Food Security and Sustainable Development in Southern Africa

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Preface

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Abstract

In the search for a Global Deal at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, which sought to address global economic relationships between the North and the South, a crucial area of debate was food security. Despite impressive developments around food growth in recent decades, resulting in enough food to meet the basic needs of every person in the world, not everyone is food-secure, as exemplified by the acute food shortages in the southern African region during 2002 and 2003. There are many causes of food insecurity, among them macro and micro issues, the roots of which are essentially internal or indirectly caused by relationships with other countries. Examples are political instability, poor economic governance, poverty and a lack of sustainable household income. The issue of HIV/AIDS has added another critical dimension to the search for food security. Strategies for enhancing income diversification and the income-generating capacity of vulnerable groups in urban and rural areas should be a major priority for both the developing and developed world, coupled with genuine commitment to international trade reforms.

Food Security and Sustainable Development in Southern Africa

Introduction

The United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in August 2002 brought together global leaders from government, civil society and business to review the implementation of Agenda 21, launched at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio in 1992. The 2002 summit focused on problems associated with increasing levels of poverty and global inequality, highlighted the need to integrate the three pillars of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) and to renew commitment to the Rio Principles. It was also intended to facilitate agreement on actions needed for the further implementation of Agenda 21, and to 'find solutions to the current crises facing humanity today: poverty, conflict, economic instability, the negative effects of globalisation, the degradation of environmental resources and emerging pandemics such as HIV/AIDS' (Naidoo, 2002).

It has been widely acknowledged that there has been limited success since the Rio conference in integrating the social, economic and environmental pillars of sustainable development and in creating a coherent and integrated

global-local governance framework to underpin them. In 2000, eight years after UNCED, world leaders met at the United Nations Millennium Summit and agreed upon the Millennium Declaration, committing themselves to achieving a broad range of time-bound, international development objectives based on sustainable development principles. This was a step further towards international recognition that practical and time-bound measures are needed to advance sustainable development and to target some of the greatest challenges to humanity, namely, poverty and global inequality. In grappling with this challenge, the South African government worked towards a Global Deal for the WSSD which was intended to constitute agreement, at the highest level, on actions needed to combat the growing challenges facing sustainable development, with a poverty eradication focus, as envisaged in the Millennium Declaration.

The South African government believed that a global response to these critical areas was needed as a basis for launching a concrete and holistic global initiative for the implementation of Agenda 21 and sustainable development. The government thus developed a list of 22 priority areas for international negotiations front-loaded by six core areas that focused on basic needs and furthered sustainable development through efficient use of resources. The six sectors were water, energy, food security, health, education and technology. In terms of food security, the immediate focus was, firstly, on the need to recognise that immediate action was necessary to reverse the current maldistribution of food throughout the world that denies people access and secondly, on market access for agricultural products, particularly for developing countries.

Food security therefore lay at the heart of South Africa's conceptualisation of sustainable development and poverty reduction, as one of six core areas that required attention at the WSSD. However, the issue of food security often becomes submerged within the intractable challenges facing development, as it raises issues that are linked to a host of development concepts, particularly the fight against poverty.

This had particular resonance during the WSSD in Johannesburg as the United Nations' World Food Programme (WFP) and Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) announced in June 2002, barely weeks before the Summit, that 12.8 million people in southern Africa were on the brink of starvation.

This paper attempts to unravel some of the difficult debates around food security. It provides an overview of the status quo in thinking on food security at the time of the WSSD, outlines the main issues, and draws a broad set of policy implications from the discussion.

A brief overview of food security

The concept of food security helps to foster an integrated approach to food and nutrition as it places stress on the avoidance of under-nutrition or starvation as the fundamental food policy goal. According to Frank Ellis (1992: 310), it implies putting in place a set of instruments and mechanisms that seek:

- To overcome existing long-term nutritional deprivation in vulnerable groups of the population; and
- To avert short-term nutritional deprivation resulting from adverse natural events or sudden changes in the capacity of people to acquire enough food.

These issues were accepted by the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome in recognition of the unacceptable dimensions of problems of hunger and malnutrition – issues seen as primarily associated with poverty and intensified by interaction with conflict and other sources of political instability. Reflecting the importance of the issue of food security, the concept has evolved, developed, multiplied and diversified in recent years as a result of the diverse nature of the problem (ODI, 1997).

In the 1970s, the concept was seen mainly as a 'food problem', particularly of ensuring production of adequate food supplies and maximising stability in their flow. This view led

to a focus on measures to reduce price variability and finance the additional costs of exceptional imports at an international level, and on self-sufficiency strategies at a national level. In 1983, the FAO expanded the concept to include a third aspect, namely, securing access to available supplies for vulnerable people, thus ensuring that attention was balanced between the demand and supply sides of the food security equation. This concept, powerfully influenced by the work of economist and Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen, resulted in the definition most widely accepted and used as capturing the spirit of food security:

> [Food security] is...access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Its essential elements are the availability of food and the ability to acquire it. Food insecurity, in turn, is the lack of access to enough food (World Bank, 1986: 1).

This definition was further elaborated at the 1997 World Food Summit as:

> [Food] security, at the individual, household, national, regional and global levels [is achieved] when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (ODI, 1997).

It has therefore been recognised at a global level, that the world food problem is not synonymous with the problems of world hunger and food insecurity. Achieving longer-term food security is inextricably linked to overcoming other global crises, such as population growth, unemployment, debt, energy consumption, environmental and political security – all problems with significant national and local components that impact negatively on one another (ODI, 1997). Direct causes of food insecurity include poverty, ill health, exclusion, conflict and natural disasters.

Conceptualising food insecurity: the work of Sen

It has been largely through the influence of Sen that the concept of food security has moved beyond debates around 'national food availability' to the 'food entitlements of individuals and groups'. In other words, people starve because of a food entitlement failure rather than because of a food availability failure. Sen elaborated a series of proposals that advanced traditional welfare economics, including the incorporation of individual entitlements, functioning, opportunities, capabilities, freedoms and rights into the conceptual foundations and technical apparatus of economics and social choice.

Sen's 'entitlements approach' provides a framework for analysing the relationship between rights, interpersonal obligations and *individual entitlement to things* (ODI, 2001). A person's entitlement is a way of characterising an overall command over things that takes note of all relevant rights and obligations. This entitlement is the totality of things a person can have by virtue of rights, the latter being characterised as relationships that hold between distinct agents (between persons, between the state and a person). Sen hypothesised that, '[m]ost cases of starvation and famines across the world arise not from people being deprived of things to which they are entitled, but from people not being entitled, in the prevailing legal system of institutional rights, to adequate means of survival' (1981, 1984 cited in ODI, 2001).

Sen distinguished four different types of entitlements that individuals, or households may possess or acquire in a market economy (cited in Ellis, 1992: 307):

- T*rade-based entitlement*: ownership of goods or resources obtained by trading something a person or household owns with another party;
- *Production-based entitlement*: ownership of output produced using personal or household resources, or using resources willingly hired by others;
- *Own-labour entitlement*: ownership of personal labour power, thus enabling the person or household to obtain

trade or production-based entitlement in exchange for their own labour power; and
- *Inheritance or transfer entitlement*: ownership of goods or resources bequeathed or freely given to the person or household.

Sen's empirical work suggests that in many famines, in which millions of people have died, there is a range of variables, other than simple agricultural productivity and aggregate food supply, that can undermine a person's entitlement to food; and that there is a possibility of an asymmetry in the incidence of starvation deaths among different population groups. In essence, certain people in specific population groups starve not only because of overall food shortages but also because they are unable to trade their labour power or skills. Therefore starvation occurs as a consequence of shifts in entitlements resulting from exercising rights that are legitimate in legal terms. These findings underpin the notion that insecure food entitlements may not arise from market failure whereby a person starves because of an inability to acquire sufficient food through production or exchange.

Sen, therefore, made the fundamental point that development objectives cannot be met by macro-level interventions alone, as individual members of a nation have to be allowed greater freedom to explore their full potential and worth. This is a matter of improving human capability, which comes with better governance, less corruption and better democratic systems. Individuals should, therefore, have the opportunity to participate in economic activity; and the economy must allow them to access resources to develop their own welfare and that of their families.

These theoretical underpinnings have influenced thinking around famines and, indeed, the approach of such organisations as the FAO, the WFP and other UN agencies. As the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) has asserted, the entitlements approach helped to shift the focus of international attention away from statistics describing per capita calories and food supplies, towards statistics describing the

differential ability of individuals, groups and classes to command food in practice (2001). As a result, current approaches to food security place an increased emphasis on identifying the precise causes of the food vulnerability of population groups.[1] This philosophy is reflected in the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) *Human Development Report* (2000), which focuses on the inter-relationships between human development and human rights, calling for a framework for trade and investment that respects, protects and promotes human rights and encourages a greater commitment to human rights priorities in developing countries.

The outlook of global food insecurity

In 1996, the World Food Summit strengthened international resolve to achieve global food security and intensify ongoing efforts to eradicate hunger in all countries, with an immediate view to reducing the number of undernourished people to half their present level by no later than 2015 (DFID, 2002). At the Millennium Summit in 2000, 191 countries redefined this target into a Millennium Declaration Goal, which set out to 'halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger'. Over the past three decades, world food production has grown faster than population growth. The remarkable growth in food availability achieved in developing countries, more than halved the proportion of undernourished from 37 to 17 per cent in 1997 to 1999. If available food could be distributed evenly, each person would be assured of 2 700 calories a day.

However, despite these international commitments to resolving food insecurity and the real achievements in global food security, the gap between the aspiration of eradicating hunger and the continuing reality of approximately 800 million, or more, undernourished people is stark. On a global scale, progress is being made in reducing the absolute number of hungry people in the world, but this is not happening fast enough to achieve the Millennium Declaration Goal. World

food is neither evenly distributed, nor fully consumed, among, or within, countries. The FAO report on the *State of Food Insecurity in the World* (1999b) indicated that the number of undernourished people had been reduced to 790 million, that is, 40 million less than the number estimated at the World Food Summit in 1996. Whilst the total number of chronically undernourished people in the developing world has fallen by approximately 40 million in the last decade, the average rate of decline has continued to be very slow, reaching six million a year, compared with eight million reported in 1996 (FAO, 1996). Consequently, the annual reduction required to reach the target by 2015 has grown from 20 to 22 million people per year. Hence the gap between realised reductions and reductions needed is widening. At the present rate it would take 60 years to reach the estimated target.

During the period 1990 to 1996, a new flash point of hunger and food insecurity has emerged. In sub-Saharan Africa, the number of undernourished people doubled between 1969 and 1992 to 215 million people, and the proportion of the population who were undernourished rose from 38 to 43 per cent (FAO, 2001). Thus, while remarkable progress has been made in some developing countries in reducing chronic hunger and abject poverty, particularly in east and south Asia, the situation of sub-Saharan Africa continued to deteriorate through the 1990s (FAO, 1999a). The situation in this region is similar to that of Asia in the early 1960s, with widespread poverty and malnutrition, large national food deficits and increasingly higher dependence on food imports and other concessionary aid. However, the problem of food insecurity varies in severity across the African continent. Although West Africa has the largest population of any sub-region, it has the lowest number of undernourished people. East Africa has more than twice as many undernourished people (FAO, 2001). The numbers in central and southern Africa are also proportionately larger, although both have smaller total populations.

The southern African food crisis

Southern Africa's food security has also deteriorated with the number of food-insecure people in this region doubling during the 1980s from about 22 million people in 1979/81 to 39 million in 1990/92. The severe food shortages and hunger that have recently struck countries in the southern African Development Community (SADC) region, particularly in Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Lesotho, Swaziland and Mozambique, have been described as the 'worst food crisis in a decade' (WFP/FAO, 2002). The region has suffered from a lethal mix of food shortages, lack of access to basic social services and an alarmingly high prevalence of HIV/AIDS – all contributing to the growing numbers of vulnerable people in rural and urban southern Africa. According to several reports from WFP/FAO missions undertaken in the SADC region in 2002, 14 million people were living on the brink of starvation and faced serious food shortages until the region's next main harvest in April 2003 (WFP/FAO, 2002). This assessment of food shortages revealed a situation close to disaster, as indicated in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Food requirements in the SADC region: 2002

Country	Population in need of food aid	Percentage in need of food aid	Metric tonnes cereal food aid up to March 2003	Cereal food aid as percentage of national requirement
Zimbabwe	6 075 000	46	705 000	33
Malawi	3 188 000	28	208 000	11
Zambia	2 329 000	21	174 000	10
Mozambique	515 000	3	62 000	2
Lesotho	445 800	20	50 000	14
Swaziland	231 000	21	12 000	7
Region	12 783 000	22	1 211 000	13

Source: WFP/FAO, 2002.

The analysis of the SADC's regional food situation showed that for the 2001/02 season, the region had a cereal deficit of over 3.22 million tons which included a maize deficit (the staple crop) of 1.10 million tons.

Table 2: Cereal production and utilisation (all figures in '000 metric tons

	Lesotho	Malawi	Swaziland	Mozambique	Zambia	Zimbabwe	Total
Domestic availability	73.8	1 721	77.2	1 933	739	838	5 382.0
Total utilisation	412.2	2 206	118.2	2 575	1 416	2 707	9 434.4
Import required	338.4	485	110.9	642	677	1 869	4 122.3
Estimated commercial imports	191.4	277	95.7	592	352	312	1 820.1
Food aid needs	147.0	208	15.2	50	175	645	1 240.2

Source: WFP/FAO, 2002

This food crisis has been partly a result of the accumulation of poor harvests over a long period of time, which was further aggravated by a decrease in crop harvests of over 50 per cent in the 2001/02 season. However, according to the FAO/WFP, food output and availability in southern Africa in 2002/3 has been affected by a number of factors as outlined below.

Poor rainfall Erratic rainfalls were identified as the major cause of the reduced production of cereals in the region. In contrast to the previous drought of 1992, when a complete lack of rainfall devastated crop production as well as livestock, rains in parts of the region were near normal and livestock herds had not been unduly affected. However dry spells extended across large sections of the SADC region. Regional variations in rainfall were reflected most clearly in Zambia, Lesotho,

Malawi and Mozambique where production levels in some parts of these countries were below normal and in some parts crops failed completely.

Despite the important link to drought, the food shortages of 2002/03 differed markedly from the food shortages of 1992, which were due entirely to drought.

Economic problems and inflation Problems such as macro-economic performance, inconsistent food policies, successive years of conflict, chronic malnutrition and the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence rates in the world, increased the vulnerability of the region. Purchasing power had fallen with the result that certain households faced an acute food shortage, taking one meal a day, if any. In Mozambique, a year of flood followed by a year of drought has severely impacted on food security. In Zimbabwe, natural disasters, including drought and flooding, were compounded by political upheaval and the disruption of commercial farming through the fast-track land redistribution programme. The area of maize planted by large-scale commercial farmers had declined to an estimated 60 per cent lower level than in 1999 to 2000.

Mismanagement and poor governance Issues surrounding mismanagement and bad governance lie at the heart of inappropriate food-security strategies at the national level. Disaster mitigation strategies in particular, are key in this regard. SADC countries should, for example, maintain permanent budgets to help alleviate the effects of sudden, unexpected disasters such as droughts or floods. However, many SADC governments failed to develop their capacities and preferred to respond to crises (Sunday Independent, 19 May 2002). This was epitomised by some countries waiting for droughts before requesting help from the international community, which was often slow in responding and sometimes responded inappropriately. Zimbabwe and Malawi were prime examples of this problem.

Corruption Corruption was another major cause of the food crisis. The Malawian government, for example, sold its strategic grain reserve of 110 000 tons in 2001 at the behest of the International Monetary Fund in order to balance its payments when there were already signs of food insecurity. As a result, Malawi needed US$21,6 million to cover its 600 000-ton maize deficit barely a year later. Corruption charges were levelled at some of Malawi's elite for buying this reserve and re-selling it in the country at a 500 per cent profit (Sunday Independent, 19 May 2002).

HIV/AIDS Another serious cause of the food crisis in southern Africa was discussed at a consultation meeting organised by UNAIDS and the Regional Inter-Agency Co-ordination Support Office (RIACSO) in November 2002. The meeting, attended by over 70 participants from UN agencies and civil society organisations, concluded that the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS, especially in the worst-affected areas, such as southern Africa, was complicating the task of fighting hunger and strengthening the livelihoods of the poor. The pandemic was creating large new vulnerable groups and was rapidly eroding food and livelihood security. The UN had thus come to realise that although all famines have long-term roots in uneven development, the fundamental difference in the 2002/3 crisis was the influence of HIV/AIDS-related morbidity and mortality, which both worsened and was exacerbated by the food crisis, creating a dual tragedy.

Commercial and subsistence agriculture are particularly susceptible to the pandemic and are facing a severe social and economic crisis in some locations due to its impact. Agriculture is one of the most important sectors in many developing countries, providing a living or survival mechanism for up to 80 percent of a country's population. The impact of HIV/AIDS is exacerbating the challenges already facing the sector, including unfavourable international terms of trade, mounting population pressure on land, and environmental degradation. The major impact of AIDS on agriculture

includes serious depletion of human resources, diversions of capital from agriculture, loss of farm and non-farm income and other psycho-social impacts that affect productivity (Mutangadura, Jackson & Mukurazita, 1999).

The FAO have reported that the continuous interruption of labour may impact on the types of crops grown, and hence substitution between crops may take place (1995). This is especially true for labour-intensive crops, which are likely to be substituted for less labour-intensive crops and a possible decrease in the area being cultivated. Therefore, the impact of HIV/AIDS on agriculture directly affects food security as it reduces:

- Food availability (through falling production, loss of family labour, land and other resources, loss of livestock assets and implements);
- Food access (through declining income for food purchases); and
- The stability and quality of food supplies (through shifts to less labour-intensive production) (Loewenson & Whiteside, 2001: 10).

As a result of these impacts, an UN Mission by James Morris, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Humanitarian Needs in southern Africa, and Stephen Lewis, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for HIV/AIDS in Africa, concluded in January 2003 that:

> HIV/AIDS is the most fundamental underlying cause of the southern African crisis. Combined with food shortages and chronic poverty, HIV/AIDS becomes even more deadly. The link between food security and HIV/AIDS must be fully recognised in all government, United Nations, international and NGO efforts to address food emergencies and in their support of HIV/AIDS-affected populations (2003: 6).

Thus the regional drought spells, combined with political, economic and social conditions specific to each country, have created a suite of complex interacting factors that have resulted in the humanitarian crisis facing southern Africa in

2002/03. Typical of the 'complex emergency' famines in the twentieth century, the current crisis is rooted in structural vulnerabilities (lack of access to resources and inequitable political and economic conditions) and conjunctural factors ('triggers' that precipitate the famine, such as drought, flooding or pestilence) (Vogel & Smith, 2002).

The politics of scarcity: international trade reforms and food security

It is thus clear that despite international commitments to resolving food insecurity and the real achievements in increasing global food security, the gap between the aspiration of eradicating hunger and the continuing reality, portrayed, in this case, in southern Africa, remain stark. As the UN Secretary-General argued at the World Bank Conference on Overcoming Global Hunger in November 1993, 'the world now produces enough food to feed its population. The problem is not simply technical. It is a political and social problem. It is a problem of access to food supplies, of distribution and of entitlement. Above all, it is a problem of political will' (cited in ODI, 1997).

However, as is clear from the discussion around Sen's work in particular, the problem is also a failure to understand food insecurity as a problem of access to food, rather than just a problem of food production, which has contributed to slow progress in reducing the numbers of hungry people in the world. The complexities of food security have created major barriers in reaching consensus on how to achieve it and, as the ODI has argued, inconclusiveness of policy prescriptions has resulted in inadequate action:

> Between the World Food Conference of 1974 and the World Food Summit of 1996, a series of international conferences have been held on key issues such as children, nutrition, environment, human rights, population, social development, women and habitat relating directly and indirectly to food security...Within the UN system alone, including the international financial institutions,

> at least 36 bodies are directly and indirectly involved in food security and nutrition objectives (ODI, 1997).

This raises serious concerns around the potential impact of the global agreements thrashed out at the Johannesburg Summit. Sceptics might argue that these objectives, reiterated at the WSSD, are merely a restatement of commitments acceptable to every government, rephrased in the sustainable, participatory, gender-sensitive, anti-poverty, environmentally friendly terms of the moment (ODI, 1997).

Part of the problem lies on the international stage where national interests, particularly around trade, are prioritised over UN agreements. The links between trade liberalisation and food security have always been hotly debated. In the context of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and, more specifically, the Agreement on Agriculture, the debate centres on whether important policy objectives, such as the elimination of poverty and hunger as causes and consequences of food insecurity, have been helped or hindered by the current agreement, and on whether further negotiations will improve upon the existing agreement or compromise the attainment of those objectives in poor countries.

The Agreement on Agriculture has been subject to severe criticism. A popular view is that there are significant imbalances in the Agreement because industrialised countries have been able to secure exemptions for some of their policies and have been allowed to continue using large amounts of capital for domestic support and export subsidies (Diaz-Bonilla & Robinson, 2000). Rich countries have the capacity and the resources to implement the variety of policies allowed under that legal text, while developing countries, although operating under the same legal text, often lack the necessary financial resources.

Approximately one billion US dollars is spent every day on agricultural subsidies in developed countries (Diaz-Bonilla and Reca, 2001). Eighty per cent of these subsidies are paid to farmers in the European Union, the United States and Japan. Large shares of these subsidies are designed in such a way that

they cause expansions in food production and thus distort trade. These countries exacerbate the trade-distorting subsidies by imposing tariffs and non-tariff barriers to imports as well as subsidising exports. These subsidies create large and negative effects on the poor in developing countries, making it virtually impossible to develop a properly functioning and fair global food system. Disposal of surplus from the European Union and United States damages domestic markets in developing countries and impacts on the rural poor. Increasing tariff rates for increasing levels of processing of food commodities, have run counter to the efforts of developing countries to add value and expand employment via post-harvest activities.

The combination of domestic support, market protection and export subsidies in developed countries has reduced agricultural market opportunities for developing countries, including unfair competition from subsidised goods from rich countries in the domestic markets of developing countries. This is especially important for the poor countries where over two-thirds of the population live in rural areas, agriculture generates about a quarter of the GDP and a substantial percentage of employment and exports depend on agriculture.

The view of the developing countries has been that trade liberalisation is one of the major obstacles to ending hunger in developing countries. The main complaint of the developing world has been that when it comes to agricultural trade, developed countries preach liberalisation, but practise protectionism. The Agreement on Agriculture was premised on the assumption that domestic food security is best achieved through promoting liberalised trade, although food imports are contingent upon both foreign currency reserves and the reliability of the transportation network (Diaz-Bonilla, Pineiro & Thomas, 1999). Similarly, there are those who argue that if there is a crop failure, free trade will provide deficit nations with access to the global market. Certainly, it will for those with money. A simulation exercise done by a research institute in India concluded that no matter where crop failure is experienced, in either industrialised or developing countries,

the number of poor in the developing countries increases, because in developing countries there is not enough money to buy food from the international market. Therefore, even when rain fails in the north, hunger increases in the south. And of course, when it fails in the south, hunger increases there in any case. It is apparent that the system provides food only to those with the money to buy it (FAO, 1999c).

The Indian research institute further examined the effects of agricultural trade liberalisation under various scenarios such as free trade by the members of the Organisation for Economic Co-ordination and Development (OECD), free trade by developing countries and global free trade. One point to be emphasised from the results is that some countries gain and some lose. The results concluded that, in general, OECD countries gained because of trade liberalisation, whatever the scenario. Some developing countries gained under certain scenarios, but in general, the poorer countries lose. This is exacerbated by the fact that most developing countries are dominated by small producers and are very often the losers in trade liberalisation. Therefore, it cannot be given as a prescription that free trade is automatically good for all countries. Developing countries are hurt by terms-of-trade losses, other distortions and rigidities, and high food prices.

Another set of issues relates to sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS), as well as other technical, quality, and environmental standards (Diaz-Bonilla & Robinson, 2000). These measures can be, and have been, used as barriers to trade. Increasing levels of food safety result in higher food prices and rich consumers are prepared to pay a premium for even small increases in food safety and reduced risks. The food safety levels demanded by high-income countries today are quite different from those demanded by the same countries 50 to 100 years ago when incomes were lower and food occupied a larger share of a family's budget. The implications for this are that rich people, and high-income countries, are less likely to accept changes in the food system that involves even small risks. A global food-safety system may

impose levels of food safety preferred by the rich countries, at the expense of the poor countries for which food security then becomes unsustainable. Thus the question of who sets the standards is an important one. A misuse of food-safety standards to create new import barriers could have severe negative effects on countries attempting to export commodities such as fruits and vegetables, seafood, and various kinds of grains and vegetables.

Trade imbalances between North and South exacerbate food insecurity in developing countries (Diaz-Bonilla & Reca, 2001). A broader vision and a major challenge is how international trade can strengthen capacity and enable developing countries to achieve food security. A perspective articulated by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) at the NGO Forum at the 1996 summit sets out a model for achieving food security based on decentralisation and a break-up of the present concentration of global wealth and power (ODI, 1997). They raised concern around the role of trade and markets, the effects of trade liberalisation, particularly the lack of accountability of trans-national corporations operating within the global economy, and the effects of structural adjustment programmes on the poor and food-insecure. In contrast, many governments see market globalisation and liberalisation as largely positive for food security at a national level. They argue that trade reduces fluctuations in food consumption, relieves part of the burden of stockholding and promotes growth.

It is thus clear that trade agreements on the international stage are a major part of the solution to securing global food security. However, international commitment to fair trade agreements which allow developing countries to consolidate food security are only part of the solution. Another major component lies in underpinning sustainable livelihoods. This includes strategies for enhancing income diversification and the income-generating capacity of vulnerable groups in urban and rural areas.

Sustainable livelihoods to underpin food security

It is increasingly clear that the current global food system is unsustainable. Although food systems alone cannot account for current hunger and malnutrition, they do play a major role and improvements in the operation of these systems are essential for food security now, and in the future. Sustainability should refer not only to the management of natural resources but also to the well-being of people. A food system that contributes to poverty among farmers and farm-workers, low purchasing power among consumers, hunger, undernutrition in some and obesity in others is not sustainable even if natural resources are sustainably managed.

It is evident that increasing production is unlikely to change the face of global food security. This is epitomised in South Africa, which is defined as being nationally food secure in that it has enough food to feed its population – yet more than 40 percent of the population is believed to be food insecure. The experience of many South African households is of poverty, which is manifested in food insecurity, ill health and arduous work for low returns. More than 25 per cent of black children in South Africa are stunted because of poor nutrition and approximately 50 per cent of households experience hunger. A quarter of South Africans are destitute, earning less than R100 a month. About half the population lives in households where each person earns less than R400 a month. High unemployment, particularly in rural areas, means that many households cannot meet their daily food requirements. This clearly indicates that poverty is the principal cause of hunger and food insecurity. Put simply, poor people cannot find the means of getting enough food either through growing it or buying it. Reducing poverty should, therefore, go a long way towards reducing hunger. However, this is not the whole story. There is a need for a more explicit focus on food security within poverty-reduction programmes, to ensure that the benefits reach the poorest groups who are also the food-insecure.

Whilst international commitments and trade agreements are important, solving food security and furthering sustainable development begins with protecting and promoting the establishment of sustainable individual and household livelihoods. This emphasis has been recognised by the Vulnerability Assessment Committee of SADC's Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources unit, which stated in September 2002 that, 'looking further ahead, agricultural recovery during the upcoming 2002/03 cropping season will be critical to improve national and household food security in the countries already facing serious food shortages' (SADC FANR, 2002). Looking beyond the immediate crisis and the need to deliver food to enable people to survive and reconstruct their lives, policies and mechanisms are urgently required to promote growth and to create wealth in poor rural areas. As clearly articulated by Dorward and Kydd (2002), a detailed examination of the processes and immediate causes of food shortages must be complemented by underlying questions regarding the vulnerability of the rural economy to production shocks and the institutional capacity (of government, markets and other actors) to respond to and manage the effects of such shocks. Assessments of food security and wider human security issues in the region, require broader, conceptual analyses to address the causes of vulnerability (Vogel & Smith, 2002).

This is an acknowledgement that increasing food production on its own will not reduce hunger and poverty. As emphasised throughout this paper, it is important not to equate food security with food production or to conclude that hunger will be solved simply through increased investment in agriculture. In some areas, and for some vulnerable groups – for example, subsistence farmers in areas with few other opportunities – farming is a direct contributor to food security. However, for many poor consumers such as the urban poor, the rural landless and the destitute, agriculture contributes only indirectly. As hunger is closely interrelated with poverty, poverty-reduction strategies should enhance many aspects of food security. Poor rural and urban people need secure and

sustainable livelihoods, with adequate incomes and buffers against shocks. Poor nations need buoyant economies in order to provide jobs, acquire agricultural inputs and purchase food where necessary.

Conclusions

The identification of policy options for food security and livelihood protection must grasp the complex realities of the vulnerabilities, assets and capabilities of different groups. This implies building on the work of Sen in more pragmatic ways that allow for rapid conceptualisation and commitment, as well as improving understanding of the structural foundations that make some sections of society inherently more vulnerable than others. However, as Devereux (2000) concludes in his detailed analysis of famines in the twentieth century, if food insecurity, starvation and famines are to be eradicated completely, an 'anti-famine contract' must be established at the global level, and it must be enforced, if necessary by 'duty-bearers' from beyond the national state:

> It is the urgent responsibility of the present generation of national and international policymakers to translate one of the most remarkable achievements of the 20th century – the potential to guarantee food security, the right to food and freedom from hunger for all of the world's population – into a 21st century reality (2000: 29).

Thus, the enhancement of multiple livelihood strategies, coupled with genuine international trade reforms, would contribute significantly to securing global food security. The urgency of this responsibility was starkly portrayed in August 2002 when, as delegates to the WSSD gathered to debate agreements in Johannesburg, the real dimensions of the southern African food crisis were becoming more apparent. Since then the crisis has almost doubled in proportion from seven million affected to an estimated 15 million with no

prospects for a real reduction. It remains to be seen whether these policy frameworks, ostensibly founded on an understanding of poor people's livelihoods and commitments to restructuring international trade, will realise global food security.

Note

1 The United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to Food has recommended that the first step in a national food security strategy is to map the situation for different groups, taking into account a range of variables including occupation, gender, ethnicity, race and rural/urban location (ODI, 2001).

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