THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF DROUGHT:
Southern Africa 1991–1993

By Reginald Herbold Green

No worst there is none
Pitched past pitch of grief

- Gerard Manley Hopkins

The devil brings drought,
Men make hunger,
Foreigners force famine.

- Makonde Proverb
(Cabo Delgado Province, Mozambique)

Do not go gentle into that good night
But rage, rage against the dying of the light.

- Dylan Thomas

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
Health Policy Unit - Seminar
London - 18 November 1992

The Apocalypse Drought

In 1991-92 the rains failed in most of Southern Africa - indeed except for northern Mozambique, parts of Malawi, Zambia and Angola and most of Tanzania they failed or were late and meagre from the Cape to Cairo. This disaster - the worst in over a century in half of Mozambique, Zimbabwe, most of Zambia and Malawi, Swaziland, Lesotho, perhaps Botswana and Namibia and also South Africa followed mixed, but generally below average, 1989-90 and 1990-91 rains. In the words of a UNDP Resident Representative - "This really is the Apocalypse drought". The folk memory of the people of Mozambique's Gaza Province - "When the great river runs dry the end of the world is at hand" - burst into searing present reality as the massive Limpopo River turned into pools, trickles and cracked parched mud from Beitbridge in Zimbabwe through Mozambique virtually to the Indian Ocean.

FAO/WFP assessments as of April put the grain crop of the 10 Southern African Development Community (ex-SADCC) states at 56% of normal (35% excluding Angola and Tanzania). Grain import requirements for 1992-93 were estimated at 6,200,000 tonnes and other food import requirements at 500,000 versus perhaps 1,000,000 and 250,000 in 1991-92. These estimates (which closely correspond to the SADCC's partial and the author's more comprehensive ones of February) in the event have proven broadly correct. Some countries' crops have turned out less disastrously than anticipated, but the figures probably underestimated need for famine relief and tended to build pre-existing food deficits (up to 25% of basic calorie needs for Angola and Mozambique) into their base.

The sheer horror of the shortage of water - for power, for irrigation, for livestock and for human beings - was badly underperceived in February/April. The initial deaths and the large scale flights to new locations (especially but not only in Mozambique and Zimbabwe) over April/October were largely the result of lack of water to drink. By November one city of over 1,000,000 (Bulawayo) and one of nearly 500,00 (Beira) were severely rationed and in dire danger of having no supplies. The same was true of much of rural southern Zimbabwe and Mozambique although early showers gave some promise of refreshing water sources and pastures. Power supplies were rationed or erratic in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Tanzania.

As anticipated in February-April, the sheer magnitude of the crisis has overwhelmed national commercial import capacity, emergency pledging and domestic delivery/distribution capacity except in Botswana, Namibia and Tanzania. There have been swings and roundabouts with Zambia's and Swaziland's performances better than feared and Zimbabwe's below initial hopes (albeit at up to 30,000 tonnes a month to 5,000,000 beneficiaries by September-November it had achieved the largest operational net and coped with one of the greatest port to country logistical problems). In Mozambique a tenuous peace was enhancing distribution capacity but in Angola, Jonas Savimbi's refusal to accept electoral defeat and apparent return to war was having the opposite result.

With minor differences of emphasis and, perhaps, of country vignettes, that sketch is broadly agreed. So too is the prognosis that given inadequate grain pledges, lagged and uncertain deliveries and no real input into raising the Angolan and Mozambican distribution capacities, the death toll over 1992-93 will continue to rise. If war continues in Angola and shipping lags do so more generally, 100,000 famine/acute malnutrition/forced migration deaths may well result.

What is not agreed is what are the factors underlying 1991-93 (1991-92 rains, 1992 harvest, 1992-93 lack of minimally adequate food and water). A number of causes have been argued:

1. agronomic/climatic;
2. technical (including foresight) and institutional weaknesses;
3. domestic technical and institutional failures;
4. national economic debilitation;
5. the interaction of war and drought;
6. international political economic considerations;
7. domestic political economic priorities.

In fairness, few would argue for only one cause - a position manifestly implausible on its face. However, it would be also fair to say that the political economic elements have received relatively less attention (within Southern Africa as well as internationally) than is merited. However, before exploring them it may be useful to look at the 1991 pre-drought context and the technico institutional factors at least briefly.

The Third Horseman - And Fellow Travellers

The Apocalypse has four horsemen not one - War, Disease, Famine and Death. It is their joint assaults which are most lethal - a fact demonstrated in Southern Africa. Botswana, Namibia and Tanzania are confronted by a drought raised famine threat alone and are able to avert disease and death.

That underlines the significance of war - and particularly protracted war on one's own soil. The weakest links in Angola and Mozambique are from arrival at port to starving people. Parallel to that are huge gaps in rural basic medical services. The combination of inability to avert massive malnutrition and the parallel inability to provide basic preventative (e.g. vaccination and mother and child clinics) and curative (e.g. oral rehydration and antibiotics) health services fuels the lethal interaction between malnutrition and disease which has marked the downward spiral to unmarked graves for over 1,500,000 souls (out of a total population of perhaps 24,000,000) in these two countries since 1990. Direct destruction of food, cumbersome convoys, lack of finance, rural insecurity, overstretched human and institutional capacity, excessive and often mutually contradictory donor initiatives cannot be analysed or understood without recognition that since at least 1980 (and arguably the early 1970s) no aspect of Angolan or Mozambican economic, political or social life and (especially) death can be analysed or understood seriously without considering war as an integral element, not merely as an off-stage noise.

The Price of Penury

National economic debilitation is clearly only partially independent of war. Over 1986-90 Southern Africa as a whole had a Gross Domestic Product growth rate above that of population and some - even if slow - improvement in most social indicators. But three countries stood out as exceptions, in part to the trends, but especially on absolute social indicator levels. Two were Angola and Mozambique. For the third - Malawi - one needs to explore domestic political economic considerations. Its war bills (transport costs and - at household though not state budget level - refugees) were not self-evidently enough to cause the divergences (which in any case pre-date 1980) nor was its economic debilitation (at least at macro level) as severe as that of - say - Zambia and Tanzania.

Despite 1986-90 recovery, most Southern African economies - with the notable exception of Botswana - were weak as of 1990. They lacked the capacity to lay aside reserves of foreign exchange, of budget flexibility, of food or of institutional capacity to ride out major shocks (drought or other) and, in some cases, even those necessary to bridge them until external assistance could be secured. The clear exception - Botswana - in 1992 as in earlier droughts can, and does, set near universal access to afflicted households programmes in operation as soon as it perceives a drought disaster. It is able to afford the structure, the bills and the imports to do so because it has a buoyant economy and high external reserves. However, Tanzania, which is far more economically constrained, has had no famine deaths since the late 1950s - not even during the worst economic crisis period of 1981-83 which corresponded to a drought cycle - and appears likely to have few or none in 1992-93. As with Malawi - but in the opposite direction - the reasons appear to turn on domestic political economic priorities.

Zimbabwe is a special case. Over 1984-90 it operated a nationally crafted joint Structural Adjustment/War Cost Finance programme. It did produce a 4% to 5% trend growth, rising exports, limited inflation, small current account deficits and sustained, if slow, social indicator gains. However, by 1990 it was running out of domestic capacity because it also squeezed fixed investment. The 1991 adoption of an internationally approved Structural Adjustment Programme (to raise external resources to revive business confidence and restore capacity growth parallel to declining war costs) went tremendously wrong. Whatever the reasons (compressing a five year time frame into two and altering sequencing is the most obvious explanation) it went into negative GDP growth, spiralling inflation, a yawning current account deficit and collapsing business confidence. That led to throwing grain reserves into exports to try to plug the trade gap and avert a self-justifying/inflation fuelling collapse of the exchange rate, to some delay in ordering grain import supplies in late 1991 and to far less capacity to buy commercially as of 1992 than had existed in 1990.

Perhaps the greatest direct result of economic debilitation is lagged action. Both the need to seek most drought relief finance externally (and to await its arrival) and the desperate hope that rain and crop forecasts will turn up, work against rapid action. Indirectly economic weakness often leads to low initial food supply/food requirement ratios and weak

rural basic health services (both less true of Tanzania, arguably for domestic political economic priority reasons) which narrow survival margins and thus increase the damage done by any significant shock.

The Weather Gods Are Angry - Or Are They?

The arguments about secular climatic changes in Southern Africa are not conclusive. The region is characterised by drought cycles which do vary in length over time and among countries. On the whole, since 1972/73 (weather and crop year) the cycles have tended to have longer periods of successive average-to-good and of fair-to-disastrous years. 1989/90 seems to have marked entry into a cyclical downswing. (The last previous one 1979/80 - 1983/84 lasted five years which is not a cheering thought.) The evidence of secular rainfall shifts is not, to date, convincing.

In respect to 1991/92 two special factors have been adduced - the eruption of Mount Pinatubo and the behaviour of the (rather blasphemously named) El Nino current in the Eastern Pacific. To the extent they were significant, 1992/93 rains should be better since Pinatubo's 1992 eruption is much less dusty and El Nino has disintegrated early.

However, there is an arguable case that population growth (and the heritage of land theft) have forced more and more sector familial households either to abandon long rotation (so-called shifting) cultivation before developing viable and sustainable short rotation intensive techniques or out onto marginal or extra marginal (particularly in terms of security of rainfall) land. This argument is strongest in respect to Malawi, Lesotho, Swaziland and Zimbabwe and weakest in respect to Tanzania and Zambia. Mozambique and Angola are special cases because war has caused over-cultivation and inadequate sized plots in less insecure rural and peri urban areas even though there is no general land scarcity nor any crippling inherited malallocation constraint of the type afflicting Zimbabwe, Namibia and Swaziland.

While not denying agronomic/climatic factors' importance over time, the evidence does not appear to suggest a major secular element behind 1989/90 - 1991/92 downturn in rainfall and production growth. If 1991/92 has been a special case for climatic reasons - a hopeful but unproven hypothesis -

it relates to a one-off (Pinatubo) and to a rather irregular, loosely correlated (El Nino vagaries) cause.

Muddled Methods vs Methodical Models

The technico-institutional argument focuses on the undeniable fact that given available knowledge response to post 1980s - and especially 1991/92 (or 1992-93) - droughts could have been prompter, quantitatively more adequate and qualitatively more effective.

In 1991-93 early warning lights went amber in December, red in January and flashing red with sirens by March. This is not being wise after the event - the data are in FAO/WFP and SADCC early warning system reports, however low key the analysis and - especially - the highlighting before February in the SADCC and March/April in the FAO/WFP case. Technical deficiencies of the early warning system exist but can hardly bear much of the blame for tardy and inadequate response. On balance domestic/regional (SADCC-Zimbabwe-Zambia-Namibia-Mozambique) high key warnings came before international (which were first voiced emphatically by international NGOs and UNICEF). The lag on the part of the UN system was real and does require future correction - e.g. highlighting amber lights and bringing the schedule of study teams into line with last dates consistent with an emergency appeal being able to deliver food just in time rather than just too late. However, the lags (perhaps because of domestic and NGO pressure) were, in fact, below average and appear to have been conditioned by the perception that donors had become bored with continuing food emergencies in Southern Africa so would not respond to early warnings but only to palpable evidence of assured massive famine.

National technical capacity is uneven. In the broadest sense it is lowest when there is war and/or massive foreign intervention in designing it and in introducing parallel systems (uniformly unsatisfactory both operationally in national decapacitating effects). But the Mozambican capacity is less weak than the Angolan (which has 'benefited' by far less international support) apparently because of demonstrably different political economic priorities. The correlation of capacity with economic strength or debilitation is not very good. Botswana has the best institutional capacity to reach the afflicted, to do so to a substantial degree by employment to earn food and to do so by expanding ongoing (non-crisis) safety net programmes. To that extent solvency, and the room for

national designing and decision-taking which it buys, helps. But arguably the second greatest capacity is Tanzania's. Rough and ready and cut price as it is, it delivers food to drought (or flood) impacted districts. Its weaknesses in building useful employment in public works into relief and in not relating emergency programming to ongoing nutrition enhancement programmes are real but the fact remains that on the basis of general economic data one would expect lower capacity in Tanzania than in fact exists. Zambia in 1992 appears to have created capacity out of nothing (including a low political economic priority) whereas Zimbabwe has failed to make a sophisticated institutional structure work promptly and effectively (despite priority). Swaziland - with no real history of distribution - has effectively subcontracted to domestic NGOs (especially its National Red Cross) while Malawi with almost as little experience has - predictably - done little carrying its malign neglect to the point of endangering the regime's survival.

The most reasonable conclusions are:

1. war erodes national capacity as well as increasing the need for it;

2. economic debilitation may or may not reduce domestic technical capacity depending on relative domestic political economic priorities;

3. irresistible foreign intervention in structuring national and creating parallel technico/institutional systems is (beyond the very short term) disastrous;

4. some technical differences appear to be genuinely independent of other factors, e.g. Zimbabwe and CARE on the minus and Zambia and Action Aid on the plus side;

5. but in several cases explanations which do not include domestic political economic (and less lucidly external political economic) priorities appear somewhat procrustean.

Any such summary may be misleading. There are very genuine differences domestically and also among international actors on how to increase technical capacity. For example, the dominant Mozambican position (which was followed until 1984) was to coordinate emergency food distribution using contract hire private transport firms who were thereby enabled to survive, rebuild and bring out whatever rural surpluses existed. A

USAID/CARE alliance since 1984 (with the passive, bureaucratic preference based support of UNDP) has focused on monolithic, state run lorry fleets. Disagreeing bilaterals, EEC and WFP have set up parallel, de facto competitive distribution systems (at least two financed by USAID). The Mozambique institutions are not uniformly pro-contract hire and coherent national coordination but were they the sole arbiters that position would prevail. More crucial has been the question of how many donors would walk out if their, and their captive (or captor?) NGOs, preferences were not pandered to. That question is a hard one to evaluate and one to which prudence counsels caution for a country dependent on external resources for 85% of imports and 75% of combined Recurrent-Investment-Emergency budgets. Unfortunately caution in acquiescing in a cornucopia (Pandora's box?) of different externally backed delivery mechanisms rapidly leads to incoherence with nobody clear on the overall position and nobody in a position to articulate and to implement strategy.

Some donor technical failings appear to be related to specific bureaucratic inertia or inadequate information. Enthusiasms for food stamps and for low wage public works to assist urban destitute households whose real problems turn not on unemployment but on starvation level real wages and high mouths to hands ratios are probable examples. Others - e.g. the total failure to schedule and deliver food aid shipments up to the minimum standards any commercial recipient would require - turn on the lack of effective recipient countervailing power. But most appear to flow from the basic assumptions of the (donor) political economy of emergency assistance.

Drought, Democracy and History: External Political Economies

There is arguably a moderately uniform donor political economy of emergencies - including drought. There clearly are two much more fragmented political economies (of democracy, where once favoured authoritarians of the right are no longer useful, and of historic affection or disquiet/detestation, outliving initial causes) which affect particular donors and recipients.

In a slightly reductionist form the political economy of emergencies turns on six basic propositions:

1. emergencies caused by exogenous events justify and call forth a short term, survival assistance oriented response;

2. this response is quite separate from ongoing or future development cooperation, useful in that it can go to the people of states otherwise seen as beyond the pale but unhelpful in respect to facilitating livelihood recuperation even after short term calamities;

3. it should be bounded by 12 to 24 months (apparently an earthquake not a multi year drought - let alone a war - is the implicit "ideal type" calamity) except in the case of support (usually via UNHCR) to international (but not domestic) refugees;

4. calamities are stochastic, exogenous events with no projectable patterns of regional or national recurrence and therefore can be treated best by one-off responses assuming no institutionalised national or household coping capacity;

5. in ascending order, saving life is important, saving physical and financial resources more so and adhering to due bureaucratic procedures (wildly divergent among donors) the most important;

6. the more the assistance needed and the longer the period for which it is needed the more incompetent - by definition - the recipient country and the greater the right (indeed the duty) of donors (bilateral and external NGO - the World Bank does not perhaps sensibly, act in respect to short term calamities and, less self-evidently sensibly, has not seriously addressed the rehabilitation of livelihoods/economic reconstruction link between long term emergency survival support and 'standard' development assistance) to "do their own thing" independent of national (including civil society) institutions.

The first four elements in this "conventional wisdom" are now coming under criticism - e.g. by the UK, ODA, by UNICEF, by several international NGOs. The trend over 1977-1992 suggests that the old orthodoxy is in the process of dissolution, but it is unclear what will replace it.

To say this is not, at least not necessarily, to posit evil intentions. "The road to hell is paved with good intentions" seems a particularly apt comment on the political economy of emergency support. Each of the five assumptions may be appropriate in some contexts - even the sixth probably is correct in the short run in Somalia (outside ex-British Somaliland) where the difference between self-styled Presidents and Generals and armed

extortionists interested in their own welfare to the exclusion of all other interests (including providing any semblance of civil governance as usually understood) is by no means evident. As a uniform implicit conventional wisdom the consensus has been ideological and reductionist even if not in left/right terms. Certainly virtually it is inefficient and all too literally kills people in the 1990s Southern African context.

There is indeed a difference between murder and negligent homicide and (unlike some critics) the author does not see any conspiracy to commit murder. However, for the dead and their bereaved or for states and leaders desperately concerned to save lives and rehabilitate livelihoods, it is cold comfort to know that the deaths are by-products of the best intentions combined with the worst perceptions of realities and of how to address them, of bureaucratic business as usual, or of the 'Republics' of a variegated array of self-annointed Platonic guardians. Those afflicted by drought and their governments may not have very clear or articulated perceptions on what needs to be done or how to do it right. On what is being done wrong at least some know what Blake recognised "The toad beneath the harrow knows, where every separate tooth point goes".

Whether this conventional approach is racist as opposed to professional centric is debatable. Professional capacity (or at any rate numbers) and funding are overwhelmingly Northern. In addition the present (albeit not the 1970s) version of the model is heavily influenced by the concept of "the deserving poor" (who become undeserving if natural calamities or human created catastrophes - including donor botches - cause the emergency to drag on beyond two to three years) and the poor (whether perceived as "deserving" or no longer deserving) are mainly black. Subjectively and explicitly it is not necessary to posit racism. However, observation suggests that implicitly and objectively it does play a role albeit probably a subsidiary one.

The results of this paradigm (or model) in the Southern African states - and especially in those most desperately needing external finance, knowledge and personnel resources - is, to put it mildly, distinctly unsatisfactory.

The economic debilitation and, in two cases, war crises are long lasting and the droughts recurrent. Therefore, one-off, approaches and fixed (or attempted) cut off points related to time alone are unsound. Similarly in

many cases substantial national historic memory, analytical and institutional capacity does exist.

Especially in the context of long term programmes, setting up parallel external systems (or expatriate run enclaves within nominally national ones) is simply inefficient. The loss of coherence, the duplication of overheads and - especially - the progressive decapacitation, fragmentation and denigration of national (including civil society and domestic NGO) capacity is a high price to pay for external support during the emergency and one which is likely to continue long after it.

The failure to link emergency survival to normal development via a reconstruction bridge of household livelihood rehabilitation backed by basic social and human investment, local infrastructure (especially rural and peri urban) and market access (including rural trading and urban micro enterprise sectors) restoration is both logically unsound and practically likely to be disastrous. In the extreme case of Mozambique, the end of war (probably in hand), the return of normal rains (as likely as not for 1992/93) and the mass return home of the war/drought dislocated and pauperised 50% of all living Mozambicans (7,000,000 of 14,000,000 - the 'missing' 2,000,000 versus population projections being at least two-thirds direct and indirect war dead) which has already begun will if there is a rapid run down of Emergencia and Refugee support be only too likely to result in the obscene and avertable paradox that peace and good rains kill as many (at least in the short run) as war and drought did.

The defects of this political economic approach are relatively evident. Partly because of its moral economic/disaster alleviating focus, it has tendencies both to deepen dependence and to be underfunded. The former results in part from the failure to link livelihood rehabilitation to survival. (The Swahili proverb about giving a fishing line not a fish is very apt - tinned fish has been distributed to dislocated persons who would have been better served by lines, plus perhaps nets and tools to build canoes.) In addition the short term survival focus raises the priority given to getting the food out and reduces the concern that doing so by parallel channels decapacitates national governmental and civil society institutions. The underfunding is initially the result of unanticipated (even if projectable) calls for resources after budgets have been prepared

and later flows from the belief emergencies shouldn't last over 18 to 24 months.

A different approach to the political economic location of long term emergency support - e.g. in Mozambique - has been proposed by the World Bank. The case is that survival is a precondition for development and how resources are used to meet that precondition will affect the trajectory, speed and efficiency of subsequent development. From this perspective, multi year food aid programmes are an aspect of import support (and therefore, as the Bank sees it, of structural adjustment).

This approach is particularly convincing in respect to commercialised, multi year food aid and to post war reconstruction support. It is not particularly attuned to rapid response nor to short duration, limited geographical location cases because overall Consultative Group type assessment, coordination, delivery processes are Byzantine in complexity and glacial in ability (or lack of it) to alter course. More basically despite the Bank's new handbook and Operational Directive on Poverty Reduction, it is not at all clear it now has an articulated strategic conceptualization of post war reconstruction. This is historically ironic as four and a half decades ago the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development's basic stock in trade was post war reconstruction.

Locating the political economy of survival support within that of development is not merely rationalisation of institutional self-interest (although World Bank-UNDP-bilateral agency-NGO dialogue might suggest the reverse). It does offer a more coherent - albeit as now adumbrated insufficiently flexible - conceptualization of emergency assistance as part of total support and of short term survival as the beginning of a continuum leading through medium term reconstruction to longer term development.

The application of the general 'Good Samaritan' model of the political economy of disaster relief is heavily influenced by country specific donor concerns and perceptions, whether accurate or not, of recipients. These can be very specific relating to placating small but pugnacious home interest groups - e.g. the otherwise incredible use of World Vision as a major USAID vehicle in Mozambique despite its (reciprocated) hostility to both the government and the main civil society bodies (Catholic, main line Protestant and Islamic). At the opposite extreme they can be global geopolitical. Low and indirect US funding for famine relief in Angola

related to US cold war strategy (and to its curious perception of Cuba as a great power) much more than to the actual nature of the Angolan regime much less to the famine or its causes. Similarly, the delay in pledging and especially delivering food aid to Mozambique until the Nkomati Accord had been signed related primarily to US Southern African regional strategy not to events on ground in Mozambique nor to technical problems in procurement and shipping.

Similarly, the present enthusiasm for promoting multi party governments - especially where an old, tired autocracy has lost its geopolitical pawn value and is visibly eroding in ways threatening stability - while in principle exempting emergency assistance from the use of sticks and carrots, in fact does reduce emergency support for unfavoured regimes. This may not affect food per se but certainly does relate to water supply, logistics, transport and institutional capacity and - above all - to rural development programmes which might reduce vulnerability to future droughts at both household and national levels.

In general the less poor a country, the greater its assumed capacity to finance emergency imports itself and, especially, to handle all costs after arrival. The principle makes sense. Pretty clearly the case for cooperation in emergency coping in Botswana has to be either human solidarity or general development cooperation, not that Botswana either could not or would not avert famine and massive deprivation on its own. And, in fact, Botswana receives relatively little emergency assistance in contrast to its substantial capital and technical assistance receipts. However, three problems arise. The first is a rather austere implicit means test (apparently applying to Zimbabwe in 1992/93) requiring the country to pay a portion of costs likely to derail any forward dynamic combined with failure to consider the overall burdens on available resources (e.g. Angola in the context of substantial oil exports but also of colossal war bills resulting in large part from South African and US intervention). Second, there is a tendency to equate GDP per capita with ability to finance emergency programmes without adequate attention to fiscal capacity, special demands on state resources or inequality of income distribution. Namibia has been ill-served by this approach both on the development and emergency assistance fronts.

The third is perhaps a general famine aid point as much as a country specific political economy one, but operates in respect to the special case of a country with food ration/work for food calamity offsetting requirements in excess of import requirements while at the same time having a serious domestic fiscal constraint. A clear case is Tanzania 1992-93 with northern and southern regional grain surpluses largely offsetting central and north-western drought deficits at the national physical supply level. However, the drought stricken households lack effective purchasing power and the stability of the state budget is, at best, precarious. Because the starting point of emergency assistance is the national food deficit (with related funding tied to it), Tanzania has simply not been considered for substantial emergency assistance despite being very poor, very concerned and very much at risk of severe criticism of the resultant fiscal deficit if it uses (as it is doing) substantial domestic fiscal resources to provide rations through domestic procurement and distribution.

Who Cares? Why? Domestic Political Economies of Poverty and Calamity

Distinct problems arise in evaluating national political economic priorities:

1. whatever the differences, they do not run on left-right or free market capitalist-social democratic lines;

2. rhetoric is not the best indication of actual priorities;

3. priorities at state/government level do not uniformly lead to institutional technical and distributional capacity to meet them, even if resources do appear to be available and reaction after calamities hit suggest the priorities are real;

4. priority to the welfare of and/or enhanced production by poor households does not appear to be closely correlated to its potential macro economic importance nor even to its short run electoral significance albeit a stronger case can be made for perceived links to the latter;

5. in certain cases (notably Tanzania, Botswana and Mozambique) there is reason to believe that the commitment to enabling poor and absolutely poor households to become less poor has been derived from the moral principles of a limited number of leaders first and given articulated

political economic justification subsequently since it is hard otherwise to explain the differences between Malawi and Tanzania or Angola and Mozambique.

Objectively it is apparent that not all ruling coalitions do give high priority to alleviating the suffering caused by drought (or drought and war). Among those that do, how high the priority is and the raison d'etat bases for it vary.

One basis is moral economic - the belief that (as Adam Smith put it) no nation can be great and prosperous the majority of whose people are poor and miserable. This is a perception rarely totally absent and most likely to have some operational force in the face of mass starvation. But - at least in terms of resource allocations over time (more broadly than just emergency relief) it evidently varies in priority. On that basis it has the greatest political economic force in Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe and the least in Angola and Malawi. Whatever the basis for this diversity it is clearly not ideological in the traditional left/right sense. Nor is it linked closely with egalitarianism even in the sense of limits on income inequality. That philosophy has never had much operational impact outside Tanzania whereas the moral economic imperative of assuring some minimum to all persons has been more broadly influential.

A political economic reason for priority to the livelihoods (and therefore the survival and rehabilitation) of poor households is that their production and demand are perceived as structurally crucial at macro economic level either in terms of present levels or/and of growth dynamics. Mozambique and - much less coherently - Tanzania are clear examples. Botswana and Namibia are not because their absolutely poor and vulnerable household sectors are of very marginal present or plausible future macro economic significance.

Political survival reasons fall in two groups. If politicians perceive themselves as accountable to, and are in practice electorally dismissable by, poor - and especially poor rural - voters then their concern for the rural family farming sector - including its needs in the context of drought - is likely to be significant. This does require relatively open and competitive elections but not any particular political system as the two present clear-cut examples (Namibia could well become a third and Mozambique a fourth) of Botswana and Tanzania illustrate. In a much

narrower sense, rural famine and acute urban hunger are political structure life threatening so that any ruling group with reasonable self-preservation instincts and foresight will try to avert or defuse them. However, that factor alone does not necessarily appear to result in high priority being given to timely or to adequate measures - e.g. Malawi.

Special problems arise in the interpretation of Zimbabwe, Zambia and Angola. The former has allocated substantial resources to programmes intended to benefit the welfare and the livelihoods of poor Zimbabweans. By 1983/84 it had built up a highly effective problem reporting, food delivery and work for food network backed by large national resource allocation as well as internationally mobilised funds. It backed this with a very (perhaps too) large inter-year food reserve. But by 1990 the reporting and delivery mechanisms had ossified. In 1991/92 the national reserves were run down in a way hard to characterise other than as reckless. The 1992/93 supply procurement, logistical, and - especially - distribution systems revival were lagged and initially chaotic. On the other hand, as of late 1992, 25,000 to 30,000 tonnes a month were reaching about 5,000,000 recipients, probably virtually double the attained level of any other Southern African state. Once seriously begun the logistical exercise from procurement through delivery to Zimbabwe was both a top priority and a model of efficiency and from December 1991 substantial import orders were placed out of Zimbabwean foreign exchange earnings without waiting for external assistance.

Zambia's governing coalition has historically never perceived small family farmers as economically significant nor has it ever devoted substantial resources to enabling them to enhance their livelihoods. The largest use of state resources in respect to food until very recently was subsidising consumers, the second subsidising marketing boards and cooperatives of startling physical and well as financial inefficiency and the third, subsidising large farmers. Because over 40% of the population is urban, imports plus food subsidies were a moderately effective famine prevention strategy except for the hardest hit rural areas where a rather sketchy ration delivery system did avert famine. By 1990 the forex, cash and rural delivery capacity had run out and as of 1992 the reshuffled governing coalition did not appear particularly small family farmer oriented. However, the response to drought in terms of ringing the Tocsin was early and energetic and the distribution of food (including commercial imports

seen as a priority out of very limited own resource import capacity) has on the whole been creative and effective.

Angola has followed a tightly prioritised resource distribution strategy:

1. the hydro carbon sector - the basic source of foreign exchange and fiscal flows essential to funding other priorities;

2. the armed forces to fight a high technology war against a regional power and an externally backed insurgency - the precondition for governing coalition survival;

3. providing adequate living standards to key officers, managers and workers in the two key sectors and in the political establishment to ensure their morale and loyalty;

4. sustaining as much as possible of human investment in health and education and providing some safety nets for the more accessible destitute victims of the war.

Priority four was real, but the first three used up not only 90% of state resources but also 90% of high level citizen personnel explaining the paradox that civil governance, human and social investment services and emergency capacity (unlike military) was distinctly lower and even patchier than in much poorer Mozambique.

This prioritisation is arguably consistent with concern for poor people - until the war was won in respect to South Africa and peace by conquest or reconciliation achieved domestically, real progress in production or in access to services by poor Angolans was not attainable. But it has gone hand in hand with a highly hierarchical, concentrated elite political coalition and the emergence of broader vested interest enclaves unlikely to be much altered by a reconciliation incorporating UNITA's elite leadership. Whether elections and/or (in the context of less inadequate resources) noblesse oblige will result in significant upgrading of the political economic priority given to poverty reduction and calamity alleviation is highly problematic.

What Might Usefully Be Done?

Analysis is a basis from which it may be possible to construct action. Unfortunately it does not always lead to any clear lines toward feasible action and is certainly rarely of such a Damascus Road illumination nature as to be self-activating. This is especially true when the proposed shifts either require acting against perceived self-interest or recasting of comfortable perceptions about oneself (whether personal or institutional) and others.

The political economic focus actually serves rather well to propose technical changes since many technical weaknesses are, at the least, intertwined with broader conceptual issues:

1. calamities (natural disasters) should be perceived as recurrent, not one-off, events both globally and nationally;

2. therefore, both at donor and (even more crucial) national level, permanent institutional structures able to expand to large scale activity within two to four months are needed;

3. allowing forward planning of useful work for food based small scale infrastructure schemes both to enable calamity stricken households to sustain self-respect and self-reliance and to add some material output to the overriding survival priority;

4. planning calamity offsetting programmes in a way conducive to sustaining rural transport and market mechanisms, e.g. paying cash to buy food and - if food transport under Calamity Commission auspices is necessary - contracting out haulage to domestic enterprises in ways encouraging back haul of whatever the rural area has to sell;

5. accepting the imperative of a single, nationally-led coordinating institution (and of enough harmonisation of donor procedures to allow both coordination and transparency) while avoiding creating external enclaves and parallel systems or using technical assistance to co-opt previously national mechanisms;

6. recognising that after most calamities (single year droughts with limited livestock losses are often exceptions) livelihood rehabilitation (replacement of working capital in seeds, tools,

livestock and repair of fixed capital in land clearing and homes) is virtually always needed and that after catastrophes (human caused disasters - basically war) broader infrastructure, human and social investment services and market network reconstruction are likely to be needed;

7. and, therefore, linking the emergency survival and livelihood rehabilitation phases of calamity/catastrophe alleviation and reversal;

8. implying both a longer time horizon and one related to contextual reality not dogma or rules of thumb;

9. plus a recognition that avoiding the need to move away from home (achievable in most droughts albeit not in wars) greatly reduces the cost and time required for rehabilitation so that early response to warnings of impending disaster is crucial;

10. and that future vulnerability reduction elements (e.g. drought resistant seed, rehabilitation/augmentation of water supplies, veterinary as well as human basic drug reserves, basic national inter-year food reserves adequate to ride out the lag before commercial or aid import flows arrive in crisis years) are part of Emergency/Rehabilitation operations;

11. paralleled by a less paternalistic perception of calamity/catastrophe afflicted households (and countries) based on a treble realisation that they usually know their own circumstances better than outsiders, have developed substantial (if fragile and subject to overloading) capacities to cope and - however generous external (whether to household or to country) support - bear the main financial, social and burdens of the calamity/catastrophe and of the ways in which it is faced (or fudged). (International "boredom" and "fatigue" over Mozambique's decade-long emergency are real enough but the very terms are rather obscene when set against the anguish of the 7,000,000 afflicted Mozambicans who are alive, let alone the fate of over a million and a quarter of their compatriots who are dead.);

12. Strongly suggesting that austere, precise national or household means testing is inappropriate because it runs down working capital which is needed for rehabilitation and also normatively objectionable since

substantial emergency programmes are virtually always to households and countries who - at least in the presence of calamity - are at socially unacceptable standards of poverty and misery. (If resources are inadequate 'rationing' may be necessary but the target should be related to true need and the shortfall visible not concealed by trimming the need to meet some idea of what "funders will bear".);

13. and a recognition that if survival and livelihood restoration are political economic priorities ("moral economy" in Adam Smith's perhaps more apt terminology) then conditioning support for them (as relatively broadly defined above) to external economic, domestic political or geopolitical objectives of donors is inappropriate (to use the mildest plausible term).

This agenda is certainly applicable in the North and in Southern African countries which do give significant priority to calamity coping by/for poor households. In a sense it is also valid for domestic advocates of major domestic political priority change. In a sense - the danger to an advocate in the North is a dusty answer but in - e.g. - Malawi, that to a domestic advocate may be a dusty prison cell... or worse. Therefore, for the external advocates and especially those with state backing, respect for domestic priorities and leadership objective can, at least in principle, clash with the priority for human survival and livelihood rehabilitation.

To this dilemma there are no easy answers and those there are can only be applied within realistic appraisals of contexts:

1. if there is a substantially accountable government which does give some priority to emergency survival/poverty reduction outside intervention by means of "sticks" is unlikely to be appropriate (and intervention by using technical assistance to try to change basic priorities is likely to be quite ineffective);

2. but in those circumstances substantial emergency programmes will in practice be accepted and can usually be tied to provision of national institutional and personnel inputs. Even if that "carrot" may well not be the government's first choice, it is likely to be accepted;

3. with the side result of building up the domestic base for emergency survival and reconstruction/poverty reduction prioritisation;

4. while withholding or underfunding emergency support is usually quite unlikely to cause basic domestic political economic change and certainly does not help afflicted people survive;

5. but contexts do exist in which national governing group priorities are totally inimical to survival, let alone rehabilitation, support and mass diversion of resources to elite uses with little left for intended beneficiaries is quite predictable (e.g. Somalia, Sudan);

6. in these cases tightly externally supervised programmes (with the maximum feasible involvement of domestic civil society and - if appropriate - local governance bodies) is likely to be the least bad attainable option with the "stick" not usually a threat to halt emergency support but to review and reduce other economic and political support;

7. with the possible exception of de facto international 'trusteeship' emergency operations if and when both near total lack of both civil governance and very limited capacity to resist armed protection of operations (e.g. Somalia) or a global context which renders the government a pariah (e.g. in respect to Iraqi Kurdistan) make them possible.

The argument that some governments behave in ways forfeiting their claim to sovereignty because violation of basic human rights is integral, not incidental, to their governance is valid. However, there is little reason to believe effective international intervention to reform or to replace such regimes is generally practicable (vide Sudan, Serbia or, indeed, so far as the North went, Idi Amin's Uganda regime). Further, whether such intervention could quickly lead to a peaceful context or to a transition toward a better national regime is problematic. It is, however unfortunately, clear that the use of an international trustee force to topple the last Ethiopian emperor (Mengistu) was never on and that - however unsatisfactory - the external support that was injected did save lives (and could have saved more had low income household livelihood rehabilitation been included) while at the same time it is doubtful that it delayed the overthrow of the regime.

These conclusions in respect to domestic priorities may appear pessimistic but more by comparison with utopia than with present reality. No Southern

African regime will actually reject emergency assistance targeted to severely affected people (even if at least one is very reticent about admitting to crises). Even in the low domestic political economic priority cases substantial progress on the thirteen point agenda is practicable and would save lives and rehabilitate livelihoods quite literally in their thousands.