



SAIIA REPORTS

Report number 32

Blame the Rulers, Not the Rain:

**Democracy and Food Security
in Zambia and Zimbabwe**

Sushant Mukherjee

Reports

SAIIA ARCHIVES

DO NOT REMOVE

**Blame the Rulers, Not the Rain:
Democracy and Food Security
in Zambia and Zimbabwe**

Copyright © SAIIA, 2002

All rights reserved

THE SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

ISBN: 1-919969-03-9

SAIIA Report No. 32

Please note that all amounts are in US\$,
unless otherwise indicated.

SAIIA National Office Bearers

Fred Phaswana
Elisabeth Bradley • Moeletsi Mbeki
Brian Hawksworth • Alec Pienaar
Dr Greg Mills

Blame the Rulers, Not the Rain: Democracy and Food Security in Zambia and Zimbabwe

Sushant Mukherjee¹

Introduction

No famine has ever taken place in the history of the world in a functioning democracy...Authoritarian rulers, who are themselves rarely affected by famines, tend to lack the incentive to take timely preventive measures. Democratic governments, in contrast, have to win elections and face public criticism, and have strong incentives to undertake measures to avert famines.²

Amartya Sen, Development as Freedom.

Nobel prize-winning economist Amartya Sen has argued that democratic institutions such as a vibrant opposition party and a genuinely free press are essential components of a country's campaign to achieve food security for its people. It is no coincidence, he observes, that the countries 'leading the "famine league" in the world today are North Korea and Sudan — both eminent examples of dictatorial rule'.³ The causal link he proposes between democratic institutions and famine prevention applies not only to prosperous democracies in the western world, but equally to functioning democracies in the developing world, such as India and Botswana.

One of Sen's favourite examples is that India has not had a famine since the Great Bengal Famine of 1943, which occurred four years before it gained independence from colonial rule and became the

¹ SUSHANT MUKHERJEE is an MA Candidate, International Relations, Yale University.

² Sen A, *Development as Freedom*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, p.16.

³ *Ibid.*, p.17.

world's largest democracy. In contrast, the authoritarian Communist regime in China presided over what is widely regarded as the world's worst famine in the 20th century, lasting from 1958–61, during which up to 30 million people are estimated to have lost their lives. Tellingly, this famine occurred when all the standard development indicators, such as average life expectancy and adult literacy rates, were far higher for China than for India.

Sen's 'democracy prevents famine' hypothesis acquires a renewed relevance today, as a famine threatens to engulf the Southern African region in the coming months. Of the six countries affected — Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe — five are so-called democracies (Swaziland is Africa's last absolute monarchy). However, the current crisis raises serious questions about the strength of their democratic institutions and their ability to provide a basic level of food security for their people. In this study, I shall examine two of the worst-affected countries, Zambia and Zimbabwe, to illustrate that the Sen thesis linking democracy with food security has profound relevance in both cases. Systemic policy failures, often related to the lack of a functioning democracy, are largely responsible for the dramatic food shortages these countries face today, bad weather and drought notwithstanding.

The two countries present interesting contrasts in terms of agricultural and colonial history. For instance, Zambia gained independence from Britain in 1964, 16 years before Zimbabwe. Even during the colonial era, when it was known as Northern Rhodesia, Zambia had far fewer colonial settlers than Zimbabwe. As a result, the country has never had the land redistribution headaches of its neighbour to the south; but neither did it inherit a well-developed large-scale commercial farming sector, as Zimbabwe did at independence.

It is equally instructive to look at some of the striking parallels between the two neighbours. Most tellingly, both countries have recently completed multi-party elections, the results of which have been hotly disputed by political opponents and the international community. In Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe and his ruling Zanu-PF party won the March 2002 presidential elections under very questionable circumstances, with election observers reporting widespread voter coercion and intimidation of political opponents. Mugabe's principal adversary, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party leader Morgan Tsvangirai, as well as many other senior MDC members, have since been charged with treason. In Zambia three months earlier, the ruling Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD) party was narrowly returned to power under new president Levy Mwanawasa, in that country's third and most controversial multi-party election. International monitors and opposition party leaders cited grave inconsistencies between the results reported by the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) and those recorded by independent observers in the field. Mwanawasa has since lifted his predecessor Frederick Chiluba's immunity from prosecution, and the latter has been charged with numerous counts of corruption.

In both Zambia and Zimbabwe, it may be argued, democracy stands at a critical crossroads, and the path each country chooses will have profound implications for its struggle to achieve food security for its people.

The Crisis

The humanitarian crisis affecting Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique, Lesotho and Swaziland has been caused by a 'perfect storm' of natural and manmade disasters. Drought, flooding, failed government policies, and devastated economies are all to blame. All this is greatly exacerbated by the fact that the region suffers from chronic malnutrition, extreme poverty, and the world's highest prevalence of HIV/Aids.⁴

In seafaring terminology, a 'perfect storm' describes a storm so powerful that it occurs once in a century, if that. The problem with this characterisation of the impending humanitarian crisis in six Southern African states, is that, in Africa, so-called perfect storms of this nature seem to occur every few years. The famine-like conditions faced by up to 13 million people in Southern Africa is hardly a novel phenomenon.

Chronic malnourishment and starvation are everyday realities in much of the region, and the spectre of famine is never far away. Besides the six countries currently being cited by the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) as in need of emergency food aid, there are several others whose need for food is almost as pressing. Angola is emerging from 40 years of a vicious civil war that has ravaged the countryside and left three million people in immediate need of assistance in the form of food and medicines. In Namibia, at least 70,000 people in the northeast of the country are in urgent need of food aid after erratic rainfall and crop damage drastically reduced the harvest. Further afield, Uganda recently announced that food security in the north of the country has been seriously jeopardised due to incursions by rebel forces. In Ethiopia, the WFP has warned of a looming food crisis in the war-torn Afar and Oromiya regions. In

⁴ From a 5 July release from the United Nations World Food Programme, in a renewed appeal for donations from rich countries.

short, perfect storms seem to be occurring with disturbing regularity across the African continent, and show little sign of abating.

What is less clear is the issue of accountability. Certainly, everyone is adept at playing the blame game when it comes to development policy in Africa, but, as the current crisis so powerfully illustrates, the governments of the countries affected must start shouldering the bulk of the responsibility for these events. This paper will use Zambia and Zimbabwe as examples to support the argument that flawed government policies, themselves the result of a fundamental lack of good democratic governance, have been far more instrumental in causing the current crisis in Southern Africa than the vagaries of weather conditions.

Background

The first indications of the magnitude of the crisis came late in 2001, when it became clear that the winter harvest was going to fall far short of the amount required to meet the food needs of Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi. By early 2002, Lesotho, Mozambique and Swaziland had also been added to the list. Moreover, due to poor harvests in 2001, most of these countries were already facing cereal deficits, and simply did not have the stocks in reserve to offset the shortfall. As the crisis threatened to explode into a full-blown famine, the WFP and its sister UN agency, the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), conducted emergency crop and food supply assessments in all six countries to determine the extent of their needs and the most efficient means of delivering emergency food aid. The UN agencies concluded their assessments in May, and established that up to 12.8 million people were in danger of starving before next year's spring harvest. As many as 7.7 million are in immediate need of food, with the number expected to rise to approximately 11 million from September to November before peaking at 12.8 million

from December to March 2003. On 1 July, the WFP launched an appeal for \$507 million in funds for the purchase of close to one million metric tons of food, sufficient to feed 10.2 million people over the next following months. The balance would have to be provided by non-governmental organisations.

The WFP assessments cited different causes for the food shortages in each country.

- *Zimbabwe* has been the hardest-hit of the six countries, with an estimated 6.1 million people in need of food aid by December 2002. One of the immediate causes of the food shortage is the severe drought experienced by most parts of the country from January to April, Zimbabwe's longest dry spell in 20 years, leading the government to declare a state of disaster in April. However, the sheer magnitude of the food deficit — an estimated 1.5 million metric tons of cereal is required — can be attributed in large part to the short-sighted and irresponsible agricultural policies of the government of Robert Mugabe, whose land acquisition programme and monopoly over grain imports have fatally undermined the country's ability to feed itself.
- *Zambia* witnessed a combination of drought and erratic rainfall that dramatically reduced the cereal harvest for a second consecutive year, leaving about 2.3 million people in need of emergency food aid. A total of 174,383 metric tons of food is required. The newly installed president, Levy Mwanawasa, has cited the policies of his predecessor Frederick Chiluba as the reason for the food shortage.
- *Malawi's* food shortage has been fuelled by its worst crop failure in over 50 years, caused by a prolonged dry spell in early 2002 and subsequent flooding in several districts. The WFP estimates that up to 3.2 million people will require food aid. The situation has been gravely exacerbated by the government's decision between mid-

2000 and early 2001, to sell its entire strategic grain reserve of 167,000 metric tons after a bumper harvest in 1999.

- *Lesotho's* crop production has been drastically reduced by heavy rainfall, unseasonably early frost, and tornadoes. Even when weather conditions are favourable, only 13% of the mountainous country's land is arable, and heavy rain in October and November 2001 resulted in only 60% of arable land being planted for this year's harvest. Approximately 444,800 people will require emergency food aid in the next year.
- *Mozambique* experienced a prolonged drought in the southern and central parts of the country, resulting in a 60% drop in cereal output in those regions. Overall cereal production is actually 5% higher than last year, but the maize surplus of roughly 100,000 tons will probably be sent to Malawi instead of the drought-affected regions of Mozambique, due to prohibitive transport costs.
- *Swaziland* suffered a prolonged dry spell from December to February, which caused crop production to dip 18% below last year's sub-par harvest, and 60% below 2000-01 production levels. An estimated 144,000 people will need food aid over the next six months. Prices of wheat and maize have been steadily rising since October 2001, and will continue to rise due to increased competition for exports from South Africa and Mozambique.

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe has long been described as the bread-basket of Southern Africa. Since independence from British rule in 1980, the country has been a net exporter of grain, including maize, the country's staple food. The agricultural sector has always been crucial to overall economic performance, providing over 50% of the country's total jobs and about 20% of its gross domestic product. More important

perhaps, agriculture accounted for roughly 40% of Zimbabwe's foreign exchange earnings.

The collapse of the agricultural sector, therefore, has catastrophic implications for the long-term health of the Zimbabwean economy. Drought notwithstanding, Zimbabwe is the most obvious case of government mismanagement and policy failure resulting in an implosion of the country's agricultural infrastructure. This year's cereal output of 670,000 metric tons represented a whopping 57% decline from the previous year, and 67% less than 1999–00. The cereal deficit for the coming year, estimated at 1,869 million metric tons, of which maize requirements constitute 1,705 million tons, is almost triple the country's output.⁵

No amount of bad weather can explain the magnitude of the shortfall. As the following analysis shows, the ruling government must take full responsibility for the disaster. Its 'fast-track' land resettlement programme, as well as its decision to grant a monopoly on purchasing imports to the state-run Grain Marketing Board (GMB), have been instrumental in causing the famine-like conditions the country faces today. And yet, these and other policy failures are but symptoms of the disease. Since the sham elections held earlier this year, it is becoming increasingly clear that the government of Robert Mugabe has failed to achieve even a semblance of democratic accountability and good governance. Ultimately, it is this shortcoming, more than any other, that is the driving force behind the current crisis.

⁵ World Food Programme Emergency Food Assessment: Zimbabwe.
<http://www.wfp.org/index.asp?section=2>.

The land acquisition programme

At the time of independence, almost 40% of Zimbabwe's land, and much of its most fertile land, was occupied by large-scale commercial farms run by white farmers, who made up less than 1% of the total population. A land redistribution programme was launched following independence to provide indigenous Zimbabweans with access to land. Initial progress was slow, with the government adopting a 'willing buyer willing seller' approach similar to the one currently employed in South Africa. By 1998, only 3.67 million hectares of commercial farmland, amounting to less than 25% of total commercial farmland, had been acquired and resettled. In June 2000, the opposition party Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) won 57 out of 120 contested seats in the parliamentary elections, marking the first time Mugabe's Zanu-PF party had been threatened in the political arena. One month later, in an attempt to bolster flagging political support, Mugabe initiated a fast-track land resettlement programme, under which the government announced it would begin seizing farms without offering compensation to white farmers. According to the WFP, 5,069 out of a total of 6,000 commercial farms had been issued eviction notices by April 2002. In addition to its own land seizures, the government failed to take action to prevent informal violent land invasions led by veterans of the country's independence war.

As the findings of the WFP/FAO assessment show, it is becoming increasingly clear that the ill-conceived land reform policy has had a catastrophic effect on Zimbabwe's once healthy agricultural infrastructure, and left the country with little means to cope with food shortages. Most tellingly, the assessment found that the amount of land planted to cereals had actually increased by 9% from 2001, with the area planted to maize increasing by 14%. This increase was largely the result of expansion in the communal and resettled

areas. However, this slight increase in cultivated area was more than offset by a dramatic reduction in the area of maize planted by large-scale commercial farmers, which declined from 74,000 hectares in 2001 to approximately 62,000 hectares this year. While this represents a little over 4% of the total area planted to maize (about 1.4 million hectares), the large-scale commercial farms produce far greater yields than small-scale commercial farms or communal areas, typically in a ratio of 5:1. This year, for example, the average yield of maize in the smallholder sector is about 0.25 tons per hectare, compared to 2.4 tons per hectare in the large-scale commercial sector.⁶

However, the damage done by the government's fast-track land redistribution programme extends beyond cereal crop production. Cash crop yields have also been sharply reduced in the past year, due once again to upheaval and lack of incentives to plant in the large-scale commercial sector. Production of each of the country's three main cash crops — tobacco, cotton and soybeans — has sagged in the past year. Tobacco production dropped 9% to 174,000 tons in 2001–02, even as the area planted to tobacco remained roughly the same. The decline can be attributed to a decline of over 15% in tobacco acreage in the large-scale commercial farming sector, which accounts for over 90% of the country's tobacco production. Cotton production fell 30% to roughly 200,000 tons. Soya bean production was the hardest-hit, plunging more than 50% to approximately 83,000 tons. As is the case with tobacco, the bulk of soya bean crops (almost 90%) are produced by large-scale commercial farmers, and hence the disruption caused by forced land acquisitions has played a major role in the decline.

⁶ *Ibid.*

The shortfall in cash crops has an immediate and direct bearing on the food crisis, as they are the country's most important foreign exchange earners. Tobacco is particularly significant as the biggest source of foreign exchange, with exports, worth \$600 million in a good year, comprising about one-third of total foreign exchange earnings. With the economy on the verge of collapse and steadily declining cash crop production, the Zimbabwean government is finding it increasingly difficult to muster the foreign exchange reserves needed to import maize for its starving people. Matters have been made worse by the fact that tourism, another significant foreign currency earner, is steadily declining, due to the country's instability and economic fragility.

Lastly, the land reform programme has had a devastating impact on the livelihood and food security of commercial farm workers and their families, who make up roughly 13% of the country's population. The WFP estimates that up to 50% of these workers, amounting to approximately 715,000 people who are among the most vulnerable in the current crisis, have lost their jobs due to the disruption caused by the fast-track programme, .

The Grain Marketing Board Monopoly

In 1991, as part of its agreement to implement an International Monetary Fund structural adjustment programme, the Mugabe government ended the parastatal Grain Marketing Board's monopoly over the export and import of grain, aiming to improve efficiency in the allocation, production and delivery of grain, and give rural consumers greater access to surplus production through the market. The GMB was to establish fixed prices for its grain sales and purchases, and restraints on private marketing of grain were to be removed.

In August 2001, however, in the face of mounting pressure to intervene in the deteriorating food situation, the government re-established the GMB monopoly on moving grain across the country. The government's reasoning was that white commercial farmers were exaggerating the food shortage by deliberately hoarding surplus grain in an attempt to undermine the authority of the ruling party. In the months following, the government deployed troops to compel farmers to sell their stocks to the GMB at prices set by the state-run entity.

When the GMB's monopoly powers were restored, Zimbabwe's Commercial Farmers' Union (CFU) — representing approximately 4,500 farmers in the area — decried the measure as 'yet another disaster' for the commercial farming sector.⁷ Those within the CFU and the opposition MDC have argued that under the new policy, farmers no longer have an incentive to grow maize, because the GMB doesn't offer a fair price.

The measure's impact is likely to be even more far-reaching in that it potentially affects all of those threatened with starvation as the crisis worsens. The GMB, it is becoming clear, simply does not have the capacity to organise and facilitate the distribution of food aid in the great volumes that the country needs. According to the WFP assessment, the GMB has reported that it can distribute only 400–2,000 of the estimated 5,000 metric tons of maize required per day. Moreover, food aid alone will not be able to cover the deficit, and private sector imports will be crucial, the UN agency reported. However, such imports can only be made if the GMB monopoly is abandoned and government price controls are removed, so that grain prices reflect market costs.

⁷ *Business Day*, South Africa, 4 July 2001.

The above are examples of two of the most glaring policy failures of the Mugabe government. One played a key role in causing the crisis in the first place, and the other might fatally complicate its resolution. As discussed in the next section, the common theme that emerges between these examples and the overall deterioration of Zimbabwe's agricultural sector is that the more autocratic the government becomes, the more quickly the crisis worsens, and the greater the likelihood that food security for Zimbabweans will never be achieved.

The decline of democratic institutions

According to Sen, 'a free press and an active political opposition constitute the best early-warning system a country threatened by famines can have'.⁸ It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Zimbabwe's political leadership was completely blindsided by the magnitude of the food deficit facing its people. Until early 2002, government officials flatly denied the existence of a food shortfall, blaming the reports on false rumours spread by members of the MDC party, or illegal hoarding by commercial farmers. Any role the press or members of the opposition might conceivably have played in recognising the shortage at an early stage and assisting in relief efforts has been undermined by the repressive policies of the government.

The opposition

The MDC, for instance, has close ties with Zimbabwe's mostly white large-scale commercial farmers, and may have been better placed to observe and report the damage being done by the government's fast-track land reform programme. However, the government has

⁸ Sen A, *op. cit.*, p.181.

been quick to suppress attempts by the MDC to criticise government policy, particularly with respect to its land reform initiative. Moreover, the March 2002 election, though widely discredited, has given the Mugabe regime freer rein to crack down on the opposition. Barely a week after the election, MDC leader Tsvangirai was charged with treason, as was his shadow minister for lands and agriculture, Renson Gasela, for allegedly conspiring to assassinate Mugabe.

Any attempts by the MDC to raise the alarm about worsening food shortages have been dismissed by government officials, who as recently as early July continued to publicly blame the opposition for engineering the crisis. Agriculture Minister Joseph Made reportedly issued a statement dismissing a plea by the Bakers Association for Zimbabwe for the government to import wheat in the face of bread shortages, as more and more Zimbabweans turn from the staple maize meal to bread as an alternative source of food. Made denied there were shortages, and echoed police officials in claiming that the opposition was using the crisis as a means of generating political instability.

The media

If the prospects for an effective political opposition in Zimbabwe are discouraging, the outlook for an independent press is at least as bleak. In January 2002, Information Minister Jonathan Moyo began pushing through a restrictive new media law, the 'Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act'. The bill, which was signed into law just days after election results declared Mugabe the winner, requires all local reporters to obtain accreditation from a state-appointed panel. Under the bill, working without accreditation may be punishable by fines or imprisonment. The legislation further

bans foreign correspondents from working full-time in Zimbabwe, and restricts the right to report on certain government agencies.

One of the first victims of the new law is Andrew Meldrum, a Harare-based journalist for the British newspaper *The Guardian*. Meldrum was charged in May with publishing false information. He has since been acquitted, but the government attempted to deport him from the country anyway. On 16 July 2002, hours after his acquittal, he won a last-minute reprieve from the courts, and he will be allowed to remain in the country until the Supreme Court rules whether or not his expulsion from Zimbabwe is constitutional. The ultimate outcome of the Meldrum case is likely to have profound implications for the future of press freedom in the country.

Meanwhile, other journalists are also being harassed by government officials. The privately owned *Daily News* is one of the few independent newspapers in Zimbabwe, and has survived repeated attempts by the regime to close it down. In June 2002, as Mugabe gate-crashed the World Food Summit meeting in Rome, the paper accused his government of being directly responsible for the food crisis. 'The tragedy is that it is unwilling to see or acknowledge its authorship of the crisis,' the paper noted.⁹

Unfortunately, the *Daily News* is one of the few voices holding the ruling government accountable for the current crisis. No private radio or television stations remain in Zimbabwe. Many media outlets have either been co-opted by the government or, like the state-owned *Herald* newspaper, have become part of the government's propaganda machinery. To put in perspective the country's dismal record with respect to the rights of the press, one need only look at the Press Freedom Survey of 2002, released by the non-profit

⁹ World Press Review. <http://www.worldpress.org/Africa/646.cfm>.

organisation Freedom House. According to the survey's press freedom rankings, Zimbabwe is one of 61 countries (33%) in the 'Not Free' category. More tellingly, the country ranks below countries like Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Syria, whose governments rank among the most repressive in the world, and only marginally above the likes of North Korea, Iraq and Myanmar.¹⁰

Interestingly, when Sen first articulated his 'democracy prevents famine' thesis, he cited Zimbabwe in the early 1980s as one of the best examples of a relatively poor democracy achieving food security for its people. Some of his critics have since questioned the use of this example, arguing that Zimbabwe had barely achieved independence when it was hit by the droughts of the early 1980s. Sen, however, has maintained that, even though Zimbabwe was a fledgling democracy at the time, there was, for example, a sufficiently free press in the country, which helped enable it to provide food security even when food production plummeted by 38%.¹¹

Whether or not Zimbabwe ever was a bona fide democracy, it is not difficult to make the case that it is less a democracy now than at any other time in its past. Sen himself is the first to admit this, remarking in an interview with the *Observer* regarding the current food crisis,¹²

As a country like Zimbabwe ceases to be a functioning democracy, its earlier ability to avoid famine in very adverse food situations (for which Zimbabwe had an excellent record in the 1970s and 1980s) becomes weakened...A more authoritarian Zimbabwe is now facing considerable danger of famine.

¹⁰ *Annual Survey of Press Freedom, 2002*. Freedom House. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/pfs2002/pfs2002.pdf>.

¹¹ Sen A, *op. cit.*, p.179.

¹² Sen A, 'Why half the planet is hungry', *The Observer*, 16 June 2002.

In effect, if Sen was right, and Zimbabwe was able to successfully negotiate its last major food crisis in large part because of relatively robust democratic institutions, then it follows that the failure of those same institutions has drastically compromised its efforts this time around, with dire consequences for its people.

Zambia

Zambia is a more subtle example of flawed government policy playing a key role in undermining the food security of the people. Whereas Zimbabwe's mistakes in agricultural policymaking may be attributed to irresponsibility and blatant populism, Zambia's may be attributed to sheer neglect. While in Zimbabwe, agriculture has always commanded centre stage in debates concerning economic development, in Zambia, agriculture has rarely been thought of as the economic sector whose success is vital for overall economic growth. That distinction has traditionally been reserved for the copper industry.

Former president Kenneth Kaunda once made the famous remark that Zambia had been born 'with a copper spoon in its mouth'. Certainly, the country's copper mines have formed the cornerstone of its economy since its independence in 1964. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, exports of copper and cobalt accounted for the bulk of Zambia's foreign exchange earnings. As recently as 2000, copper and cobalt exports comprised about \$521 million of total exports of \$800 million. However, steadily declining copper prices in the last decade have dramatically reduced the productivity of the Zambian Consolidated Copper Mines. Copper production fell from 422,000 tons per year in 1990 to 260,000 tons in 2000. To make matters worse, the government's efforts to privatise the mining industry seem to be destined to failure, with global mining conglomerate Anglo

American pulling out of the Konkola Copper Mines (Zambia's biggest mining operation) after having bought a controlling stake in the mines in March 2000.

The copper mines are Zambia's largest employer and, with the Anglo American exit, Zambian officials may finally be realising that they are going to have to rely on another part of the economy to revive economic growth and alleviate the country's widespread poverty. Now, with the present crisis threatening the food security of almost a quarter of the country's population, the agricultural sector is finally getting the long overdue attention of bureaucrats and policymakers.

While the current crisis was certainly precipitated by widespread drought and erratic rainfall in successive years, it can be argued that a lack of commitment on the part of the state to building up agricultural infrastructure has contributed significantly to the seriousness of the crisis.

Next to Zimbabwe, Zambia is the country most seriously affected by the food security crisis. Maize production was sharply reduced by rainfall deficits of up to 50% in five of the country's nine provinces. Total maize output for 2002 is estimated at 606,000 tons, 24% lower than last year's meagre harvest, and 42% below 2000 levels. The WFP assessment estimates total grain import requirements for the upcoming year at approximately 626,000 tons, of which 351,000 tons will be supplied by commercial imports. The remaining deficit of 275,000 tons will have to be supplied by the government and international donors.

The government has already set aside about \$12 million to import roughly 50,000 tons of maize.¹³

Agricultural policy since independence

Adverse weather conditions clearly played an instrumental role in causing the present food crisis in Zambia, and policymakers are not as obviously to blame as they are in Zimbabwe. The Famine Early Warning System Network said, in a report issued on the 24 July, that the crisis was more manageable in Zambia than Zimbabwe because its food security problems 'are mostly the result of multiple years of drought, rather than policy and governance issues'. And yet, while this may be an accurate assessment of the immediate causes of the crisis, it overlooks the tendency in Zambia for political leaders and bureaucrats to underestimate, if not neglect, the potential of the agricultural sector and the significance of its role in the regional economy.

In Zambia, the development of agricultural infrastructure has never been a priority as it was in Zimbabwe. This is a legacy that dates back to the colonial era, during which Zambia saw far fewer colonial settlers than its neighbour. Those who came to Zambia were far more focused on its vast mineral wealth than on its agricultural resources. As a result, prior to independence, there was migration from rural to urban areas in response to the employment opportunities offered by the mining sector. However, the colonial government placed strict restrictions on migration flows to ensure that only the required amount of labour was available in urban areas. Upon independence in 1964 the new government removed these restrictions and urban migration increased significantly. Today, Zambia is one of the most urbanised countries in sub-

¹³ World Food Programme, *Emergency Food Assessment: Zambia*.

Saharan Africa, with close to 50% of its approximately 10 million people living in cities and towns. One of the most damaging effects of this trend has been the decrease in available labour in the rural areas, which in turn has led to a largely underdeveloped agricultural sector.

And yet, like neighbouring Zimbabwe, Zambia is endowed with abundant agricultural resources. The country has a vast landmass of about 75 million hectares (of which roughly 40–50% is potentially arable), adequate rainfall, and a plentiful supply of groundwater. (Zambia is divided into three agro-ecological regions, with average annual rainfall ranging from 600 mm to 1200 mm.) However, only a small fraction of the cultivable land has been exploited for crop production. According to the WFP assessment, total arable land allocated for crop production in 2001–02 amounted to a scant 1.5 million hectares. Moreover, of the country's estimated 423,000 hectares of irrigable land, less than 10% is currently under irrigation.¹⁴

Agriculture's contribution to foreign exchange earnings has dramatically increased over the last seven years to approximately 30%, but remains below average for the Southern African region. Not only is the commercial farming sector much smaller and less developed than that of Zimbabwe, but the country's agricultural output remains extremely vulnerable to weather shocks of the sort experienced in the months immediately preceding the current food crisis.

¹⁴ Southern African Regional Poverty Network, *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper: Zambia*. April 2002. http://www.sarpn.org.za/CountryPovertyPapers/Zambia/prsp_april2002/Index.php.

Clearly, a country blessed with the kinds of agricultural resources Zambia has at its disposal should be able to feed its people regardless of year-to-year variations in weather patterns. It should also derive a major portion of its foreign currency earnings from its agricultural exports. That this scenario has not materialised must be attributed in large part to significant policy shortcomings on the part of the ruling government, from the time of independence to the present day.

When Zambia gained independence in 1964, President Kenneth Kaunda and his United National Independence Party (UNIP) inherited one of Africa's most prosperous economies, and the first few years witnessed strong growth on the strength of a global demand for copper. In order to consolidate power, Kaunda declared Zambia a single-party state in 1972. However, the government's support base began to erode in the late 1970s as copper prices began to plunge, sending the Zambian economy into a tailspin from which it has never fully recovered. Meanwhile, the UNIP government had embarked on a programme of socialist economic reforms designed to give the government greater control over the economy. Retail firms, banks and the copper mines were nationalised. The government also adopted an interventionist approach in the agricultural sector through price subsidies, centralised delivery of inputs and extension services, and state control over agricultural marketing and distribution.

Most significantly, the Kaunda government heavily subsidised the production and consumption of maize, Zambia's staple food, as a way of cementing support among the rapidly growing urban electorate. Just as the overall economy had become overly reliant on copper mining, the agricultural sector became increasingly dependent on maize production. The government did little to encourage the production of crops that were more drought-resistant

than maize, and as a result, farmers became increasingly vulnerable to drought-like conditions. As the Southern African Regional Poverty Network Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (SARPN PRSP) report notes,¹⁵

because of the policy bias in favour of maize, infrastructure and service support in the agricultural sector discriminated against other equally rewarding activities in this sector targeted both at the domestic and external markets...Consequently, a badly distorted and lopsided agricultural sector emerged that was dominated by a single crop, maize, which was encouraged even in areas not suited to its production.

Ultimately, it was this policy shortcoming that was to prove the downfall of Kaunda and his UNIP government. As the economy continued to weaken, foreign donors began to pressure the government to cut back on its consumer subsidies, particularly those on maize, which in the late 1980s amounted to over 15% of total government revenues. However, the removal of subsidies on maize hit poor urban consumers hardest, and caused widespread urban rioting. Finally, in 1991, after rioters torched UNIP's old offices in Lusaka, and dissidents intensified a campaign for a return to multi-party democracy, it became clear to Kaunda that his days in power were numbered. In October 1991, Zambia held its first competitive national election since independence, which brought Frederick Chiluba and the reformist Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD) party to power.

The MMD's first steps towards reforming the agricultural sector were encouraging. Consumer subsidies on maize were phased out, and restrictions on exports and imports of agricultural commodities and inputs were relaxed. Tariffs on agricultural goods were lowered

¹⁵ SARPN, *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper: Zambia*.

or abolished, and plans were developed for the privatisation of state-run boards controlling agricultural marketing and distribution.

However, it soon became clear that these market-oriented reforms were created more at the behest of foreign donors and investors than as part of a broader and more coherent policy to revive the agricultural sector. The Chiluba government did not differ strikingly from the Kaunda government in its focus on placating urban consumers and continuing to emphasise copper production as the engine for future economic growth. The policies of the new regime did little to create price incentives for rural producers. For instance, the MMD's Food Reserve Agency (FRA), created in 1995 ostensibly to manage the strategic food reserve, imported such large quantities of grain to supply urban consumers that the imported food undermined prices for smallholders. Moreover, in 1997, the FRA took over the distribution of fertiliser on credit to smallhold farmers, which has rendered private sector fertiliser uncompetitive in many areas. Most fertiliser imports now go through the FRA distribution programme, under which certain private fertiliser distributors are chosen by the FRA and given monopolies for the allocation of fertiliser in provinces, thereby discouraging private firms from entering these markets.¹⁶

Significantly, poorly timed or insufficient access to government-distributed fertiliser has been cited as a key factor for the drastically reduced grain yields in parts of Zambia this year. The WFP assessment states,

¹⁶ Govereh J, *et al*, *Working Paper, Zambia Food Security Research Project*. Cited in 'False promise or false premise? Experience of food and input market reform in Eastern and Southern Africa'. <http://216.239.51.100/search?q=cache:TIPok9vx1k4C:www.wye.ic.ac.uk/AgEcon/ADU/eaeannc/jayne.pdf+fertiliser+imports+Zambia+fra+false+promises&hl=en&ie=UTF-8>.

Limited access to chemical fertilisers has been a constraining factor for small-scale farmers in the last 3–4 years...In most of the districts assessed in the Central, Southern, Western, and North-Western provinces, there were complaints of lack of timely access to good quality fertilisers...In many cases, these were not available until December or January, resulting in late plantings.

Other agricultural programme failures under the Chiluba government seem to suggest an ad hoc approach to agricultural policymaking, and a lack of commitment on the part of the country's leaders to a full-scale overhaul of the sector. Initial efforts at reform were complicated by the severe drought of 1992. In 1993, however, the government removed subsidies on maize transport, and allowed state-supported lending institutions to participate in maize marketing. However, the government's relationship with these lenders — such as the Credit Union and Savings Association (CUSA) — as well as its announcement of a floor price for purchasing maize, discouraged the private sector from entering the market.

In 1996, the government introduced the Agricultural Sector Investment Programme (ASIP) to revive growth in the sector, but the initiative has from the outset suffered from a lack of financial resources. The four-year budget for ASIP was \$350 million, of which barely half was actually disbursed over the period.¹⁷As recently as 17 June 2002, FAO's representative in Zambia, Richard Fuller, stated that ASIP had been an unequivocal failure, citing the lack of involvement of smallholder farmers and the mismanagement of funds as the principal causes. 'There's currently nothing on the ground that has a direct benefit to the farmer that was done under ASIP', he said.¹⁸

¹⁷ SARP, *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, op. cit.

¹⁸ 'Chiluba's ASIP was a total failure — FAO', *The Post*, Lusaka, 17 June 2002. <http://allafrica.com/stories/200206170261.html>.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the government was so ill-prepared to cope with the adverse weather conditions of the last two years, and the low-yield harvests they have caused. Interestingly, when news of a full-blown food crisis began to circulate both within the country and internationally, the political leadership of Zambia reacted in much the same manner to that of its notorious neighbour to the north — by blaming everyone but themselves. In October 2001, in the run-up to national elections, Chiluba accused Zambian millers of ‘conspiring’ against the government by hoarding stocks of maize in an effort to push prices up. A month later, as the price of maize continued to rise, the president blamed the food crisis on former members of his MMD party who had left to form the opposition Forum for Democracy and Development (FDD) party.

A new era of agricultural growth?

And yet, the current crippling food shortage notwithstanding, the outlook isn’t entirely bleak for Zambian agriculture. With the decline of the copper mines, the agricultural sector is the largest contributor to GDP at about 25%, and employs over 50% of the population. The last five years have seen some favourable trends in agricultural production, including an increase in the cultivation of cash crops and a shift away from maize production. Moreover, the new government under President Levy Mwanawasa seems committed to formulating a coherent, *long-term* policy framework for harnessing Zambia’s agricultural potential.

Cash crop production has only recently become a prominent feature of the Zambian agricultural sector. The removal of maize subsidies was probably a major factor in allowing farmers to consider growing other, more profitable, or more drought-resistant crops such as cotton, groundnuts, and cassava. According to the WFP report, the area planted to maize declined 43% between 1989 and 1999. During

the same period, the area planted to cotton increased by 65%, and the area for groundnuts grew by more than 100%. This trend reflects a positive move towards diversification. While maize will continue to be the country's staple food, the sector's over-reliance on its production may soon be a thing of the past. The increased production of these other crops has also driven growth in agricultural exports, which more than doubled from \$89 million to \$195 million in the 1995–99 period.

In addition, newly-elected president Levy Mwanawasa has taken several positive steps towards alleviating the food crisis, while also announcing several policy measures that, if successfully implemented, could have far-reaching implications for future growth. These include the replacement of the ineffective FRA with a new central marketing board, the Crop Marketing Authority (CMA), and the reintroduction of certain subsidies for agricultural inputs, such as pesticides and fertilisers, for smallholders.

Mwanawasa has made it clear that the difference between the FRA and the newly created CMA is that the latter will be more focused on managing the grain reserve, and will purchase grain only 'as a buyer of last resort'.¹⁹ His reinstatement of input subsidies will certainly raise eyebrows among foreign donors, but there are those within the new regime and outside who feel the government still has a limited role to play in this regard, particularly as the private sector has yet to make an impact in providing credit and marketing inputs to small farmers.

Whether or not these policy measures are successful depends in large part on their implementation. What is more important,

¹⁹ President Levy Mwanawasa, opening address to parliament, 22 February 2002. <http://www.aegis.com/news/re/2002/RE020230.html>.

however, is that perhaps for the first time since independence, agricultural policy in Zambia may be determined and informed by a carefully crafted broader policy, rather than by knee-jerk responses to food crises. Mwanawasa has certainly made it clear that agricultural growth will be his top priority while he is in office. In his opening address to parliament in February, Mwanawasa declared,²⁰

I see agriculture replacing mining as the engine for economic development...I am proposing a set of groundbreaking and innovative interventions to stimulate agricultural growth.

Decline of democratic institutions

If Zimbabwe's current predicament helps to illustrate the link Sen draws between the lack of democracy and famine, then a brief review of Zambia's political history certainly seems to strengthen that link. According to Sen's thesis, democratic governments must make famine prevention a policy priority, because if they don't, they will quickly find themselves removed from power. In this regard, there are some important lessons to be learnt from the Zambian political experience since independence.

The Kaunda presidency

Kenneth Kaunda, a schoolteacher-turned-activist against colonialism, became the country's first president upon independence in 1964. In 1972, in order to quell ethnic dissension, he established a one-party state, under which all parties except for his own, the UNIP party, were banned. Kaunda chose to continue holding elections to maintain the illusion of a functioning democracy, but these had no meaning, as there were no other viable

²⁰ *Ibid.*

candidates. As discussed earlier, Kaunda's socialist economic policies, such as the nationalisation of banks and the copper mines, spelled disaster for Zambia's economic growth, promoting as they did an over-reliance on a single commodity, copper. But it was the Kaunda government's utter neglect of the agricultural sector and its ill-advised subsidies on maize that ultimately proved its undoing. Agricultural policy with an eye to future growth was non-existent, and the maize subsidies were a blatantly populist policy with little basis in rational economic logic. By the time the government realised the subsidies were fiscally unsustainable, it was too late. The price of maize shot up, and there were no alternatives for people to turn to. In 1991, as riots spread across the country, particularly in urban areas, Kaunda called Zambia's first multi-party elections, and was defeated in a landslide.

The link Sen suggests between democracy and food security is certainly demonstrated here. It is hardly surprising that dramatic increases in the price of the country's staple food coincided with growing demands for a return to multi-party democracy. In effect, although maize subsidies were the catalyst that led to Kaunda's downfall, it may be argued that the seeds of his failure were planted with the introduction of a one-party state. This allowed economic decisions to be made by a handful of the political elite without any public scrutiny, so that when they attempted to extricate themselves from the mess they had created, the government inevitably collapsed.

The Chiluba presidency

When Frederick Chiluba and the MMD swept to power in 1991, their victory was widely recognised as a huge step forward for Zambian democracy. It is significant that the first fundamental agricultural reforms in Zambia were considered within days of the conclusion of

the country's first multi-party elections. Maize subsidies were phased out, and export and import restrictions on agricultural commodities were eased. Most tellingly, there was little popular discontent with these liberalisation measures, even though they were essentially the same as those that sparked extensive rioting when the Kaunda regime attempted to implement them. Carol Graham highlights this difference in her study of poverty alleviation in Zambia:²¹

When the Chiluba government liberalised the price of maize in December 1991, there was no popular unrest...This was due in large part to the government's explaining the measures to the public...which contrasted sharply with the Kaunda government, which usually announced measures overnight, and where entrenched interest groups with a stake in state subsidies had much more influence.

In effect, the Chiluba government, at least initially, seemed committed to principles of transparency and accountability in its agricultural policymaking, in ways that the Kaunda regime had not.

Nonetheless, the optimism surrounding the MMD's reform programme was short-lived. As mentioned earlier, in spite of all the rhetoric about developing the rural infrastructure of Zambia, the Chiluba government failed to establish any kind of long-term policy framework for reviving the agricultural sector. Most of the reforms that were passed in the early days of the government, such as tariff reductions and exchange rate devaluation, were of the 'stroke of the pen' variety, and there was little thought as to how these might fit into a broader plan for agriculture in Zambia.

²¹ Graham C, *Gender Issues in Poverty Alleviation*. <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/strat/publ/iddp11.htm>.

Moreover, Chiluba's regime was riddled with corruption and it became, if anything, just as anti-democratic as that of his predecessor. In 1996, Chiluba succeeded in passing a law prohibiting those Zambians whose parents were not Zambian citizens from running for president. The provision was widely regarded as specifically targeting Kaunda, whose parents were Malawian, and his UNIP party. UNIP subsequently boycotted the 1996 elections, and Chiluba retained power by a comfortable margin.

The media

It was in the wake of the 1996 elections that the free press began to come under attack from the Chiluba regime. Harsh new media laws were introduced, under which the government targeted its most outspoken critics in the media by filing numerous criminal defamation lawsuits. In 1997, there were more court cases pending against journalists in Zambia than in any other country in Africa.²² The leading independent newspaper, *The Post*, was singled out for especially harsh treatment, with its editor-in-chief Fred M'membe alone facing up to 50 different criminal prosecutions. Many of the larger media entities, such as the *Times of Zambia*, the *Zambia Daily Mail* and the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) are state-run organisations.

And yet, recent events have shown that the press, in spite of the immensely difficult circumstances under which it operates, remains a force to be reckoned with in the political arena. When Chiluba announced in early 2001 his intention to run for a third term, it was the independent media, in conjunction with a number of civil society groups, that led a vigorous campaign to prevent him from

²² Committee to Protect Journalists, 'Attacks on the Press in 1997'. <http://www.cpj.org/attacks97/africa/zambia.html>.

making the constitutional changes that would allow him to run. *The Post* and other independent media outlets reprinted earlier articles in which Chiluba had repeatedly pledged to leave office after a second term. Ultimately, the campaign drew enough popular support to force Chiluba to withdraw his candidacy. Interestingly, both *The Post* and *The Monitor*, another independent, saw their sales increase significantly as the political debate intensified.²³

Similarly, *The Post* has been one of the few voices in the media that has consistently blamed the policies of the Chiluba administration for the current food crisis. As recently as 30 July 2002, for example, the paper observed in an editorial that the agricultural sector's decline was directly caused by the 'lamentable failure' of government policy under the Chiluba regime.

However, a great deal still needs to be done to guarantee the rights of the press in Zambia. The country joins Zimbabwe in the 'Not Free' category in the Freedom House Annual Press Freedom Survey, which cited widespread abuses of press freedom during the run-up to the 2001 elections. Independent journalists continue to be harassed and intimidated.²⁴ It remains to be seen whether these abuses will continue under Mwanawasa's watch.

Future prospects for democracy and food security

Zambia's hopes now rest with its newly elected president. Mwanawasa, a former vice-president under Chiluba, resigned from politics in 1994, citing the administration's corruption as well as his own marginalisation in the party as reasons. As mentioned earlier,

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ As recently as 1 August 2002, the home of *The Post* editor Fred M'membe was damaged by a bomb blast.

he has implemented some positive reforms in the agricultural sector. Yet so, for that matter, did his predecessor Chiluba when he first came to power. Will things be any different this time around? While it is certainly too early to tell what kind of impact Mwanawasa's leadership will have on the strength of Zambia's democratic institutions and the country's ability to feed itself, there are some reasons to be cautiously optimistic.

Firstly, Mwanawasa has made the elimination of corruption a cornerstone of his policy agenda. In fact, he has gone so far as to lift Chiluba's presidential immunity from prosecution in order to bring numerous charges against his former boss. There are certainly those who contend that this move smacks more of a political vendetta against Chiluba than of a genuine commitment to remove corruption. However, if it is a policy Mwanawasa intends to follow through, it represents an important step in Zambia's efforts to reform its public finance system, and may free up more funds for investment in agriculture.

Secondly, in spite of widespread allegations of rigging and voting irregularities, if the elections of 2001 showed us anything, it is that the potential for a vibrant political opposition does exist in Zambia. Many of the MMD's leading members have left the party, and are now watching Mwanawasa's every policy move intently. There is good reason to hope that these parties, such as the newly formed the Forum for Democracy Development (FDD), will give the MMD a run for its money in the next election.

Thirdly, and somewhat perversely, the decline of the copper industry and the government's unsuccessful efforts to privatise the mines may prove to be a blessing in disguise for the agricultural sector, by forcing policymakers to look elsewhere for economic growth opportunities. The agricultural sector, as Mwanawasa

himself has said, is likely to be the principal beneficiary of the shift in policy focus.

There seems to be a depressing tendency in Zambia for history to repeat itself. Chiluba's comment after withdrawing his bid for a third term in the face of increasing criticism for, among other things, the failure of his agricultural policy, proves instructive in this regard: 'In Zambia, food is politics...Maize in Zambia can create a huge problem for anyone, especially for politicians. Without maize, instability is generated'. It might as well have been his predecessor Kaunda speaking. For both of them, understanding the link between democracy and food security came too late, as their authoritarian politics had left their people increasingly vulnerable to food crises. It remains to be seen whether or not Mwanawasa will take to heart the lessons Zambia's two previous rulers learned the hard way.

Conclusion

Zambia and Zimbabwe are two of the most interesting examples of corrupt, undemocratic governance playing a major role in triggering the current food crisis in the Southern African region. If Sen's link between democracy and food security is a valid one, and anecdotal evidence in the Zambian and Zimbabwean cases seems to suggest that it is, then it may be argued of these two countries that one has taken a huge step backwards in the campaign for food security, while the other may have taken a small step in the right direction.

And yet, Zambia and Zimbabwe are by no means the only countries whose governments must bear responsibility for causing the current crisis. The case could be made that in each of the six affected countries, healthy democratic institutions could well have prevented this kind of crisis from occurring.

Malawi, for instance, is another powerful case confirming the Sen thesis. When it became clear that this year's harvest would be a meagre one, it was discovered that the grain reserve built up from the bumper harvest of 1999 — a sizeable 167,000 metric tons — had been sold in its entirety. More disturbingly, the government has yet to provide a convincing explanation of where the proceeds of the sale have gone, sparking accusations that the funds were used to win support for President Bakili Muluzi's plans to run for an unconstitutional third term in office. If true, this would be a particularly powerful illustration of how undermining democracy effectively amounts to undermining food security.

Perhaps the most vivid example, however, comes from Swaziland. With 144,000 of his people — comprising almost a sixth of the entire population — facing imminent starvation, King Mswati of Swaziland has decided to go ahead with a purchase of a \$5 million private jet for himself. While senators have expressed outrage at the jet purchase, they have been careful to focus their criticism on the prime minister rather than on the monarch himself. Needless to say, under a more democratic system, the ruling party in Swaziland would have been extremely unlikely to make such a purchase in the middle of a food crisis.

The strength of Sen's thesis derives just as much from his contention that poor democracies have successfully prevented famines as from his argument that authoritarian regimes have been comparatively unsuccessful in doing so. In this regard, India is his most prominent example. Sen's critics, however, charge that it is a flawed example, because even if a full-blown famine hasn't occurred in post-independence India, chronic malnourishment remains a very real problem.

- While this charge is certainly true, it doesn't weaken Sen's argument, or the relevance of India as an example of a poor democracy able to achieve food security (for a population that exceeds that of the entire African continent) through the strength of its democratic institutions. The last relatively serious food shortages in India took place in the 1960s, when the country was dependent on large shipments of humanitarian aid (the country was said to be living from 'ship to mouth'). The shortages triggered a broad-based overhaul of the agricultural sector to promote food security. The remarkable success of this 'Green Revolution' has been attributed in large part to the democratic institutions that allowed policy decisions taken at the executive and legislative levels to be implemented effectively at the grassroots level.

The latest breakthroughs in agricultural research were quickly made available to farmers, who were encouraged to make use of the new techniques. The success of the programme hinged on involving and mobilising smallholder farmers, who make up the great majority of India's agricultural sector. Countries like Zambia in particular, where smallholdings also make up the bulk of the agricultural sector, would do well to study the Indian experience. Today, India has a buffer stock of 50 million metric tons, leading to problems of storage. While certain states, most notably Orissa, continue to register high malnutrition rates, it certainly cannot be denied that the country is no longer vulnerable to the kinds of exogenous weather shocks that have contributed to the current crisis in Southern Africa.

In this publication, I have not dealt with the Aids pandemic and its undeniably devastating impact on agriculture in Southern Africa. The six countries affected have among the highest HIV infection rates in the world, and the disease has obviously played a key role in exacerbating the food crisis. And yet it is important to note that the Aids crisis does not make governments in the region any less

culpable for creating the conditions that lead to food crises. After all, Botswana and South Africa have remained unaffected by the current crisis, even though the former has the highest HIV infection rate in the world, and the latter has the greatest number of Aids patients.

Lastly, this paper is by no means an attempt to absolve international financial institutions and Western donors of all blame for the current food crisis. On the contrary, there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that donor-driven policies of economic reform have, in many cases, done more harm than good for agriculture in Southern Africa. Moreover, monumental subsidies awarded by Western governments to their own farmers have done considerable damage to Africa's competitive position in agricultural trade. But these arguments miss the bigger picture. Blaming someone else doesn't feed starving people. As this paper has tried to show, good governance bolstered by strong democratic institutions that promote transparency and accountability has to be the fundamental building-block in these countries' efforts to attain food security. Until this is achieved, donor fatigue will increasingly manifest itself in food relief efforts.

If the poorly attended World Food Summit meeting in Rome in June 2002 is anything to go by, richer nations are finding it easier to remain indifferent to the plight of those poorer nations that, in their view, refuse to help themselves. The rallying slogan for the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad), the ambitious initiative to be overseen by the newly formed African Union, is 'African solutions for African problems.' Certainly, for the problem of food security, there may be no other kind.



The South African Institute of International Affairs
PO Box 31596 Braamfontein 2017 South Africa
Jan Smuts House, East Campus,
University of the Witwatersrand
E-mail: saiigen@global.co.za
Tel: (+27 11) 339-2021
Fax: (+27 11) 339-2154