

***Look, listen and learn: promoting the use of CSOs' evidence
in
policies for food security
An action research project in southern Africa***

Draft Concept Paper

**For discussion at inaugural project meeting,
South Africa, May 2005**

This initial project concept has been developed by the Southern African Regional Poverty Network¹; the Overseas Development Institute²; and the SADC Food and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network³. SARPN, ODI and FANRPAN are now seeking to validate and develop the project concept in collaboration with CSO networks in southern Africa working on food security.

The food security crisis in southern Africa

Strengthening the food security of poor and vulnerable people is an issue attracting increasing regional and international attention. The need to strengthen food security in southern Africa has been highlighted by the recent humanitarian crisis, and the Millenium Review process (<http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/>) is raising the profile of food security issues worldwide.

The Millenium Declaration adopted by world leaders in 2000 set out goals for contributing to a better and safer world in the 21st Century, including a specific target of halving, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger (<http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/goals/goals02.htm#goal1>).

But progress has been slow. Prevalence rates of underweight children have been falling in most regions of the world, but too slowly to achieve the 2015 target, and in some regions the proportion of hungry people continues to grow (<http://ddp-ext.worldbank.org/ext/MDG/target.do>). Progress in southern Africa (see Table 1) has lagged behind global trends, and hunger has actually increased in some countries in the region over the last decade.

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Table 1: Progress towards Hunger Millennium Development Goal in southern Africa

	Prevalence of child malnutrition (% U5 children below 2SD mean weight for age)			Prevalence of undernourishment (% population below recommended daily calorie intake) FAO		
	1990	1995	2001	1990	1995	2001
Lesotho	15.8	21.4	17.8	27.0	26.0	25.0
Malawi	27.6	29.9	25.4	49.0	39.0	33.0
Mozambique	–	27.0	–	69.0	62.0	53.0
Zambia	25.2	23.5	28.2	45.0	47.0	50.0
Zimbabwe	11.5	15.5	13.0	43.0	44.0	39.0

Source: Demographic and Health Surveys (www.measureddhs.com); FAO State of Food Insecurity in the World, 2003.

In southern Africa, better policies for increasing food availability, strengthening effective access to food, and improving food utilisation are now recognised as a priority. Accordingly, a number of countries (for example, Lesotho, Malawi and Mozambique) are conducting comprehensive reviews of national food and nutrition security policies, and a number of donors (for example, DFID, USAID and UN-WFP) are putting in place long-term funding to support policies and processes contributing to food security at national and regional levels.

However, there is increasing evidence that in southern Africa, poor progress with strengthening food security over the last two decades has been as much the result of weaknesses in policy processes as failures in food production and utilisation technologies (see, for example, Wiggins, 2005; Cromwell and Chintedza, 2005).

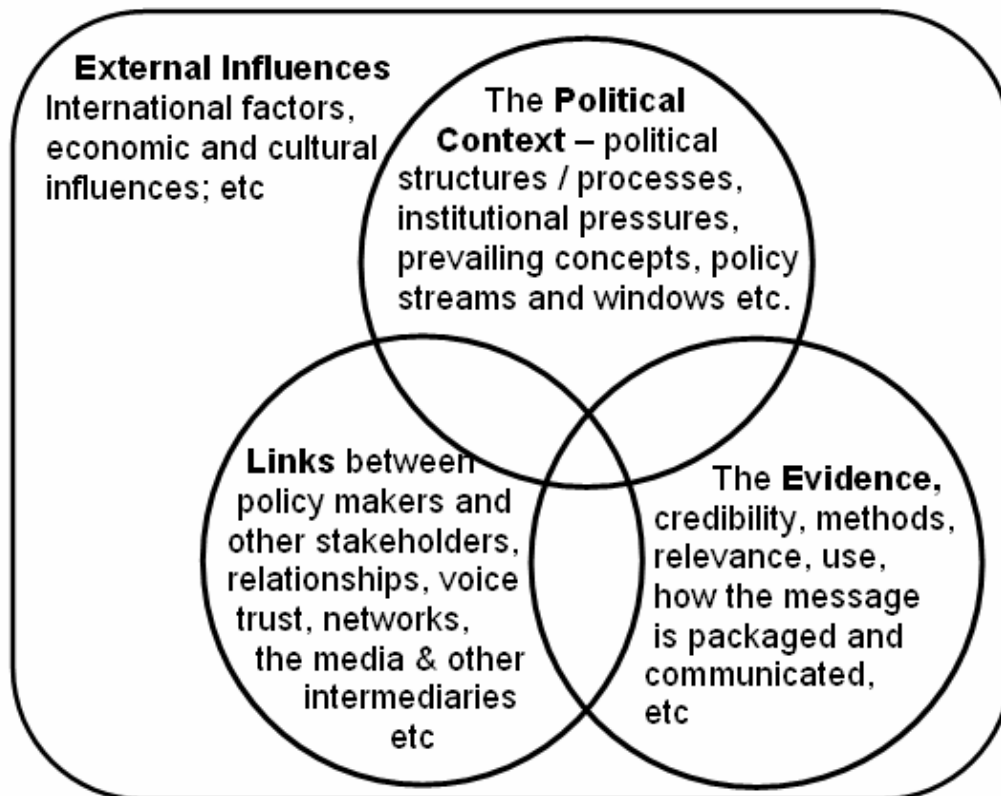
What are policy processes and how can CSOs get involved?

The policy process can be defined as a “purposive course of action followed by an actor or set of actors”⁴. It goes beyond documents or legislation to include activities on the ground relating to agenda setting, policy formulation, decision-making, policy implementation, and policy evaluation. Civil society organisations (CSOs) have an important role to play in strengthening policy processes by working in the arena between the household, the private sector and the state to negotiate matters of public concern. CSOs include a wide range of institutions including non-governmental organisations, faith-based institutions, professional associations, farmer organisations, trade unions, networks, research institutes and think-tanks.

In particular, CSOs are in a unique position to present and promote the needs of poor and vulnerable people, whose voices may not otherwise be heard effectively in the policy process. But how best this evidence can be presented is determined by the political context, by the nature of links between policy makers and other stakeholders, as well as by external influences (see Figure 1 below).

⁴ This and the following definitions are taken from RAPID’s CSO Partnership Programme: Key Terms and Definitions (<http://www.odi.org.uk/RAPID/ppa/Terms.html>).

Figure 1. The RAPID framework: evidence-policy links



Source: ODI Research and Policy in Development project (www.odi.org.uk/rapid)

Using evidence to influence policy 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.

Emerging international evidence suggests that political context seems to be the most important influence on the extent policy making is evidence based, and it can best be influenced by provision of better evidence and better links (Court and Young, 2003). Evidence is more likely to contribute to policy if:

- 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;
- the evidence is credible and convincing, provides practical solutions to current policy problems, and is packaged to attract policy-makers’ interest;
- researchers and policy makers share common networks, trust each other, honestly and openly represent the interests of all stakeholders and communicate effectively.

Key issues in terms of the nature of evidence and its policy influence are:

- Quantity of evidence: is there enough to create a “tipping point”?
- Quality of evidence: high quality evidence, be it moral, anecdotal or quantitative, keeps radical ideas on the table
- Relevance of evidence for policy: how timely, topical, operational is it?
- Credibility of evidence, including considerations of objectivity of sources; extent of contestation; generalisability (is there extensive information or just selective case studies?)
- How well the evidence is communicated to policy makers: good evidence will not have much policy influence unless it is well communicated.

Project objectives

Not enough is known about the context, evidence and links in policy processes for food security in southern Africa. This project – which is intended to be a collaboration between CSO networks working on food security in southern Africa - is aimed at developing understanding in this area, to test the impact of different approaches, and to disseminate lessons on both context and process, at national, regional and international level.

The project is intended to engage with a range of development partners at national and regional level in southern Africa to:

- promote the contribution of civil society organisations to the debate within southern Africa on food security policy;
- promote the voice of Southern Africa civil society organisations in the international debate on food security policy;
- publicise within the region and internationally the policy and practice lessons learnt;
- disseminate within the region relevant evidence and policy lessons from civil society organisations elsewhere in the world.

Project approach

Using the standard definition of food security:

‘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’⁵

⁵ www.fao.org/WAICENT/FAOINFO/ECONOMIC/ESA/fs_en.htm

the project recognises that all three basic components of food security are important:⁶

- **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 entitlement 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.

Reliability is 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.

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 project proposes to use action research in various settings in southern Africa to develop understanding around:

- Lessons about **how CSO networks use evidence to influence policy** (using the RAPID framework, see Figure 1 above)
- Lessons about **how CSO networks relate to their downstream and upstream partners** (exploring the applicability and usefulness of Partnership Principles)
- Lessons about **food security policy priorities for poor and vulnerable people in southern Africa.**

Activities - Stage 1 Planning (Jan – May 2005)

1. prepare and circulate draft **concept paper** (10 pp) (**in advance of inaugural project meeting**)
2. **inaugural project workshop** with CSO networks interested in collaborating, and other key stakeholders, to discuss and agree joint project concept. Possible timetable outlined in Annex 1 (**May 2005**).

⁶ www.ifad.org/gender/thematic/rural/rural_2.htm

Activities - Stage 2 Regional activities (May – October 2005)

Potential activities – subject to discussion and agreement at the inaugural project meeting – include:

1. prepare and circulate **Project Alerts** (1-2 pp, see Annex 2 for suggested topics) to raise awareness of issue and generate interest in project (**May – August 2005**);
2. one day **donor and inter governmental meeting**. Chatham House rules. How donors and inter governmental organisations see food security policy process in the region and internationally; their perceived role in policy process regionally and internationally; evidence they value from CSOs. Possible presenting organisations: DFID RHVP, USAID, WFP, EU, NEPAD, SADC Ag, AU. Audience: open and including CSO networks. To gather information on donor and inter-governmental organisations perspective, which has been largely missing to date, and to raise awareness of issue and generate interest in project (**June/July 2005**)
3. 4 short **case study papers** (20 pp) from a representative national CSO network in selected countries (e.g. Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia) and a regional CSO network, summarising CSO experience with engagement in national, regional (and international if applicable) food security policy processes. Perceived functioning of food security policy process, perceived role of CSOs in it, successes and failures, i.e. testing, amplifying SWOT conducted at inaugural project meeting. To stimulate cross-country exchange on experiences and collective lesson-learning at regional workshop (see below). With FANRPAN national nodes in the three selected countries also participating in case study preparation. And FANRPAN producing a case study of regional-level processes (by **end August 2005**)
4. 4 Project Alerts summarising above country and regional papers (by **end September 2005**)
5. High profile **regional workshop (October 2005)**: **Participants**: inter-governmental organisations, national government representatives, national CSO networks, regional CSO networks, international CSOs present in southern Africa, researchers/evidence-gatherers, donors. **Objective**: forum for all those concerned to discuss how more and better evidence and links can contribute to getting poor southern Africans' voices better heard in policy processes for food security within the region and internationally [country papers as a resource]. From which to generate roles and communications strategy for Stage 3 international action, with national, regional and international participants. Major conclusions could be disseminated in workshop CD-Rom and summarised in a Project Alert.

Activities – Stage 3 International action (October 2005 – March 2006)

1. Stage 3 activities could consist of various project stakeholders disseminating a range of different types of **information products** in different fora (national, regional, international). Details will be determined at Stage 2 regional workshop, but might include a Project Alert on workshop conclusions; a CD of workshop outputs; material on SARPN website [Some will be self-funded by project partners, with project funds concentrating on synthesising policy and practice lessons learnt] (**October 2005 – March 2006**).
2. **After Action Review** meeting of project partners and lessons learnt report (**April 2006**): what went well, didn't go so well, what would we do differently next time (lessons re: evidence, links and partnership). Combined with or complemented by **Peer Review** by independent professional peers of project implementation and achievement of objectives. Neither of these activities need consume a lot of time, eg AAR can be as short as half-day. Both will refer to the results of the monitoring and evaluation conducted during the project life that will have been agreed during the Inaugural Project Workshop.
3. Dissemination of final **Project Alert** on policy and practice lessons learnt (**April 2006**).

Project Outputs

The range of policy and practice outputs produced by the project (described above) will contribute to achieving the following outputs:

1. Understanding of policy processes relating to food security regionally and internationally increased amongst CSO networks and other development partners in southern Africa (through project's collaborative action research, meetings, and Project Alerts)
2. Generalisable lessons about the role of CSO networks in using evidence to contribute to pro-poor policy processes disseminated internationally (through Project Alerts and web alerts)
3. The voice of southern Africa poor people promoted in the international debate on food security policy (through selected dissemination activities by regional CSO networks)

Resources

ODI's Civil Society Partnership Programme has made a conditional offer of approximately UKP 42,000.

SARPN and FANRPAN will make additional contributions to the total project cost in terms of funding participation in the Stage 1 inaugural project meeting and funding dissemination of Stage 3 information products.

SARPN's funding partner, Australian Aid has committed funding for the Stage 2 regional workshop.

The project will also benefit from the existing high quality website maintained by SARPN (<http://www.sarpn.org.za/>) as part of its information exchange activities. All project outputs will be mounted in a dedicated area of the SARPN website, which will serve as the central information centre for the project.

References

Court, J and J Young (2003) 'Bridging research and policy: insights from 50 case studies' *ODI Working Paper* No. 213
http://www.odi.org.uk/publications/working_papers/wp213.pdf

Cromwell, E and A Chintedza (2005, forthcoming) 'Neopatrimonialism and policy processes: lessons from the southern African food crisis' *IDS Bulletin* Vol. 36, No.2

FAO (2003) *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2003*
<ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/006/j0083e/j0083e00.pdf>

Wiggins, S (2005) 'Southern Africa's food and humanitarian crisis of 2001–04: causes and lessons' Discussion Paper, Agricultural Economic Society Annual Conference, Nottingham, April 4 to 6 2005.

Annex 1 : Inaugural project meeting: suggested timetable

08.00 – 08.30	Welcome, introduction to meeting, self-introductions
08.30 – 09.30	<p>Roundtable discussion of key food security policy issues in southern Africa</p> <p>This session to build consensus around key food security policy issues in southern Africa</p>
09.30 – 10.45	<p>Roundtable discussion of policy process issues in food security in southern Africa</p> <p>This session to identify key food security policy processes in southern Africa that will be addressed by the project.</p>
11.00 – 13.00	<p>Context, evidence and links in food security policy processes in southern Africa</p> <p>This session to identify context, evidence and key players in priority food security policy processes in southern Africa.</p>
14.00 – 18.00	<p>Food security policy processes in southern Africa: stakeholder analysis, force field analysis and SWOTs (group work)</p> <p>These sessions will build on the morning's work which identified the key food security policy processes in southern Africa to be addressed within the project.</p> <p>Stakeholder analysis will deepen understanding of the actors involved and their relative influence on the different stages of key policy processes.</p> <p>Force field analysis will then look at the forces for and against change in the key policy processes.</p> <p>SWOT analysis will then open the space to discuss CSOs' capacities bring about these changes and enable better understanding of what can be taken forward within the project work plan. This session should discuss the kinds of evidence and tools CSOs already use, which work best, what others could be tried, and comparative advantages of different CSOs.</p>

Annex 2: Project Alerts

The project could produce a series of attractively formatted and easily readable 1-2 page *Project Alerts* aimed at increasing awareness amongst development partners of both policy processes relating to food security regionally and internationally and their implications for southern Africa, and of this project, its aims and outputs. Topics should span the range of context, evidence and links. All Project Alerts would be mounted on the SARPN website in an area dedicated to this project.

Suggested topics include:

1. **Project summary:** project background, draft context-evidence-links analysis, project objectives, target group, activities
2. **Context, evidence and links in pro-poor policy processes:** a summary of current international understanding relating to the use of evidence by CSOs in pro-poor policy processes
3. **The Millenium Development Goals review process,** and other current international policy processes affecting food security
4. Current **policy processes in southern Africa affecting food security** (based on the project's proposed donor/inter-governmental organisation ½ day meeting)
5. **The state of hunger and food insecurity:** cause and effect in southern Africa compared with global trends, based on Forum for Food Security outputs
6. **Country case studies** (1 Project Alert for each): summaries of Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia project case studies.
7. **Regional workshop:** summary of key conclusions.
8. **Project conclusions:** summary of key conclusions, derived from After Action Review.