999 evaporated quickly in 2001, when production levels were lower due to scaling back of the SP scheme and adverse climactic conditions. The stock was sold at the depressed price levels of the 1999 season despite having incurred substantial holding costs and the fact that the market could have paid a higher price. The result of this was that both the NFRA and ADMARC could not honour some of their financial commitments, and the government had to pay off the greater part of the combined bank borrowings from tax revenue. This situation continued into 2002 and resulted in a very tight food supply situation; ADMARC unable to pay NFRA for the maize it drew from it; and further burdens on the tax payer. The prices at which NFRA trades with ADMARC are severely distorted and result in unintended and aggravated fluctuations in crop quantity, with the consumer being favoured over the grower in most years.

The appropriate functions of the SGR must be negotiated and agreed between the Government of Malawi and its donor partners as a priority, given the highly negative impact of SGR mismanagement on food security during 2002-03. Three key questions remain unresolved:

1. What is the appropriate level of the SGR to meet national food security objectives at reasonable cost? Opinions vary between 60,000MT and 180,000MT, or enough grain to meet 3-9 months of national consumption needs.
2. Should the SGR intervene in the market – e.g. to stabilise prices ‘counter-seasonally, by buying grain at harvest and selling this grain during the ‘hungry season’ at cost – or should it function purely as an emergency buffer stock?
3. If the SGR is to fulfil food security functions, it must be adequately capitalised. But should its operations be subsidised or should it operate as a cost-recovery agency? However these issues are resolved, there is little disagreement that the SGR must be managed in a transparent manner and be subjected to regular independent audit

(Devereux 2002:2-3).

In addition to resolving these questions, SGR management must be improved to ensure surplus stocks are exported promptly in order to reduce the costs of carrying large stocks. And serious consideration should be given to removing controls over the commercial import and export of white maize, in order to make it easier for Malawi to supplement domestically produced food with imports when necessary. Given the emerging evidence of the availability of substantial cheap supplies of food across Malawi's border in Northern Mozambique, it could be argued that increased policy attention to facilitating this trade could altogether remove the need for a Strategic Grain Reserve that carries more than emergency stocks.

4.4 Market-based economic development

The performance of the agricultural sector is a critical component of overall economic growth, however it has been unsatisfactory in Malawi over the last two decades, with low rates of growth, weak intra and inter-sectoral linkages and deepening of rural poverty.

The first pillar of the MPRSP emphasises the promotion of sustainable pro-poor growth. To meet this objective, the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development co-ordinated the development of the Malawi Economic Growth Strategy. The growth strategy recognises the leading role of the private sector in investment in high economic potential sub-sectors, which are considered to be mining; agro-processing (cassava, maize, rice, macadamia); and cotton and the textile/garment industry (GOM (2004):98). Many stakeholders argue that current policies for economic development are insufficient to achieve the required and sustainable level of 6 per cent annual economic growth to halve poverty by 2015.

Lack of effective demand is a major constraint to getting the agricultural sector moving. Furthermore, given Malawi's predominately rural economy, low per capita incomes translate into demand being fragmented, raising transaction costs.

Rural poverty in Malawi manifests itself in an underdeveloped and undiversified economy. The economy, and people's livelihoods within the economy, are principally dependent now on own account agricultural production and wage labour. Both these suffer from climatic variability.

One response by rural people to pressure of declining opportunities from agriculture (both production and wages) and migrant labour, has been to try and diversify out of agriculture into other activities. In other African countries, rural non-farm activities contribute over 40% of rural households' income, which helps to improve their purchasing power and food security. A major difficulty has been the lack of suitable opportunities which have low capital and skill demands, and low risk. While petty trading would qualify, especially as it has low barriers to entry, it also offers low returns.

For agriculture to fulfil its role as the engine for economic growth and poverty reduction, a radical structural transformation is needed. The FFSSA Theme Paper on market-based development (Poulton and Dorward, 2003) concludes that sound and stable macro-economic conditions are a basic pre-requisite for getting out of the low level equilibrium trap that characterises many of the economies in Southern Africa (including Malawi), in order to generate market opportunities, access to resources to investment, reasonable

returns on investment and acceptable risks. Achieving these macro-economic conditions requires suitable policy interventions to assure:

- Low and stable interest rates, low inflation, and stable and realistic exchange rates;
- A good business environment, including infrastructure;
- Clear and enforceable property rights and contracts which requires overcoming entrenched political and private interests.

Sector specific policy options are also required and include the need for:

- Lower cost, lower external input and less risky, but more productive, food crop technologies for agricultural intensification (for example greater use of organic fertiliser produced on farm, cheaper inorganic fertiliser and promotion of irrigation);
- Appropriate agricultural technologies to widen the range of crops cultivated, in order to reduce production risks, improve nutrition and act as complementary drivers and supporters of economic growth;
- Appropriate technologies, for example labour saving technologies, to ameliorate the debilitating effects on HIV/AIDS on smallholder crop production.

Whilst free input distribution, such as has operated under Starter Pack/TIP, can provide income as well as production gains, recent analysis concludes these are insufficient to drive longer-term rural growth without the kind of market promotion and organisation development described above to overcome economic coordination failures (Kydd and Dorward in Levy, forthcoming).

Land Reform

A number of studies in Malawi indicate that upwards of 2.5 million hectares of land under the estate sector remains uncultivated, meaning that approximately 28 per cent of the country's total land area is lying idle while many smallholder farmers cultivate miniscule pieces of land. In relation to customary land cultivated by small farmers, Malawi does not have a comprehensive land ownership policy. Instead, Government has attempted to address the land problem through a series of consultative fora geared toward the eventual formulation of a land policy. As the FFSSA Malawi Country Issues Paper notes, customary land, which is predominantly occupied by smallholders, has been perceived by many as being a hindrance to growth. While moves towards transforming customary land into leasehold land have been attempted in the past, these have been on a small scale (Chulu et al, 2003).

The new Land Policy in Malawi is a response to this. Under this policy the "underlying causes of under-utilisation and the consequences of tenure insecurity will be addressed by strategies that provide access and security of tenure to citizens with the ability and resources to make productive and environmentally suitable investment in land" (GOM (2004):72-73). It is not clear how quickly this will be implemented.

4.5 Employment

The CISANET/FFSSA civil society consultation (CISANET, 2004) identified lack of employment opportunities and low wage rates has several negative impacts on rural communities. According to the rural men and women who participated, these include a

reduction in holding sizes, as people try to accommodate relatives; theft, especially impacting on the livestock sector; and increased corruption, resulting in employment opportunities being biased in favour of relatively wealthy village members.

Government recognises the importance of employment creation for poverty alleviation, but policies appear to focus mainly around disseminating information on employment and labour markets.

Following the analysis presented in Poulton and Dorward (2003), the mining, micro and small enterprise and tourism sectors may have potential for employment generation and increasing incomes, although it is not clear that this potential has been investigated. This implies a significant restructuring of the economy, away from its current dependence on agricultural production (notwithstanding the potential for agriculture-related enterprises). However, these sectors are constrained by a number of barriers. For example, most tourism developments have been foreign led with limited participation of local communities. These sectors are also hampered by poor product development, lack of clear standards and guidelines, lack of innovation in marketing, and inadequate supporting finance (GOM 2002). The kind of policies outlined in Section 4.4 for addressing economic coordination failures are relevant.

In addition, recent research discussing lessons from East Asia for African industrial competitiveness (Lall, 2004) suggests that there are two major requirements for long run industrial competitiveness: the ability to master new technologies; and to attract foreign direct investment, particularly in export-oriented activity. Lall suggests these in turn depend on a focussed effort to build up a range of technological, managerial and institutional capabilities, often initially by tapping into foreign sources of knowledge, technology and skills. So far, Africa has not adopted these strategies successfully, and with Malawi's adult literacy rates amongst the lowest in Southern Africa (only formerly war-torn Mozambique has lower rates), it is difficult to see how such strategies can be applied in the foreseeable future to Malawi's chosen priority sectors of mining, agro-processing, tourism and textiles.

4.6 Social protection

Malawi's 1999 Safety Net Strategy contained four pillars:

- Support to agriculture for subsistence farmers through free inputs programmes
- Support to feeding programmes for around 150,000 malnourished children
- Public works initiatives (food for work) for around 250,000 people per year, and
- Pilot schemes for direct welfare transfers

In the short to medium term, increasing poverty and lack of growth indicate that social protection will play an important role in strengthening food security in Malawi. However, there are a number of issues to be resolved.

First, overloading objectives. For example, SP/TIP has been promoted at different times and sometimes simultaneously as contributing to national food security; household food security; agricultural technology diffusion and adoption; and safety nets. Evaluation evidence has subsequently shown that SP/TIP does not and cannot contribute equally to meeting all these objectives, and in fact contributes to some in unanticipated ways (eg to household food security through price smoothing effects of increasing national maize availability). It is worth noting that international thinking is moving increasingly towards

focussing social protection programmes specifically on delivering instruments to support risk coping by the poorest and most vulnerable households, passing the cost and responsibility for delivery of instruments to support risk mitigation and risk reduction to a much wider range of sector Ministries (for more on international experience of social protection for vulnerable households, and specifically in relation to food security, see Farrington et al, 2004; Slater 2004; Cromwell and Slater, 2004).

Secondly, targeting. Altogether, the Safety Net Strategy was expected to cost around US \$ 25 – 30 million per year and reach about 2- 3 million people (25% of the population) as direct or indirect beneficiaries. This compares with 65% of the population below the poverty line, of which 36% are ultra poor, and immediately raises difficult questions about how to target non self-selecting programmes in situations of widespread poverty. Evidence from the SP/TIP evaluation programme (Levy and Barahona, 2002) shows it is almost impossible to target the ultra poor in Malawi: even where they can be identified, complicated patterns of social networking mean that they do not necessarily retain the resources they have been given. Targetting difficulties are a common problem: similar experience has been documented in countries ranging from Zambia (Scott and Mufwambi 2004) to Indonesia (the Operasi Pasar Khusus programme). The most appropriate interventions on balance may be those that benefit the whole community, thereby reducing exclusion errors, and build upon, rather than undermine, traditional community mechanisms (Cromwell and Slater, 2004).

Third, instruments for labour-constrained households. Not enough is understood about access to labour in labour-constrained households (eg through hiring, or social networks) in Malawi, but it is reasonable to hypothesise that labour-intensive technology such as improved seed and fertiliser through SP/TIP and inputs for work, may not be the most relevant form of social protection for non-able-bodied vulnerable people.

Direct welfare transfers could be a more effective alternative for this group. International evidence increasingly indicates the risks of direct welfare transfers may have been exaggerated as compared to their considerable advantages (see, for example, Harvey 2005, Hanlon 2004) A number of other countries in the region, such as South Africa, Namibia and Lesotho, and in Latin America already have considerable positive experience of direct welfare transfers. It would be useful to explore their relevance to Malawi.

4.7 HIV/AIDS

In an attempt to mitigate the effects of HIV/AIDS, government has designed a Comprehensive National Strategic Framework, co-ordinated by the National AIDS Commission and supported by co-operating partners. The national HIV/AIDS policy recognises that people living with HIV/AIDS are amongst the most vulnerable, particularly because they are often unable to work to generate income. Individuals in this category are to be identified for ongoing assistance with food security and other relief, for example education costs. The strategic framework has three main objectives:

1. To reduce the incidence of HIV/AIDS. The first strategy is to prevent infection among youths: it incorporates HIV/AIDS education in all school curricula. As part of these efforts, it is intended to increase adolescent reproductive health services and emphasise promotion and distribution of the female condom. The second strategy is to improve the implementation of HIV prevention activities for the general public including commercial sex workers.

2. To improve the quality of life of those infected. It is intended that efforts will be made to improve the management of HIV related conditions, including putting in place guidelines for treating opportunistic infections. It is also essential that Government put in place clear guidelines and policies for Anti-Retrovirals and negotiate reduced prices for them.
3. To mitigate economic and social impacts. By providing support to those who are affected indirectly by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, including measures such as supporting legislation on inheritance, introducing less labour intensive crops, and providing food to affected households (GOM 2002).

The strategic framework is useful for directing resources and political attention towards dealing with the impacts of the epidemic. Notwithstanding this, current international evidence¹⁷ suggest actual activities focussing on HIV/AIDS mitigation and coping should be part of larger programmes, for example those dealing with chronic illness or food security. Direct targeting of people living with HIV/AIDS or HIV/AIDS orphans is inappropriate in many cases: support should instead be delivered through social protection mechanisms designed to reach people who are vulnerable whatever the cause. Innovations in microfinance can be particularly useful in supporting HIV/AIDS-affected households. Whatever instruments are chosen, government and donors must acknowledge the long-term welfare bill that the HIV/AIDS epidemic will create.

4.8 Health and nutrition

The need to improve access to safe drinking water has been identified as one of the top priorities of the MPRSP, which is to be complemented by increased access to adequate and appropriate sanitation (GOM 2002).

The MPRSP also proposes the design and implementation of an Essential Healthcare Package (EHP): a bundle of health services provided at community, primary and secondary levels, supported by administrative, logistics and management systems. The EHP is intended to address medical conditions and service gaps that disproportionately affect the rural poor.

Malawi will also benefit from resources from the Global Health Fund which will combine with this framework and seek to ensure that HIV/AIDS receives adequate policy attention. Given the rising scale of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Malawi, this is to be welcomed.

The MPRSP also stresses the importance of good nutrition through the improvement of infant and child feeding practices, the diversification and modification of diets and the strengthening of institutional capacity in order to deliver these benefits. However, it is difficult to see how this will be successfully addressed without simultaneously addressing constraints to food availability and access to food.

There are debates on whether agricultural extension services may be able to improve food security by promoting crops other than maize, which has historically been the focus of these services. Reducing the emphasis of maize in Malawi's diet will however require significant cultural change.

¹⁷ For more on this, see Slater (2004).

With the advent of the national food and nutrition security review in 2003, coordination and complementarity between sector-specific efforts and the new Food and Nutrition Security Policy will need to be clearly set out.

4.9 Food and nutrition information

Currently, Malawi is facing major challenges in setting up a reliable and responsive food security and nutrition information system which could be used as an effective early warning system and to inform the design and targeting and implementation of social assistance. Challenges include lack of consensus among stakeholders on what should comprise a FSNIS and the non-availability of timely, up-to-date and accurate data and information (GOM (2004)). Several constraints have been identified, including budgetary constraints; insufficient capacity resulting in lack of management, technical and analytical skills; technical and operational problems; and incentive issues (GOM (2004)).

4.9.1 Early warning systems

Food security monitoring is considered to be an important basis for decision making on government policy interventions and programme design (GOM (2004):66). In Malawi there is considered to be a need for an integrated food security and nutrition monitoring system, which incorporates information from the macro-environment and information on utilisation of food.

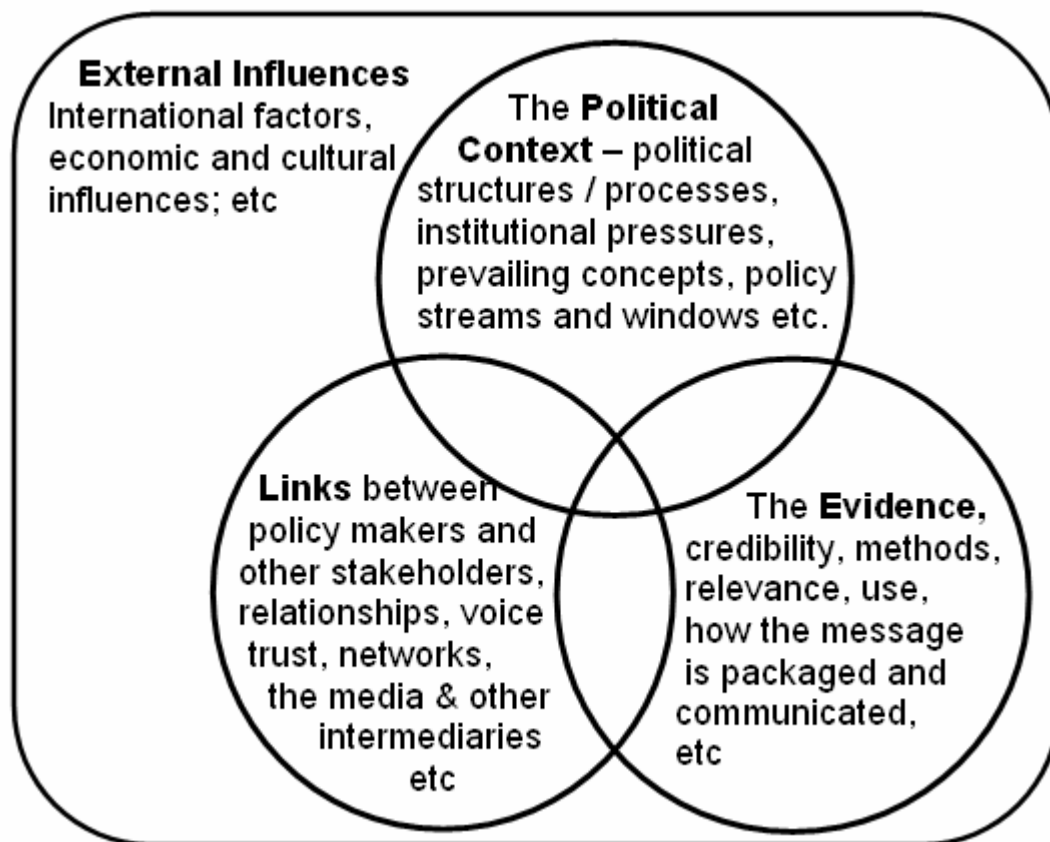
4.9.2 Vulnerability assessments

There is currently strong dissatisfaction with procedures for targeting highly vulnerable individuals and family groups. At community level, there is a perception that a high proportion of free distribution goes to people who are not highly vulnerable. This is supported in relation to free input distribution by evidence from the Starter Pack evaluation (Levy and Barahona, 2002). It is recognised that there is a need for a clear and unambiguous, centrally designed and nationally applied definition of eligibility for social protection assistance.

4.10 Policy processes

Better use of research-based evidence in development policy and practice can help to save lives, reduce poverty, and improve the quality of life (Young and Court, 2003). Research uptake is a function of the interaction between Context (policies and institutions); Evidence (approach and credibility); and Links (between researchers and policy-makers) – see Figure 8. It is not, as previously thought, a linear process, whereby a set of research findings is shifted from the “research sphere” over to the “policy sphere”, but rather a two-way process shaped by multiple relations and reservoirs of knowledge.

Figure 8. The RAPID framework: evidence-policy links



Source: www.odi.org.uk/rapid

Emerging international evidence¹⁸ indicates that research-based evidence is more likely to contribute to policy if:

- i. it fits within the political and institutional limits and pressures of policy makers, and with their ideological assumptions, or sufficient pressure is exerted to challenge those limits;
- ii. the evidence is credible and convincing, provides practical solutions to current policy problems, and is packaged to attract policy-makers' interest;
- iii. researchers and policy makers share common networks, trust each other, honestly and openly represent the interests of all stakeholders and communicate effectively.

But these conditions are rarely met in practice. In Malawi, as we saw earlier, the policy process is distorted by neo-patrimonialism which, following Cammack (n.d) and Lwanda (n.d.), makes the generation of cash and other resources for the maintenance of patron-client relations a fundamental component of the political process, and may override or distort the design and implementation of policy in response to research evidence. Neo-patrimonialism affects not only institutional capacity but also donor relations and levels of civil society participation. A tangible example of how neopatrimonialism can be argued to have affected food security in Malawi is the functioning of the National Food Reserve Agency, as was discussed in Section 3.1.

¹⁸ For more on this, see www.odi.org.uk/rapid

There is little consensus within Malawi on the best approach to promoting the design and implementation of effective food security policy based on research evidence in this context.¹⁹ While some local experts feel that the policy requires extensive consultation, reviews, meetings and expert advice, others feel that this is unnecessary. They also stress the importance of the process being locally owned and driven by government, not by donors, which they currently perceive to be the case. The latter group also do not feel that the process of writing a food security policy needs to 'go back to basics' as they argue that a huge body of expert advice (on agriculture, poverty, land etc in Malawi) has already been reported.

International evidence suggests efforts are most likely to be successful if researchers can control the credibility of their evidence and can ensure they interact with and communicate well with policy makers. For Malawi, on the one hand this implies greater attention to the generation of accurate basic data concerning food availability, poverty and vulnerability, etc. On the other hand, it implies researchers need to work with a wider range of policy activists, including civil society organisations, and to use the media if they wish to influence policy. The collaborative work of civil society networks such as MEJN and CISANET and research analysts such as ECAMA is encouraging in this respect.

Tackling the root causes of neo-patrimonialism and its impact on policy design and implementation is a long-term proposition. The recognition of the need for development-oriented governance in Malawi is one of the four pillars of the MPRSP. Good governance is considered to consist of three elements:

1. Political will and mindset – the recognition of the need for a change in mindset and political will is seen as a major step forward.
2. Security and Justice – insecurity frustrates the ability of the poor to accumulate assets and wealth especially in rural settings, and thus their ability to generate their own incomes and reduce their own poverty. Crime and insecurity also have significant indirect effects on the poor. For example, fraud, tax evasion and corruption reduce the resources available to Government to reduce poverty, and discourages investment and tourism (GOM 2002).
3. Responsive and effective public institutions – public institutions need to be transparent and held accountable to counter the effects of neo-patrimonialism and in order to improve trust and confidence in their functioning.

A two-tiered strategy is proposed in order to introduce the necessary governance reforms. In the short to medium term, this will involve programmes designed to include short-term benefits in order to attract broad-based support. The need to restore the neutrality and professionalism of the public service is also recognised. In the longer term, the strategy consists of strengthening parliament and civil society in order for them to play their role of providing checks and balances on the executive (GOM 2002). In recent years Malawi has made important steps forward in integrating civil society into the policy process; improvements in civil service performance will, however, be heavily dependent on finding resources to increase remuneration – to reduce the influence of neo-patrimonialism – and to provide the facilities necessary for professional service provision. In addition, at 23% of GDP (WDI data) the quantity of aid to Malawi is in danger of reaching the 25-30% level at which diminishing returns set in (de Renzio, 2005); over and above economic returns, the

¹⁹ The following section is based on FFSSA Malawi country issues paper (Chulu et al, 2003) and Cammack, 2003.

high degree of influence donors have on the policy process in Malawi needs to be evaluated, particularly when set against the relatively weak voice of civil society.

5. Conclusions

The manifestation of the 2001-03 crisis in Malawi was a six-fold increase in food prices which left around 3.5 million people (30% of the population) food insecure during 2002-03. In terms of numbers and proportion of people affected, other countries in Southern Africa suffered to a similar extent, but the depth of the crisis in Malawi appears to have been more intense - culminating, tragically, in starvation-related deaths in some Districts.

The cause of the crisis appears to have been the interplay of a marked decline in food availability and severely constrained purchasing power. The decline in food availability appears to have arisen not only from two consecutive poor seasons but also notably from the mismanaged sale of SGR stocks in a context of poor relations between development partners. This latter is particularly significant in Malawi, where aid accounts for nearly 25% of GDP and is the major source of non-recurrent government expenditure.

As in a number of other countries in Southern Africa, lack of purchasing power is a long-standing problem in Malawi arising from the high incidence and severity of poverty. Unfortunately the effect of this appears to have been significantly exacerbated during 2002-03 by policy failures: the mismanagement of the sale of SGR stocks; and longer-term policy of reliance for food security on domestic maize production. It could be argued the latter accentuated the decline in food availability in 2002-03, apparently causing a greater than usual number of less poor households to enter the market, and this in turn fuelled price pressure, further limiting poor households' access to food via the market.

Unfortunately, the risk of this kind of food crisis happening again would appear to be extremely high in Malawi in the absence of fundamental policy change, because the causes stem from long-term trends as much as from short-term shocks, namely:

- In terms of domestic production, maize dominates the farming system and yet rain-fed small farm agriculture is highly sensitive to climatic variation and maize yields are only about one third of potential;
- In the current cross-border trading context, with increased supplies of maize at lower prices from Northern Mozambique, there appears to be an over-reliance on domestic agriculture for food availability;
- Too much is expected of small farm agriculture in terms of generating employment and incomes without active coordination involving government, the private sector and civil society, and this has contributed to the extreme poverty and food insecurity now seen in Malawi;
- HIV/AIDS, and its influence on agricultural production and on community transfers, will get worse before it gets better. Even now, excess deaths from HIV/AIDS, at 70,000 per year (UNAIDS, 2004) far exceed the rate of mortality that, if arising from malnutrition, would prompt a major international humanitarian response;
- Donor relations, in highly aid-dependent states such as Malawi, have a major influence on policy implementation: in relation to food security, this is most obvious in relation to the Starter Pack programme; and to the impact of suspended budgetary support on Malawi's ability to secure commercial imports of food in late 2001 and early 2002.
- The reliance on domestic agriculture for food availability brings with it the necessity of operating a substantial Strategic Grain Reserve. In the context of Malawi's deeply embedded patron-client relations, this is open to mismanagement.

There would appear to be little cause for optimism that the modest improvements in stunting made between 1981 and 2000 will be maintained, or that the increasing incidence of wasting (now at “warning” levels in rural Malawi) will abate.

What appear to be the policy lessons from Malawi’s experience of the 2001-03 crisis? Before summarising the lessons from data analysis, it is useful to consider ordinary people’s own analysis. As in a number of other countries in Southern Africa, the voice of ordinary men and women is not loud in the policy process in Malawi. The Forum for Food Security helped to facilitate a series of civil society consultations on food security issues in rural areas of Malawi during 2004, carried out by members of Malawi’s Civil Society Agriculture Network, as a contribution to the national food and nutrition security review process. Rural men and women who participated in these consultations emphasised two important points that coincide with lessons from data analysis and yet have not been emphasised in policy planning for food security to date:

- Food security has multiple components, or in the words of the consultees “Food security is having high yields of different food crops to last the whole year from one harvest to the next, and different kinds of livestock, and reliable sources of income to support our livelihoods” (CISANET, 2004:9).
- Institutional effectiveness has a critical impact on food security at village level: consultees frequently referred to the problems caused by lack of extension agents, closure of ADMARC markets, and lack of voice for District Assemblies in national policy processes (exacerbated by the disinterest of many MPs in their constituencies). Consultees also emphasised the loss of income caused by redundancies from government services in rural areas made as part of the economic reform process (CISANET, 2004:27).

Malawi’s experience would appear to illustrate the potential dangers of dependence on small farm agriculture in the economy, for food availability and for incomes without significant coordination involving government, the private sector and civil society. We deal with these in reverse order.

First, incomes. Agriculture as a primary driver of growth is promoted in contexts where there are adequate levels of rural infrastructure, labour-demanding technical change that delivers significant productivity gains, and access to stable input, output and financial markets (Dorward et al, 2004). Observers suggest there is scope for increasing the contribution of agriculture to growth in Malawi by implementing policies that deliver this kind of support (Dorward et al, 2004). But there are two major limitations in the Malawi context. First, the scale of support needed: a significant proportion of currently cropped land in Malawi is small plots of degraded, marginal land with low agricultural potential without massive expenditure on irrigation and fertiliser inputs. Second, and related, the kind of support in the form of fertiliser subsidies or producer price support, that has given agriculture the kick-start it needs in other areas of the world, is extremely difficult to defend fiscally in small countries with open borders like Malawi. In areas remote from markets with high population density and a declining resource base, the emphasis may have to be more on resource rehabilitation, supporting out-migration and meeting local food needs than on fully-fledged transformation.

Second, food availability. A central assumption of Malawi’s food security policies since Independence has been that domestic maize production will always be cheaper than commercial imports. But the evidence on the ground indicates that it is profitable to sell maize produced in Northern Mozambique in Malawi due to lower costs of production there.

Estimates suggest several hundred thousand tonnes (equivalent to Malawi's typical food gap) has been moving across the border in informal trade in recent years, even though Malawi's maize prices are amongst the lowest in the region. If this is likely to continue, it implies Malawi needs to re-visit its policy focus on food availability from domestic agriculture, because this may be significantly restricting both food availability and potential employment and incomes from a more diversified agriculture. Malawi might beneficially focus on removing the, largely policy, constraints to informal cross-border trade.

If imports from Northern Mozambique prove on investigation to be likely to be relatively sustainable over the longer term, then the objectives of Malawi's agricultural development policy could be substantially re-oriented, towards higher value employment and income generating production, which will require large scale and long term investments along the lines indicated above. Programmes like Starter Pack provide income as well as production grains, but these are insufficient to drive longer-term growth without these kinds of investments to overcome the significant failures in economic coordination in rural areas.

Is there also potential for employment generation outside agriculture? At 10% of the labour force, Malawi has the lowest proportion of non-agricultural employment in Southern Africa. But at the same time, land pressure is intense and a growing proportion of the rural population is effectively landless. As have a number of other countries in Southern Africa, Malawi historically relied on cyclical migration to industrial and mining jobs elsewhere in the region, but the opportunities for this have permanently contracted. How to create these jobs is one of the major conundrums facing Africa today. Some countries in the region have made use of preferential trade agreements: Lesotho, for example, has seen 40,000 jobs created over 3 years as a result of AGOA. But these bring their own problems of low paid work, often targeted at women, and insecurity, potentially lasting only as long as the trade agreement (Slater and Holmes, 2004). Lessons from East Asia suggest that there are two major requirements for long run industrial competitiveness: the ability to master new technologies; and to attract foreign direct investment, particularly in export-oriented activity. So far, Africa has not adopted these strategies successfully, and with adult literacy rates amongst the lowest in Southern Africa (only formerly war-torn Mozambique has lower rates), it is difficult to see how such strategies can be applied in the foreseeable future to Malawi's chosen priority sectors of mining, agro-processing, tourism and textiles.

In terms of food utilisation, the available evidence suggests that Malawi's continuing poor health status has more to do with poor nutrition than vice versa. A priority would appear to be improving infant weaning practices. However, with relatively low levels of educational attainment in Malawi and poor rural transport and communications, this is going to be difficult. Malawi's poor infant feeding practices may also be directly related to food availability: the dominance of maize in the diet and infrequent meals. Understanding of the links between nutrition and HIV/AIDS suggests that Malawi's growing HIV/AIDS crisis is likely to be exacerbated amongst adults by current levels of malnutrition and amongst children by poor feeding practices.

Underlying all these policy decisions, is the influence of the policy process: the combination of political will and institutional capacity which determines the nature of policy decisions and the extent that policy decisions, once taken, are implemented. The significant distorting impact of both these factors in African policy making is increasingly recognised.²⁰ In Malawi, the extent and impact of neo-patrimonialism is increasingly well

²⁰ See for example Jayne et al, 2002; Omamo, 2003.

documented and could be implicated directly in the severity of the 2001-03 crisis. Malawi's new President has taken steps to improve governance and accountability in key food sector institutions, but these will need to be broadened, deepened and sustained if Malawi's long history of neo-patrimonialism is to be tamed. Institutional capacity is constrained not only by neo-patrimonial tendencies, but also by lack of financial resources and increasingly by the impact of HIV/AIDS. Although steps are being taken to increase participation in the policy process, in the form of multi-stakeholder fora for policy formulation, in general the voice of civil society is not well heard in Malawi, particularly in comparison to the voice of donors, who have a marked influence in this highly aid-dependent economy.

Finally, what role for social protection? Malawi is spending around US \$ 30 million a year on a broad range of social protection instruments, including innovations such as direct welfare transfers, with which experience elsewhere in the region and internationally has been positive. The key policy lesson concerns the need to understand better which instruments are suitable for delivering different social protection objectives. It may well be appropriate to deliver a greater proportion of risk reduction and mitigation through the policies of sectoral Ministries such as agriculture, health and education, leaving the safety net programme to focus on risk coping instruments for those most in need. A major learning point in this respect has been around the limitations of the Starter Pack programme in contributing to risk mitigation for labour-constrained ultra poor households, although it may contribute to overall risk reduction when delivered universally. More generally, there would appear to be an urgent need for increasing the voice of poor and vulnerable people in local and national institutions and policy processes.

Malawi is at a turning point in its long history of attempting to strengthen food security. It faces several fundamental and difficult policy questions relating to how best to ensure food availability, access to food and effective food utilisation. Following the 2001-03 crisis, Malawi has demonstrated a willingness to start tackling these questions; for the sake of the 7 million Malawians who are poor and vulnerable, it is to be hoped that the necessary policy changes will be put in place and implemented over the coming decade.

Annex 1: Food security and vulnerability – Key definitions

Defining food security

'Food security' exists when:

'all people at all times have physical, social and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.'²¹

Some propose that, in addition, the definition includes that people do not fear loss of food security (Maxwell 1996). In this sense, reliability becomes as important as overall level of food intake: dramatic fluctuations in any component of food security, either because of an unexpected shock or during particular periods of the year, can have significant impacts on overall food security status.

Food security may be seen to have three basic components:²²

- **Food availability:** the sum of domestic production, imports (both commercial and food aid) and exports, and changes in national food stocks;
- **Food access:** people's entitlement²³ to food, namely the amount they can produce, purchase or obtain through transfers from kin, community or state;
- **Food utilisation:** effective preparation and consumption of food, and the biological capacity of individuals to absorb and utilise nutrients in the food that they eat, that in turn depends in large part on their health.

Institutions are important for food security because they influence people's ability to source food, for example through markets, government channels, and community networks.

The concept of food security can be applied at various levels: for individuals, households, nations and ultimately at global level. Food security is sometimes confused with concepts of food self-sufficiency, particularly at national level. To clarify, it is not necessary that a country produce all its own food to be food secure – think for example, of Finland, Kuwait or Singapore; countries where food insecurity barely exists, but which import much of their food. In similar vein, food availability at national level does not imply food security at individual level.

A1.1 Types of food insecurity

For those living in or close to poverty, food insecurity can often be seasonal. Typically in the period leading up to the harvest, some smallholder households run out of their basic food supplies and enter the food market, pushing up food prices and thus making access to sufficient food difficult for those living below the poverty line. Not for nothing, this period is often called the 'hungry season'.

²¹ www.fao.org/WAICENT/FAOINFO/ECONOMIC/ESA/fs_en.htm

²² www.ifad.org/gender/thematic/rural/rural_2.htm

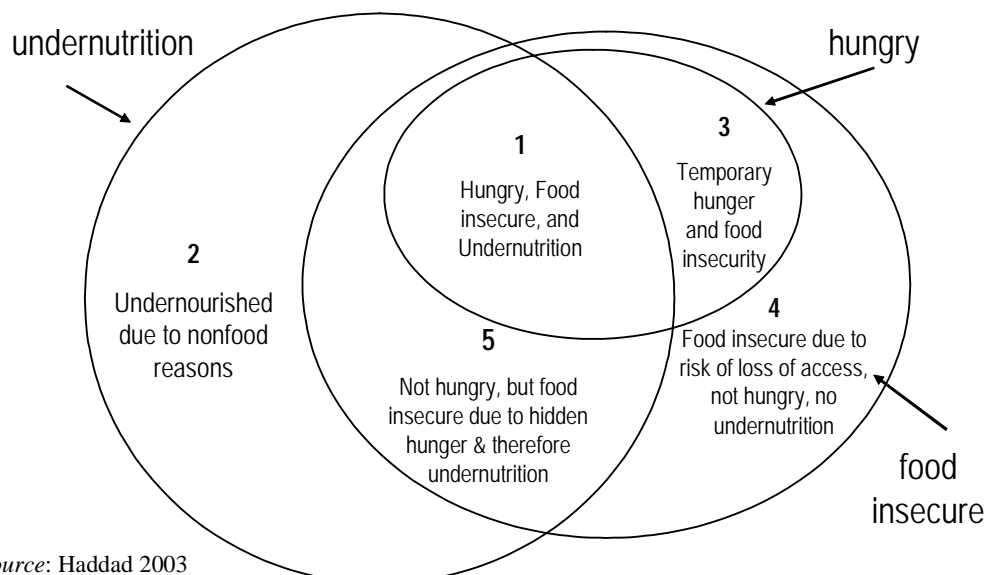
²³ Entitlements are the basis of access to food: 'The mere presence of food in the economy, or in the market, does not entitle a person to consume it' (Dreze and Sen, 1989: 9).

Food insecurity can be a chronic, on-going condition, usually closely associated with the poverty of those affected – usually a minority of the population. But there can be more short-lived episodes of food insecurity in which much larger numbers of people become temporarily food insecure, in reaction to a shock to the food system. In the case of Southern Africa, the combination of harvest failures in 2001 and 2002 and the consequences of policies on storage, food trading and land redistribution, were shocks that plunged large numbers of people into food insecurity.

Large-scale temporary food insecurity is clearly of great concern in its own right; but what may be even more worrying is that people may have become more vulnerable to shocks than in the past, and thus at greater risk of falling into such temporary food insecurity. If so, it may take only small shocks in future to condemn many to hunger. When severe problems are experienced by large numbers of people, and especially if they have suffered an abrupt decline in food intake, only then may the situation may be described as ‘famine’.

Concepts of hunger, food insecurity and undernutrition overlap, see Figure A1.1.

Figure A1.1. The overlapping concepts of hunger, food insecurity and undernutrition



Source: Haddad 2003

The five possible states identified are as follows (after Gillespie & Haddad 2004):

1. Hungry, food insecure and undernourished owing to inability to access the food or to use it well, usually owing to problems of health and sanitation;
2. Food intake sufficient, but undernourished due to a lack of non-food inputs such as clean water and sanitation;
3. Not undernourished, but food insecure and hungry;
4. Neither hungry nor undernourished, but food insecure since they run a significant risk of losing access to food; and,
5. Not hungry, but food insecure and undernourished — they get enough calories to stave off hunger, but not enough variety in their diet and so are likely to have micronutrient deficiencies ‘hidden hunger.’

A1.2 Measuring food insecurity

Unfortunately, indicators for measuring food insecurity are not well developed. Food balance sheets based on crop estimates, plus data on exports, imports and stores, have historically formed the basis of assessing food security in many countries, but these are indicative only of likely food availability, not the other important components of access to food and effective utilisation of food.

There is a well developed international protocol for assessing malnutrition through anthropometric measurements, described below, and this is the conventional route for identifying “emergencies” warranting international humanitarian response.

However, many food emergencies are ‘slow-onset’ and critical months have been lost by the time food insecurity is manifest in actual malnutrition. The essential difficulty is in identifying meaningful indicators of the *risk* component of food insecurity that can be used to measure the probabilities of food insecurity for different population groups. We return to this issue below, after setting out the various measures of malnutrition which still form the basis for much international debate on food insecurity.

There are two commonly used ways of assessing undernourishment.

- One is by inferring access to food by individuals, and then comparing this against a benchmark of typical minimum requirements for energy – defined by FAO as *on average* 2,100 kcal per person per day. To do this, FAO take a balance sheet of food available in a country, and then make judgments about the distribution of income so as to infer the average amount of food likely to be accessed by different fractions of the population.²⁴ This is then compared to the benchmark, and the numbers estimated not to have enough food are expressed as a percentage of the population.
- The other is by directly observing nutrition status by measuring people (‘anthropometry’). Most frequently surveys are made of children aged under five years, since they are most sensitive to malnutrition. Children are weighed, their height measured, and their age recorded.²⁵ From these three sets of information, three statistics are usually computed:
 - Weight for height (‘wasting’) is indicative of *acute* malnutrition;
 - Height for age (‘stunting’) is indicative of *chronic* malnutrition;
 - Weight for age is a combination of the two.

All are measured against norms for the reference population as a whole: more than 2 Standard Deviations under the median is regarded as “moderate” malnutrition, and more than 3 Standard Deviations is classed as “severe”. Demographic Health Surveys are generally considered to be the most accurate source of nationally comparable under-5’s data.²⁶

²⁴ The method depends heavily on the quality of the data on food supplies, and on the assumptions about the distribution of food. Although FAO take great pains to make their estimates, the results have been criticised as unreliable.

²⁵ When time is pressing, as in emergencies, a short cut is to measure the upper-arm circumference (MUAC) of children.

²⁶ <http://www.measuredhs.com/>

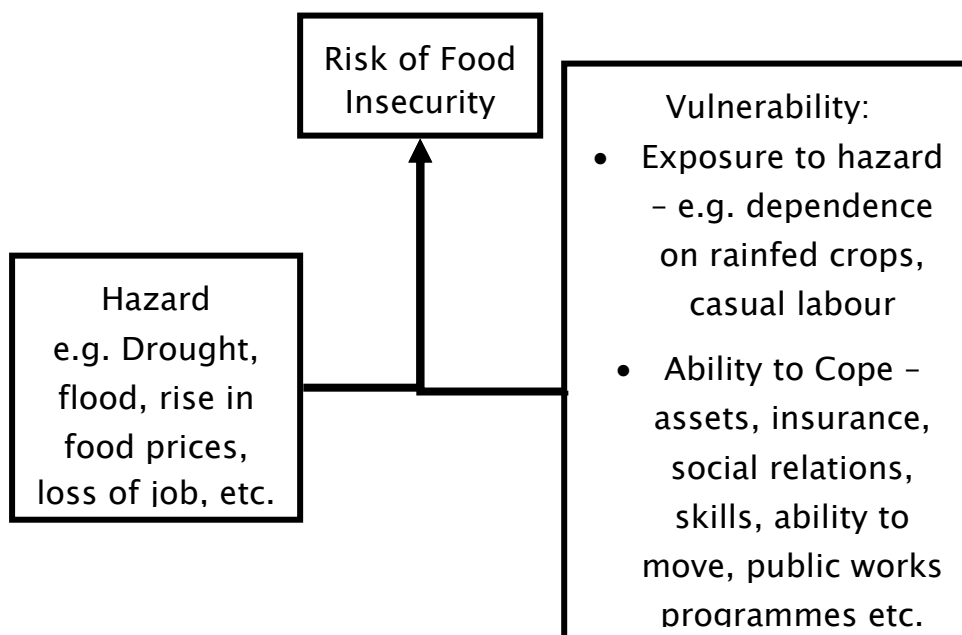
The standard indicator used to identify emergencies – Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) – measures weight for height (wasting). Levels of 10% of under-5's more than 2 Standard Deviations below the median weight for height within the reference population are generally considered to indicate levels of malnutrition in the population at large warranting universal supplementary feeding of children under five. Levels between 5% and 10% are considered to be of concern and warranting close monitoring of the population.²⁷

To sum up, the quality of data used to measure malnutrition is often contested, but in any case malnutrition indicators are not necessarily accurate guides to levels of food insecurity within population groups. This distinction is highly important because, as we shall see in the next section, the risk of food insecurity – and the fear this induces – can be a major determinant of coping strategies, producing a downward spiral for affected households. The necessary public policy response is to attempt to address the underlying factors contributing to the risk of food insecurity.

A1.3 Vulnerability and food insecurity

Vulnerability may be seen as a combination of the degree to which a person or household is exposed to a hazard, and the extent to which they can cope with the effects of the hazard. The combination of vulnerability and hazard produces the risk of a particular outcome, such as food insecurity. These relations can be captured in a diagram, as seen in Figure A1.2.

Figure A1.2. Risk of food insecurity, hazards and vulnerability



Hazards may be natural, political, economic or social/human in nature; they may be unpredictable shocks, or longer-term trends. The latter, including, for example, weak economic growth and failures in democratic consolidation, can be as damaging for food security as sudden natural disasters or conflict. Hazards that affect individuals, such as old age, illness or being orphaned, are additional threats to food security for affected individuals, over and above economy-wide hazards.

²⁷ This is not to ignore those children who are malnourished.: when levels of GAM in the population are under the 10% trigger level, children identified as wasted are, ideally, referred for individual therapeutic feeding.

Box A1.1. Common food security hazards

	Natural	Political	Economic	Social
Trend	Land shortage Soil degradation	Weak governance	Market failure Inflation	Old age Childhood
Shock	Drought Flood Earthquake	Civil conflict	Devaluation Border controls	Motherhood Accidents Ill-health

NB. HIV/AIDS and other pandemic diseases – as distinct from ill-health – are both trends and shocks, and there are political aspects, social aspects, economics aspects etc in terms of impact (see Slater, 2004)

For the chronically poor, the land, labour and capital they have at their disposal may be so inadequate that they are food insecure even in the absence of a significant hazard. This appears to be the case for around 8 million individuals across the countries of Southern Africa year-in year-out (CARE SWARMU, 2003). For many other households, however, food insecurity can occur when they are unable to cope with a particular hazard or combination of hazards. It is this latter group that appeared to be expanding significantly during 2001-03, as a result of localised climatic events *in combination with* longer-term economic trends and the HIV/AIDS epidemic: in Southern Africa as a whole, by late 2002 doubling the number of food insecure people to 16 million.

The concern in Southern Africa is that more people are at risk of food insecurity than in the past. As Figure A1.2 suggest, this can arise in three ways, thus:

- Increased exposure to hazards, since some households find their range of livelihood options curtailed and are forced to depend on risky activities, such as rainfed cropping;
- Reduced ability to cope. A key element is possession of assets, such as savings or livestock. But if these have been already been liquidated to cope with a previous hazard, future coping will be undermined. Inability to move and find additional work in times of stress may similarly reduce coping capacity: those living with HIV/AIDS are often in this situation. Coping is also affected by social relations: some fear that HIV/AIDS may weaken community mechanisms to help the weak cope. This is particularly important for food security because, as we explained above, the ability to generate income or to source food through community transfers is very important, not just the ability to grow it. Coping is also a function of formal provision of social protection by government, such as public works schemes or cash transfers.
- Increased frequency or severity of hazards. Climate change may be a threat in this respect, but equally so might be increasingly unstable food markets in which the price of maize fluctuates violently.

A feedback loop could operate as well: households that have seen either their ability to cope reduced, or the hazards they face increased, may then try to limit their exposure by undertaking less risky activities – but at the expense of forgoing income opportunities that would allow them to rebuild their assets and thus cope better. For example, farmers in drylands might plant millet rather than take the risk, arising from drought, of growing cotton or maize for which there is the chance to earn cash from surpluses. In relation to food security, livelihood strategies, in combination with livelihood outcomes themselves (i.e. in terms of poverty reduction and food security), can set up **virtuous or vicious circles** of

asset accumulation and social integration, which have a critical impact on households' ability to reduce, mitigate or cope with hazards threatening food security over the longer term.

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