

Southern Africa: State Vulnerability and Food Insecurity

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Six countries in Southern Africa (Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique, Swaziland and Lesotho) are suffering a serious food crisis situation. Due to scarce rainfall last year the maize crop was the poorest in the last ten years. The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) forecasts that over 12 million people, at present in a food shortage situation, will die of starvation in the next few months if they do not receive the necessary aid. This discussion paper reviews the causes and responses to this food insecurity crisis affecting several States.

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) has warned over the last few months of the humanitarian crisis looming in Southern Africa. It has been forecast that 12 million people will die victims of critical malnutrition if action is not taken fast. The WFP has stated that it needs US \$ 77 million to feed nine million starving people in Lesotho, Swaziland, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe.¹ However, it faces a budget shortfall after the avalanche of crises caused by the tsumani in Asia, hurricanes in the US and Central America and food crises in Niger, Sudan and Ethiopia.

The combination of an unpredictable climate, seed and fertilizer shortages, as well as the deadly impact of chronic poverty and AIDS, means that Southern African countries have become a death trap for millions of people whose fate will be decided over the next few months. Malawi jumped into the headlines because imminent crisis, but its seriousness is comparable to the other six countries that are in a state of emergency. The annual hunger period in Malawi usually begins in December, reaching its worst point in January-February before the next harvest is collected in March-April, but this year it has started several months earlier and the harvest will not be ready until June 2006. Moreover, the increase in maize prices, combined with the severe impact of AIDS in the area, has brought the vulnerable population to the limit of survival. Next season's harvest usually marks the end of the annual hunger period, but on this occasion there are shortages - of seeds for planting, of fertilizer to ensure the crop's success and of human labour to carry out the work.

It is not the first time that these six African countries go through a similar situation and the causes, which are considered to be absolute, are in fact only the catalysing factors of a previous critical situation. The drought which has scourged these countries (a cyclical phenomenon for which preventive mechanisms could and should have been developed in order to guarantee food security)² collapses the fragile balance of States already affected by inadequate agricultural policies, corrupt elites, social inequality, the effects of AIDS, chronic poverty and a population unprotected by the State.

State fragility, rather than the severity of weather conditions, is what pushes the poorest communities to extreme situations such as that affecting 12 million people today. Very often fragility is the result of weak or dictatorial governments which prevent the population from having free access to food, or else it is caused by unsuccessful post-conflict management. Therefore, in Mozambique, the inequality between rural and urban communities is the reason why families in rural areas are extremely vulnerable to the drought and cyclical flooding suffered by the country. Given that the extreme weather conditions the area is subject to are foreseeable, the cause of the food crisis cannot be attributed to nature but instead to the distribution of resources and the use of investment for development.³

¹ "Southern Africa's children face a new year of hunger", Press release, PMA, Johannesburg, 22 December 2005. <http://www.wfp.org/english/?ModuleID=137&Key=1972>

² *Food security* is defined as "access by all people at all times to enough food for an active and healthy life." (World Bank); "Food security means that all people, at all times, have access to enough (quantity), nutritious (quality), safe, personally acceptable and culturally appropriate foods." (FAO)

³ See: Megan Burke, *Mozambique: ¿Hasta qué punto es un éxito?*, FRIDE, Discussion Paper, September 2005, <http://www.fride.org/File/ViewLinkFile.aspx?FileId=752>

State vulnerability

The causes of this vulnerability can be identified within the framework of approximately 50 postcolonial states that are classified as institutionally fragile within the international system. Because of their leaders' incapacity or lack of political will, together with structural weaknesses, and the lack of consensus and democratic practice, these are States which do not protect or safeguard the security, rights or access to goods for the majority of their citizens.⁴ Many of these countries are in Africa and suffer from food insecurity. Some reports have described the countries affected by this type of insecurity, and specifically by famines, as a subcategory of the so-called Fragile States.⁵

These States have deficient systems which are totally or partially incapable of facing up to external impacts. All their capacity is taken up by solving their own crises caused by their systems' inadequacy and shortcomings. In other cases, there is scarce political will to deal with adversities, such as this year's drought, that only affect the well-being of poorer communities. These States' vulnerability, which can be defined as their incapacity to deal with risks, threats and other problems, places them in fragile conditions which are detrimental for the poorest population. Several independent studies and some governments (the United Kingdom, Germany, Holland and Canada, among others) consider this category of States as essentially in need of being cared for through cooperation, humanitarian aid and peace building programmes in order to maintain regional and international security.⁶

Food insecurity is only one way of expressing the context in which approximately 870 million people live in the world, (around 14% of the world's population.)⁷ These people are victims of all sorts of insecurity situations: political, physical, health, economic, cultural, environmental and food. Extreme social inequality creates a climate favouring violence and social destructuring that ends up leading these fragile States to the verge of collapse. The analysis of these States' shortcomings as well as proposals for development strategies which would reduce their vulnerability should therefore be considered essential measures for maintaining and achieving security in the affected areas. If not, medium term development plans such as the Millennium Development Goals for 2015, or the recommendations by the United Kingdom's Commission for Africa, will not have any chance of becoming reality.⁸

The causes that can lead institutionally weak States to such a vulnerable situation are diverse: inadequate agricultural policies, dysfunctional market regulation systems for maintaining accessible prices for the population, mistaken post-conflict and/or development policies carried out by external agents, an inferior level of economic integration in the world market, corrupt elites and the impact of AIDS in these communities are some of the aggravating factors and are even the causes, to a large extent, of the extreme fragility of these States. On the other hand, the colonial legacy and neoliberal policies implemented over the last twenty years by international credit organisations and local elites are, undoubtedly, also causes of the instability suffered by these countries.⁹

The scope of these causes is interdisciplinary and in order to design the norms which would guarantee the right to food, within the framework of sustainable development,

⁴ See: Susan Woodward, *Fragile States: Exploring the Concept*, FRIDE, Discussion Paper, December 2005, <http://www.fride.org/File/ViewLinkFile.aspx?FileId=850>

⁵ *Synthesis Report on the Famine Forum*, FANTA Project (Food And Nutrition Technical Assistance), May 2004, http://www.fantaproject.org/downloads/pdfs/FamineForum_2004.pdf

⁶ See, for example: *Why we need to work more effectively on fragile states*, DFID, January 2005. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTLICUS/64137341-1094571451760/20356978/DFID%20Strategy.pdf>

⁷ Tobias Debiel, *What can be done with fragile states? Options for development policy and beyond*, Expert Opinion, Bertelsmann Stiftung, Experts Forum "Precarious Statehood and International Order" 20-21 October 2005, Berlin.

⁸ Commission for Africa: "Our common interest": <http://www.commissionforafrica.org/>

⁹ See, for example, regarding Africa: Alex Thomson, *An Introduction to African Politics*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2000.

research must be carried out from many points of view; social, economic, anthropological, ethical, legal and political.¹⁰

However, there are many significant causes that could be prevented given the evidence of their causal relationship with countries that suffer food insecurity frequently. Leaving aside explanations of famines as the result of divine will and going beyond the traditional interpretation of climatic catastrophes and overpopulation (or Malthusianism), which has been refuted by history, it is necessary to focus on political and economic reforms that would introduce favourable changes to this deep rooted and widespread problem.¹¹

Taking into account that death by starvation is essentially a political and economic phenomenon, that is to say, that politics and purchasing power decide who eats and who starves to death, the conclusion is that social inequality is the main cause of hunger and therefore the first problem that should be dealt with.¹² The solution is to combine development with democracy. That is to say, development as part of a process of "substantive expansion of freedom", which means that there must be a relationship between economic growth, the functioning of both state and non-state social institutions, and the formation and promotion of social ethics, as synthesized by Amartya Sen.¹³

Crisis background

The same situation, with similar figures and affecting the same countries, happened in spring 2002. Although scarce rainfall was considered the main factor that gave rise to the crisis, subsequent analysis revealed that, going beyond the drought, the crisis was due to human factors.¹⁴

One of them was the colonial legacy that implanted maize as the dominant crop in the area. Although it does have some advantages (it does not require much attention and the cobs protect the crop), it is a crop that depends to a large extent on soil fertility and therefore, in lands such as Malawi, it requires a sizeable investment in fertilizers which most farmers cannot pay for and the government does not provide. The result of this combination of factors was a very scarce harvest and total vulnerability in the face of unforeseeable weather conditions. This meant that farmers had to plant two or three times in one year, as the first crops were lost due to lack of rainfall. Others opted for selling their labour so as to be able to buy food given that, not even in good years, was one family's harvest enough to satisfy their food needs.

The 2001-2002 crisis cast doubt on the dysfunctions of the government food security systems in the area. By selling their labour instead of depending on their own crops, the rural population went from depending on the whims of the climate to depending on those of a very volatile market. Governments implemented market regulation systems to mitigate the population's vulnerability. These entailed maintaining accessible prices through imports and distributing one area's overproduction surplus, at subsidized prices, to other areas where there were shortages. But the local authorities were not able to run

¹⁰ See: Karlos Pérez de Armiño, "El derecho humano al alimento", en Bob Sutcliffe (Ed.), *El incendio frío: Hambre, Alimentación y Desarrollo*, Icaria, Barcelona, 1996.

¹¹ See: Frances Moore Lappé, Joseph Collins, Meter Rosset y Luis Esparza, *Doce mitos sobre el hambre: Un enfoque esperanzador para la agricultura y la alimentación del siglo XXI*, Icaria, Colección Antrazyt, Barcelona, 2005.

¹² It is important to differentiate between the concepts of *inequality* and *poverty*. Inequality "refers to the distribution of certain goods, especially money: some have more, others less, and the "distance" between them is the measure of their inequality." Poverty "means that one's basic needs are permanently or voluntarily unsatisfied". Poverty and inequality "have an empirical relationship but are logically and politically independent". Poverty, in short, "could be abolished without affecting inequality; the needs of all could be satisfied but the distance between those "above" and those "below" would be maintained". Quoted from José M. Tortosa, *La Pobreza Capitalista*, Tecnos, Madrid, 1993, p.27 and following. On the rise of inequality in the last few decades parallel with economic growth see James K. Galbraith, "A Perfect Crime", *Daedalus. Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Science*, Winter 2002, pp. 11.25. http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3671/is_200201/ai_n9075395

¹³ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, pp. 297-298. Also see: Amartya Sen, *El Valor de la Democracia*, El Viejo Topo, Barcelona, 2006.

¹⁴ *Geopolítica del Hambre. Hambre: ¿Quién es responsable?. Informe 2003-2004*, Acción contra el Hambre, Icaria Editorial, October 2004, Barcelona.

these programmes effectively and the population ended up at the mercy of speculation, which in turn raised prices until they were inaccessible for the majority.

The mismanagement of these programmes worsened the 2001-2002 crisis. In Malawi, the State sold most of its reserves to large national and international traders, just at the time when families were running out of stocks before the next harvest (this usually happens each year from December to March, except that year when the drought period started three months early). The resulting food shortage opened the way for the laws of supply and demand to operate freely. Prices soared and left the vast majority of the population without any possibility of buying food. In any case, behind this mismanagement was the inadequacy of an open market model because, although liberal theories assure us that the market would prevent famine because demand would attract food imports, it is essential to establish the radical difference between the concepts of demand and need.¹⁵ The poor, by not having enough money to buy, may not generate the demand the market needs, despite their real need. The situation is happening again in the 2005-2006 crisis and the international community does not seem to have learnt the lesson from previous years.

Causes and responses I

- ***Climate change and geographical determinism***

There are many approaches to tackling the extreme inequality which is reinforced by the current economic system. From the point of view of climate change, fragile States obviously bear the brunt as they lack the necessary infrastructure to deal with natural disasters: their economies and infrastructure are less diverse and so weak that a catastrophe is capable of destroying the country's whole development process. The trend is not promising as natural disasters are becoming more frequent, more devastating and more expensive.¹⁶

In Southern Africa, the area currently suffering from the drought that is causing this present food crisis, has always been affected by droughts and by yearly flooding because of its geographical situation. However, global warming is worsening the effects of these extreme climate disasters.

Therefore, climate change affects the food crises of this African region on two fronts: on the one hand, lack of rain in the area destroys the crops, and on the other, tropical storms, hurricanes and flooding in other parts of the planet mean that international aid funds are redirected to more media-exposed disaster areas.

International response to climate change has taken the form of two legal instruments: the "United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change" and the "Kyoto protocol". The latter, signed by 156 countries, stipulates that the signatory countries should reduce their polluting gas emissions during the period 2008-2012 by 5,2% compared to 1990. However, there is severe criticism ranging from the loophole left open for the sale of CO2 emissions between countries that do not reach the maximum level permitted and those which buy the surplus of emissions, to the fact that countries such as the US, the biggest producer of the greenhouse effect, and Australia have not signed the Protocol nor do they recognise the seriousness of the problem.

- ***International Market Integration***

The level of economic market integration has direct repercussions in creating some or all of the existing forms of insecurity caused by lack of development. Africa, which only has a 2% participation in international markets, is the continent with the greatest number of Fragile States in the world. However, in order to improve development through international market integration, not only will it be necessary to undertake internal

¹⁵ Sutcliffe, *El incendio frío: Hambre, Alimentación y Desarrollo*, 1996.

¹⁶ See: *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2005: Eradicating world hunger- key to achieving the Millennium Development Goals*, FAO, Rome, 2005.

structural changes in these African countries, but also changes will have to be made in the international financial system.

Despite the fact that the importance of access to world markets is today taken for granted, as revealed by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) meetings, the method for gaining access, and the type of market system capable of accruing benefits for all, are still issues under debate.

Looking at the externally imposed obstacles, agricultural subsidies in industrialised countries make it enormously difficult for agricultural products from developing countries to reach the market. This issue was dealt with at the last WTO summit in Hong Kong. Currently, the situation is very different to that presented in the declarations of international goodwill regarding equitable market integration for developing countries given that these countries are totally dependent on Northern markets today. Seen from the point of view of food security, survival of the poor depends on the demand of the well-off because of world wealth distribution. Likewise, the distribution of land, a fundamental element in the sharing out of the means of living and consequently of food, is subordinate to the demand for vast extensions of land needed for cattle and managed by multinationals. This means that farmers are left without land and thus end up falling into the poverty trap.

The EU acknowledges that the need exists to "diversify production to achieve greater flexibility in the international market which would subsequently facilitate integration in international dealings". Thus, the new "European Union Strategy for Africa"¹⁷ emphasises this need, referring also to the EU's role in encouraging this trend, given that it is Africa's most important trading partner.

Up until now, many sub-Saharan countries have not varied their exports and at present they usually consist of a reduced number of unprocessed raw materials. The immediate result of this is that sub-Saharan Africa's participation in international markets has fallen from 3% in 1950 to 2% today.

EU Strategy for Africa also maintains the importance of "defending and promoting trade as a means of development" as it can generate greater benefits than aid. Obviously, if the EU took measures such as the reduction of its tariffs, which would enable developing countries to plan reforms for their own benefit, this would imply a huge step forward towards achieving the Millennium Goals.

- ***International financing shortfall***

The United Nations reports that it is having difficulties in collecting funds from an international community that has been saturated by the avalanche of natural disasters towards the end of 2005. Donors who react to United Nations emergency calls tend to do so late and their funds are usually aimed at emergency humanitarian aid rather than long-term development programmes.

The WFP, furthermore, has suffered a significant shortfall in funds affecting their food crisis programmes after the barrage of emergencies such as the tsunami in Asia, hurricanes in the US and Caribbean and food crises in Niger, Sudan and Ethiopia. Therefore, when medium and long-term development mechanisms do not work, having to forgo the necessary resources for last-minute humanitarian aid can lead to millions of deaths.

In recent statements, the WFP has reported that it urgently needs US\$ 77 million to aid Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe until the next harvest in June 2006. Lesotho and Swaziland will also receive aid in this same period in the context of an operation that

¹⁷ See: *Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee: EU Strategy for Africa: Towards a Euro-African Pact to Accelerate Africa's Development*, Brussels, 12 October 2005.

intends to reach nine million people in the region who are in a food insecurity situation. The WFP has been working since the 1st January 2005 against the triple threat of AIDS, food insecurity and weakened governance capacity in a programme that will last until December 2007, but it has a shortfall of 299 million dollars (including the 77 million dollars needed for assistance for Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe) to achieve the total of 621 million dollars estimated to be necessary to successfully implement this programme and to save more than 9 million lives.

The latest news refers to statements made by ex-president Bill Clinton, now the UN special envoy, who declared that the funds donated for reconstruction in the wake of the Tsunami that have not been used once work is done, will be redirected to African crises.¹⁸

Causes and responses II

- **Authoritarian and corrupt governments**

Hunger exists in many countries, apart from the reasons already mentioned, because of the incapacity of governments to ensure their citizens' access to food, one of the fragile State's common characteristics. In this way we can identify the authoritarian systems of many African States as one of the problems to be dealt within a plan to achieve the goal of food security.

According to the Nobel Prize Amartya Sen, the Indian economist from Oxford University, there is a very clear link between tyranny and hunger, democracy and prosperity. In democracies, writes Sen, famine does not exist: "authoritarian rulers, who rarely go hungry (or suffer economic hardships), have no incentive to take the necessary measures to prevent famines".¹⁹ In democracies, on the other hand, governments have a strong incentive to appear to be responsible for the most basic needs of the electorate: if they are not, the next time people vote they may well lose power. This reasoning can be used as a basis to explain the inefficient distribution of resources when the elite is corrupt and only worried about its own well-being instead of its citizens'.

In this respect, both the EU Strategy for Africa, and the British Government's Commission for Africa have detected the need to promote good governance through the development of peace and security and by supporting legitimate and effective governability. There is still a lot to do however, in order to move beyond simple good intentions.²⁰

Against corruption, on the other hand, there are numerous initiatives such as that undertaken by the Utstein Group (formed by Canada, Germany, Norway, Holland and the United Kingdom in 1999). Their project is to fight corruption both in their development aid programmes and in their associated countries as well as globally. Currently, there are 201 projects running in the geographic area of sub-Saharan Africa.²¹

¹⁸ See: *Unspent Tsunami Funds May Go to Africa Once Work is Done-Clinton*, REUTERS, 30 November 2005. On the tsunami and international aid see: <http://www.alnap.org/tec/>

¹⁹ Quoted in John Carlin, *Ocho razones por las que hay hambre en el mundo*, El País, 6 December 2004.

²⁰ On the limits and controversies surrounding the concept of "good governance" see Martin Doornbos, *Global Forces and State Restructuring*, Palgrave, Hampshire, 2006.

²¹ The Utstein Group (<http://www.u4.no/about/u4partnership.cfm>) was formed in 1999 after a meeting by the Ministers for International Development from Germany, Holland, Norway and the United Kingdom to coordinate their development aid policies. In 2004 Canada and Sweden joined the group. Of their projects in sub-Saharan Africa, six are being run in Lesotho, 25 in Malawi, 20 in Mozambique, 4 in Swaziland, 29 in Zambia and 12 in Zimbabwe.

- ***Inadequate agricultural policy***²²

Inadequate agricultural policy in the countries that today suffer this food crisis in Southern Africa is another of the problems directly affecting both internal security mechanisms and economic integration in the global market of these six States. Their limited range of exports or, more precisely intensive single-crop farming, increases vulnerability enormously by not offering an alternative plan in situations where the majority crop is destroyed. The historical legacy of these countries is not ideal when it comes to equitable integration in the international system. In this regard maize, practically the only crop in Southern African countries, was introduced by the Portuguese in the 17th century and it has remained the main food source for the majority of the population up until today. Government incapacity and the lack of willpower to change these policies can lead to consequences as dire as the current crisis.

- ***AIDS epidemic***

The importance of the relationship between AIDS and food security has become more evident as successive crises have afflicted Southern Africa, one of the areas in the world most affected by this epidemic. AIDS is a danger for food security because the loss of working age people affects families' capacity to purchase and produce food. Development capacity is also affected because, by striking many people in their prime, AIDS hinders knowledge and expertise from being passed on to subsequent generations.

Therefore, for many reasons, AIDS affects both social and economic aspects of the affected communities, which are essentially rural. On the one hand, one of the groups most affected by AIDS is women and female adolescents, and this has direct repercussions on food production as it is women who are responsible for working the land. Likewise, AIDS causes the disintegration of the family and leads to children working. They often end up taking over the work of the household head and forgoing their school education. Furthermore, the loss of agricultural labour force affects the care and maintenance of land which becomes wasteland and ends up being used for crops that require less work. On the other hand, family economies are enormously affected by sick members, both by the need to spend time caring for them and paying for medical care as well as, in the last instance, the time and money spent on funerals. Many families end up in ruin after suffering this process.

The World Health Organisation (WHO), in collaboration with UNAIDS, launched the initiative "Three by Five" which intended to provide three million people with antiretroviral (ART) treatment by the end of 2005. This goal was not reached and the last figures made public by the WHO date from June 2005 and mention one million people being treated. There is no doubt that this is a great step forward, as in June 2004 there were 600,000 fewer people under treatment. However, this initiative, which was first implemented in December 2003, has not reached even half the people intended for treatment by the anticipated deadline.²³ WHO calculates that in sub-Saharan Africa there are approximately 500,000 people who are receiving ART today, but this is an area with a high death rate and, despite representing only 10% of the world population, it has more than 60% of the world's AIDS victims.

Regarding donations to combat the illness, WHO stated last June that, despite being less than what it needed, it was good to know that US\$ 27,000 million have been made available, or promised, to combat HIV/AIDS on a world scale in the period 2005-2007.

The right to food

The right to food is one of the human rights most referred to in international documents. In recent years however, it has been one of the most frequently violated rights and its core content has not been precisely expressed. The right to food belongs to the so-called second-generation rights along with the right to a home, health and work. However,

²² See the point on "Integration in the international market" for international responses towards the inadequacy of agricultural policy.

²³ See: "3 by 5": <http://www.who.int/3by5/en/>

there is another right intrinsically related to it, which is the right to development. In this case development is interpreted as the progressive realisation of human rights. The guarantee that the right to food will be fulfilled is found therefore within the framework of development, but it requires the establishing of specific norms which would make its fulfilling mandatory. And this will only be possible by undertaking a global study that would analyse in depth the true causes of the problem

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) is the greatest authority on subjects related to hunger. It has made a noteworthy contribution to debate on the food situation in different parts of the world and to raising public awareness about the violation of the right to food. It holds the merit of formulating Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and also the formal proposal for its inclusion in the Covenant. Article 11 establishes the obligation of States to "take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, [of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions], recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international co-operation based on free consent." However, despite the noteworthy mission of highlighting these State responsibilities, many doubt whether the FAO really prevents famine in any effective way through its policies, over and beyond rhetorical statements.²⁴

International covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Article 11

1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international co-operation based on free consent.

2. The States Parties to the present Covenant, recognizing the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger, shall take, individually and through international co-operation, the measures, including specific programmes, which are needed:

(a) To improve methods of production, conservation and distribution of food by making full use of technical and scientific knowledge, by disseminating knowledge of the principles of nutrition and by developing or reforming agrarian systems in such a way as to achieve the most efficient development and utilization of natural resources;

(b) Taking into account the problems of both food-importing and food-exporting countries, to ensure an equitable distribution of world food supplies in relation to need.

²⁴ See the magazine *The Ecologist*, vol.21, July 2005, which accuses FAO policies of fostering famines.

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