

## **Policy Options for Increasing the Contribution of Social Protection to Food Security**

### **Questions for the e-Discussion**

The following set of questions is provided as an indicative list of issues that will structure the e-discussion; it is not intended to be either exhaustive or prescriptive. Contributors should feel free to offer reflections on any topic, as well as comments on the theme paper, even if these comments fall outside the scope of the questions being discussed on any given day. However, the summaries of the e-discussion will broadly follow the topics and sequencing set out below.

#### **1. Defining social protection in the southern African context**

The paper begins by setting out some current definitions of social protection. Are these relevant to the contemporary southern African context or should they be modified?

##### **Discussion: 16-17 June 2003**

- 1.1 Do you agree with definitions of social protection that emphasise the two aspects of 'social assistance' to chronically poor and vulnerable groups (such as orphans), and 'social insurance' against risk (e.g. weather shocks undermining farmers' harvests)?
- 1.2 Is anything left out of the definitions presented in the theme paper? Should the definition be adapted to the specific vulnerability context of southern Africa?
- 1.3 What should be included under the label 'social protection', and what should be excluded – e.g. is free primary education a social protection measure? Is the free distribution of fertiliser in Malawi an agriculture programme or social protection?

#### **2. Social protection needs in southern Africa**

Following the analysis in other theme papers, this paper identifies four sets of factors explaining why southern Africans 'coped' less effectively with the food crisis of 2001/02 than with the crisis of 1992/93: HIV/AIDS, poverty, market liberalisation, and governance issues. These factors suggest that there might be particular needs for social protection in contemporary southern Africa that differ from the needs of the past, and from other regions.

##### **Discussion: 18-19 June 2003**

- 2.1 How can very poor countries provide effective social protection for their citizens, given the fiscal constraints these governments face, and pressures to prioritise public spending in the 'productive' economic sectors rather than the social sectors?
- 2.2 Given the close linkages between chronic and transitory food insecurity, is there any potential for interventions that 'link relief and development', by supporting people through short-term crises while reducing their long-term vulnerability?
- 2.3 Since governments and donors have inadequately planned for the socio-economic impacts of HIV/AIDS, what ideas can we propose to provide social protection for affected households and communities against these negative consequences?

#### **3. Mechanisms of social protection**

Structural adjustment has been associated with the removal of many policy instruments (e.g. subsidies) and institutions (e.g. marketing parastatals) that aimed to support national and household food security. This section of the theme paper explores experiences with a range of social protection tools, and finds strengths and weaknesses with all of them.

### **Discussion: 20-21 June 2003**

- 3.1 Is there a case to make for reintroducing untargeted social protection interventions to enhance food security in southern Africa – such as food price subsidies, or fertiliser subsidies – that were abolished under structural adjustment reforms?
- 3.2 How important and useful are public works programmes as a social protection tool, and what form of payment should be offered – food, cash, or agricultural inputs?
- 3.3 Is there any potential for extending social pensions from relatively wealthy SADC countries (like Botswana, Namibia and South Africa, which all have social pension schemes) to poorer countries like Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia?
- 3.4 Should countries hold large Strategic Grain Reserves or move towards financial reserves, or use options markets instead? What is the optimal size for a national grain reserve? Are regional solutions to this issue possible?

### **4. Social protection and the PRSPs**

The section of the theme paper that examines the role of social protection in Poverty Reduction Strategies (of the four countries that have one) concludes that Malawi's and Zambia's PRSPs give specific and detailed attention to social protection, while Lesotho's and Mozambique's PRSPs do not, and Zimbabwe has no poverty reduction strategy at all.

### **Discussion: 22-23 June 2003**

- 4.1 Are there lessons to be learned from Malawi's incorporation of social protection into its Poverty Reduction Strategy for other countries in the region, such as Lesotho and Mozambique?
- 4.2 The PRSPs concentrate almost exclusively on rural poverty and interventions to reduce rural poverty. Do poor and vulnerable people in urban areas have distinct characteristics and a different set of social protection needs?
- 4.3 How can we move beyond proposing a set of loosely related 'social welfare' or 'social safety net' tools towards an integrated approach to social protection that addresses vulnerability in a comprehensive and systematic way?

### **5. The way forward**

The overall question that the theme paper asks is: *What social protection policies and institutions are needed to achieve the food security goal of ensuring adequate and appropriate food at affordable prices to all southern Africans at all times?* In the wrap-up phase of the e-discussion we would like to explore some fresh ideas towards this goal.

### **Discussion: 24-25 June 2003**

- 5.1 Is there a need for a 'National Food Security Agency', or even a Minister of Food Security, to coordinate efforts in each crisis-affected country to protect and ensure food security for all their citizens?
- 5.2 Are you aware of other initiatives related to social protection, either within the SADC region or elsewhere (e.g. in South Asia), that are worth considering or piloting in the current southern African context?
- 5.3 What other ideas for social protection can you think of to address the specific food security needs of people in southern Africa, and which interventions would you prioritise?

**E-discussion closes afternoon Wednesday 25 June 2003**