

Civil Society & Regional Food Security

PROJECT BRIEF NO. 1

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The Look, Listen & Learn Pilot Project

The Lethal Mix?

According to the Executive Director of the World Food Programme, addressing the UN Security Council in July 2005, southern Africa was suffering the world's greatest humanitarian crisis. This crisis, he said, was down to a 'lethal mix of HIV/AIDS, recurring drought and failing governance'.

Whether the situation in Southern Africa is really worse than in the Sudan or the DRC need not detain us - what is known is that the countries of the region are struggling with rural poverty as never before and seem less and less able to cope with the social and economic consequences of drought and climatic variability. Drought has long been a fact of life in southern Africa; population growth has been outstripping food production and the impact on rural livelihoods of HIV/AIDS is growing in severity.

But why is 'failing governance' part of this lethal mix? This is not just a matter of governments lacking the revenue or the expertise to cope with massive problems of rural poverty. The reference is to failures in policy and implementation, and the WFP is not alone in pointing to such failures.

But is it really the case that governments are doing worse currently? Are regional efforts to address food insecurity failing? And are the policies themselves making things worse?

Regional Policies

If this is true, what are CSOs doing to hold governments and regional institutions accountable? And, what are CSOs themselves doing to improve policies towards the poor and vulnerable?

This project is about CSOs and regional food security policies. Regional food security policies are:

- policies that emanate from regional institutions, particularly SADC
- national policies that have a direct impact on other countries in the region
- region-wide efforts to address common problems

Taken together, such regional policies are fairly well developed - at least as far as policy *intentions* are concerned.

The region has benefited from a large amount of research into factors that have created the high level of food insecurity and vulnerability. Much of this research is evident in the *Dar-es-Salaam Declaration* on Food Security and in the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP). A number of mechanisms at the SADC level have been designed to improve regional food security and poverty impact; such as the SADC Trade Protocol, the Regional Vulnerability Analytical Information System, the Regional Early Warning System and the Regional Food Reserve Facility.

Implementation

Strategies, programmes and even policies themselves do not represent 'failing governance': it is policy *implementation* that lags. As a result:

- there are still limitations on the movement of food within the region which negatively impacts on food accessibility and affordability in times of shortage and price escalation at the local and country level
- agricultural inputs, to increase production, are unavailable in some countries because of failure to

LOOK, LISTEN & LEARN:
Promoting the use of CSOs' evidence in policies for food security

An action research project in southern Africa

Malawi

Zambia

Zimbabwe

Mozambique

Angola

harmonise regulations across the region

- in emergencies, food aid is still erratic in delivery, inconsistently targeted and sometimes market-distorting
- food production strategies among neighbouring counties are weakly co-ordinated, especially at times of crisis.

These are complex problems where CSOs have an opportunity to offer support towards resolving. CSOs frequently seek evidence on the impact of policies and the absence of policy implementation. These organisations often operate in ways that incorporate the household, rural organisations, the private sector and government itself. CSOs themselves also have policy research capacity.

Challenges

The challenge therefore is how to promote the use of CSO experience and evidence. The Look, Listen & Learn pilot project seeks to do this at both the national and regional level. Given the current weaknesses in this area, the project assists CSOs in their understanding of regional policy processes and offers support to identifying the most effective means of informing and influencing policy

SARPAN, FANRPAN and ODI (with support from the DFID-financed Civil Society Partnership Programme) began the current pilot project by consulting with representatives of over 40 CSOs at an inaugural meeting in May 2005. This revealed a strong interest in using evidence to inform regional food security policies, but also a limited understanding of the policy processes involved.

Stepping Stones

As a result, a study has now been undertaken of regional policy processes and leading policy actors (see forthcoming Policy Briefs) which will be discussed at a planned regional meeting in November,

along with the work undertaken at a series of national consultations held since May.

In the final stage of the pilot project from November to June 2006, a small number of policy issues will be selected to see how far CSOs are able to generate evidence and present their conclusions in ways that can inform and influence the course of regional policy implementation.

The selection of policy cases will be undertaken by the CSOs themselves but, drawing upon work already done by FANRPAN, SARPAN and ODI, a number of options will be discussed. They include:

- Regional maize trade liberalisation
- Monitoring the SADC Dar-es-Salaam Declaration on food security
- Standardising vulnerability data
- The impact of tied food aid
- Seed trade harmonisation
- Co-ordinating experience on social protection
- Regional approaches to mitigating the impact of HIV/AIDS

Policy Briefs will be prepared on these.

The purpose of this pilot project effort is to establish a longer term programme of CSO engagement with regional food security policies. This programme overall will:

- test the impact of different approaches to influencing regional policy
- 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.

The Project aim is to improve the targeting of regional policies in southern Africa to the food security needs of poor and vulnerable people

Look, Listen and Learn is a joint project between

Southern African Regional Poverty Network

www.sarpan.org

Overseas Development Institute

www.odi.org.uk

Food and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network

www.fanrpan.org