Part I: Contexts and Debates

1. Introduction: Livelihoods in Crisis:

Challenges for Rural Development in Southern Africa

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1 Introduction

Livelihoods in southern Africa are in crisis. One of the worst ever food crises has hit the region, with over 14 million reported to be at risk. Newspapers carry appeals from charities for support, and TV images of food queues and malnourished children are commonplace. Yet, southern Africa is the region where the development success story was supposed to unfold. This was the bread basket of the continent, where economic reforms were apparently generating growth and investment and where the great hopes of democratic transition were supposed to show quick dividends. According to the script, the crisis was not supposed to happen.

The research on which this *Bulletin* is based has attempted to examine how various rural development and governance initiatives, concerning wild resources, land and water, have played out in practice in a series of rural areas in three southern African countries: Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe. By looking empirically and in detail at what has and has not happened on the ground, questions are raised about the nature of the current livelihoods crisis, its origins and potential solutions. What emerges, perhaps not surprisingly, is a complex story connecting livelihood change with the dynamics of politics and power, where easy technical or managerial solutions are not immediately evident.

That Africa has not gained from economic reforms and globalisation is by now widely accepted. That something needs to be done is agreed upon by everyone. But the solutions are elusive. A recent flurry of initiatives has emerged, with the New Economic Partnership for Africa (NEPAD) being the most prominent.[1] Led by African leaders, including Thabo Mbeki, President of South Africa, this offers a familiar cocktail of policy measures, combining further neo-liberal economic reform, technology transfer and support for social service provision, especially health and education, all within a framework of so-called "good governance". As many have pointed out, NEPAD is in many respects barely distinguishable from the current orthodoxy promoted by most aid agencies and the international financial institutions through the mechanisms of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs)[2] and other sectoral interventions.

But are these initiatives on the right track? Do they really respond to the challenges of livelihood vulnerability in rural southern Africa? Are these responses offering something new, or is this old wine in new bottles?

As in the rest of Africa, poverty remains concentrated in rural areas. Many of these are remote, with poor infrastructure, limited services provision and far from the centres of power and decision-making. The three case study sites: Zambézia province in Mozambique, the former Transkei in the Eastern Cape in South Africa and Chiredzi district in Zimbabwe all, in different ways, fit this description of poor, marginalised areas (see article 2, this *Bulletin*). These areas too have been the subject of development interventions over the past decade in the name of rural development, and were supposed to have benefited from a plethora of national-level economic and governance reform policies. Yet poverty persists and seems to be increasing. Rural development policy appears to be at a crossroads.[3] Past prescriptions appear not to be working and new offerings, while acknowledging some of the failings of past efforts, are perhaps not radical enough to confront the enormity of the challenge. But what are the alternatives? By critically examining the experience of the case study areas, the *Bulletin* articles tentatively attempt to define what the contours of an alternative might be.

2 Rural development at a crossroads?

Before looking forward, we need first to look back. Debates on rural development have a long pedigree in southern Africa, dating from the colonial era when a range of different initiatives were pursued. In more recent times rural development policy has been constructed around a particular narrative centred on the assumed efficiency of the small family farm. Agriculture, as the mainstay of the rural economy can, it is argued, be transformed through technology transfer, supported by effective extension and input supply and credit systems. Efficient and productive small farms would produce sufficient food to eliminate food insecurity, provide opportunities for labour, and form the basis for broader-based rural growth (cf. Mellor 1966; Lipton 1977; Ellis and Biggs 2001). Or so the story went …

In the early 1980s, there appeared to be evidence for this in Zimbabwe: a smallholder-led African "Green Revolution" seemed to be developing (Rukuni and Eicher 1994). Maize output boomed, as communal area farmers in the newly independent Zimbabwe started producing for the market. They were supported in their endeavours by generous credit arrangements, a newly revamped extension system and parastatal marketing boards, which provided guaranteed prices (Rohrbach 1989; Weiner 1988). But the miracle did not last. Drought struck hard in the mid-1980s, resulting in major declines in productivity and a dramatic loss of cattle, perhaps the key asset in the rural production system. From the early 1990s, structural adjustment policies were adopted nationally at the insistence of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), which resulted in a decline in state service provision and the privatisation of parastatal marketing boards (see article 2, this *Bulletin*). While this undoubtedly benefited some, those who lost out were those in the more marginal areas and the poor, who became poorer and more vulnerable. The economic reforms also changed the opportunities for circular migration. These had been central to livelihoods since the early colonial era and, with the consequent decline in remittance receipts in the rural areas, there was a resultant decline in investment in assets and a reduced ability to pay for inputs. The impacts of adjustment were compounded by another major drought in 1991–92 that reduced the asset base, particularly cattle, yet further (see Scoones *et al.* 1996; Wolmer *et al* 2002). In addition, from this time the effects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic began to be felt seriously with mortality and morbidity, especially among age groups who would otherwise have been the most productive farmers or remittance-earners (Barnett *et al.* 2001; Cross and Whiteside 1993). Economic mismanagement and a crisis of political authority have plagued the country in the past few years, only adding to the layering of problems that had accumulated in the two decades since independence. Today, levels of poverty are higher, agricultural productivity is lower and life expectancy at birth is now under 40 years (World Bank 2002).

There is much debate in the region as to whether this smallholder agriculture-led model is the way forward. In South Africa, for instance, there has been a tangible shift away from such a commitment in policy debates surrounding land reform. Commentators have argued that small-scale farming is not economically viable, and that rural dwellers are not interested in "proper", productive, efficient farming in any case. Data is often deployed that shows the limited proportion of total income derived from agricultural sources, highlighting, instead, the importance of remittances, pensions and off-farm income sources generally (e.g. Budlender 1999). While this analysis is questioned by many (cf. Lipton *et al.* 1996; Shackleton *et al.* 2000), the argument that the future of agriculture lies in an "emergent" black commercial farming sector appears to hold sway. Indeed, in Zimbabwe this has also been very much part of policy rhetoric up to today, with the recent land reform offering land to the relatively better off under the A2 commercial farm resettlement scheme, as well as the poor (see *SLSA Research Paper* 2).[4]

Whether small- or large-scale, primarily subsistence or commercial, the overarching policy prescription for the rural sector, and agriculture in particular, over the last decade or more has been one of liberalisation, as part of structural adjustment programmes implemented in all three of the case study countries. This "Washington consensus" has had dramatic effects on the viability of agriculture and the livelihoods of poor, rural people, as the example of Zimbabwe above has illustrated.

However, of late, there has been a growing call for a rethinking of this apparent consensus on food, farming and rural development (Ashley and Maxwell 2001; Maxwell and Heber-Percy 2001; Kydd and Dorward 2001). Such commentators take issue with the argument that smallholder productivity and efficiency can be delivered through an economic reform package involving the wholesale liberalisation of the agricultural sector. While no-one argues that the old style parastatals were paragons of efficiency and effectiveness, their removal has resulted in an institutional gap, it is argued, which means that the transaction costs involved in engaging in a newly liberalised, market-oriented rural economy are high, often preventing entry, particularly for poorer producers (Kydd 2002). This argument can be extended to other areas, where the assumptions of the level playing field for market engagement can be questioned, and those who lose out are those who do not have the skills, capacities and resources to get on the upward ladder of market-led growth (see article 6, this *Bulletin*).

Many recent commentaries also argue that the small farm model, with small-scale agricultural growth the main motor of development, may be inappropriate in contemporary settings. Efforts, so the argument goes, should instead be focused on supporting new, commercially-oriented agricultural entrepreneurs, rather than the conventional clientele of the mass of smallholder farmers. A number of reasons are forwarded for this position. First, due to the changing nature of agriculture and associated commodity and supply chains, with food systems increasingly consolidated, often in supermarket-driven supply systems, small farmers may find it progressively more difficult to compete in such markets (Reardon *et al.* 2002). Similarly, new technologies, which provide both higher quality and increased productivity, may also require more highly skilled and more capital-rich farming enterprises than the conventional small-scale farm (Tripp 2001). The old scale-neutrality arguments for technology transfer may no longer apply when globalised markets, requiring particular standards of quality, govern the type of technology options that are developed by private sector research and development. Small family farms are therefore seen as not "economically viable", with consolidation and larger units needed. Entry into global markets in agriculture (a non-debatable necessity given the inevitability of the WTO regime and globalisation, so goes the argument) is restricted for small-scale farmers without capital, skills, quality assurance, etc. Finally, from sections of the environmental lobby, small-scale farming is seen as environmentally destructive and inefficient.

3 Diverse livelihoods and the non-farm economy

Such a vision however, does not really provide a solution for what to do about rural poverty and how the vast mass of other rural dwellers, who do not fit into the nascent commercial farmer category, will make a livelihood. For answers to this conundrum, debate has shifted to the non-farm rural economy, and the potentials for livelihood diversification outside the agricultural sector, or at least encouraging employment and income generation which adds value to locally produced agricultural products (Start 2001; World Bank 2000a). While no-one argues that agriculture is unimportant, the supposed ideal of full-time farming on a small plot may no longer apply (if ever it did).

Certainly, most farmers in southern African are part-time, combining agriculture with other livelihood activities, including a range of off-farm work both locally and further afield (sometimes in other countries). This has been a pattern since the colonial era, and circular migration, with remittance flows financing local investment and asset accumulation through the demographic cycle, has been a key facet of rural livelihood strategies for the best part of the last century. Part-time farming, with high degrees of gender and age differentiation, is the norm in southern Africa. Some have commented on this pattern of "deagrarianisation" (Bryceson *et al.* 2000) and associated livelihood diversification (Reardon, 1997; Ellis 2001; Barrett *et al.* 2001; Bernstein and Byres 2001) as a more general, and in some places recent, phenomenon. It certainly is central to any understanding of contemporary rural livelihoods across the study areas discussed here (see article 2, this *Bulletin*).

Interventions that assume a particular model of farming – for example integrated crop-livestock production on a mixed farm (Scoones and Wolmer 2002) – may be misplaced, failing to see the diversity of ways livelihood portfolios are constructed. Similarly, notions of the "economically viable" farm, or the "viable unit" for farm sizes, may be missing the point. Instead, interventions that support a rounded view of complex, diverse rural livelihoods – rather than just "agriculture" or "farming" – are important. These would encompass, for example, supporting effective migration, improving remittance transfers or encouraging the start-up of off-farm enterprises (cf. McDowell and de Haan 1997; Toulmin, 2000). Such a perspective would, in turn, recast in important ways approaches to rural extension and training, credit provision or, more broadly, immigration policy (see for example Shankland 2000).[5]

4 Sustainable livelihoods

Some of these perspectives come together under the rubric of a "sustainable livelihoods approach". As a development buzzword and umbrella term, sustainable livelihoods has come to mean many different things to different people. Amongst other things, it has come to connote multi-dimensional perspectives on poverty, an asset-based approach to development and a focus on institutions and policies, participation and empowerment (Ashley and Carney 1999; Carney 2002). In many respects, by encompassing all bases of contemporary development thinking, it came to mean everything and nothing. Its early formulations (Chambers and Conway 1992), and the subsequent "frameworks" (Carney 1998; Scoones 1998), emphasised several key aspects, however. First, the focus on assets, formulated in terms of "capitals": economic, social, human etc., as the basis on which people construct complex livelihood portfolios. And, second, the focus on institutions and policies as mediating the process by which livelihoods are played out and outcomes realised.

The "asset pentagon" in the Department for International Development (DFID) sustainable livelihoods framework (Carney 1998) captured much attention. This was important in highlighting the trade-offs, for instance, between economic assets (of capital, credit etc.), natural assets (of land, livestock etc.) and human assets (of skills, education etc.) in the construction of livelihood strategies, and so highlighting the variety of "entry points" for development interventions, perhaps going beyond the standard formulae. However, the asset focus downplayed the other key element of the livelihoods approach: institutional and policy mediation (cf. Shankland 2000; Hussein 2002). This emphasised how institutions and policies affect the way people gain access to assets and how, in turn, different livelihood strategies are played out. Hidden in the "policies, institutions and processes" box of the livelihoods frameworks was a whole world of complex institutional arrangements, social relations and policy processes; all influenced by power and politics (Keeley 2001).

As many have pointed out, the rather technocratic application of the livelihoods framework in the context of aid programming and project planning, perhaps inevitably, downplayed issues of power and politics. Under the guise of "governance" approaches, such issues could be talked about at the margins, but largely in terms of well-established models of community-based participatory management; various versions of decentralisation; or forms of public administration and management for organisational reform. Thus technocratic, design-oriented institutional and organisational models fitted into the sustainable livelihoods approach without question. And, with this, dozens of decentralised watershed programmes, community-based natural resource management projects or public sector service reform initiatives could be rebranded as "sustainable livelihoods" projects without too much trouble. Such exercises in rebranding may be seen, in many instances justifiably, as a rather cynical response to development faddism, and flows of resources.[6]

But a sustainable livelihoods approach has encouraged, for some, a somewhat deeper and critical reflection. This arises in particular from looking at the consequence of development efforts from a local-level perspective, making the links from the micro-level situated particularities of poor people's livelihoods to wider-level institutional and policy framings at district, provincial, national and even international levels. Such reflections therefore put into sharp relief the importance of complex institutional and governance arrangements, and the key relationships between livelihoods, power and politics.

5 Politics, power and livelihoods

It was this type of multi-level institutional and policy analysis, starting at the micro level through detailed understanding of particular case study settings and looking upwards and outwards to broader institutional and policy arenas, that the research reported in this *Bulletin* attempted to do. Rather than focusing on formal organisations and institutional design the research emphasised the complex, messy institutional context that poor people face when trying to gain access to livelihoods (cf. Mehta *et al.* 1999, 2001). The tactics and strategies people deploy to negotiate access to resources through a range of routes in a highly pluralistic, power-laden institutional setting, have been the focus of much of the work, as the articles in this *Bulletin* demonstrate. The work took a micro-political and anthropological approach to understanding the social and political basis of power, authority and accountability. In addition, the research took an historical approach to understanding how institutional arrangements have been layered on colonial and post-colonial interventions. Together, these perspectives have allowed a complex understanding of how lines of authority and control are constructed in overlapping and often contested institutional settings in particular places and, as a result, allowed for a nuanced and grounded analysis of the consequences of different rural development interventions on rural livelihoods.

A similar perspective has been applied to our understandings of policy. Rather than taking policy-making at face value, and examining policy in a linear, mechanistic manner, we have approached our understanding of policy with a focus on process and politics. By understanding how different policy debates have been framed, and how different actors' perspectives have been included or excluded, we have attempted to grapple with the complex politics of the policy-making process in respect of land, water and wild resources across the three countries (see Part II). These approaches again show that things are not so simple: power relations, bureaucratic politics, interest groups, connections from the local to the global and back again, all affect the nature of policy framing and the form of intervention we see on the ground (cf. Keeley and Scoones 2003).

The research programme was conducted across three phases. The mapping phase (October 2000–April 2001) was aimed at gaining a broad overview of the issues in the context of an understanding of livelihood dynamics in the chosen study areas. This also involved developing policy contacts and networks both in the case study areas, and nationally. Through interactions in the field and with policy actors, a series of focused case studies were developed by country teams. The case study phase (April 2001–May 2002) involved a period of in-depth fieldwork on a series of issues which highlighted some of the key livelihood challenges and policy trade-offs in the case study areas (see *SLSA Research Papers* listed on page 116). The case study work, in particular, highlighted the local institutional and policy dynamics surrounding livelihoods and three different resources: wild resources, water and land.

Despite the evidence of livelihood diversification to non-farm livelihood opportunities in all three of the case study areas (see article 2, this *Bulletin*), a significant proportion of people, and particularly poorer sections of the case study communities, are reliant on natural resources for farming, fishing, forestry, wild produce harvesting, and commercial enterprises of various sorts. Natural resources therefore remain central to rural livelihoods. Land, for example, is of course critical to agriculture, but also may be more indirectly important in other livelihood activities, as the basis for tourism enterprises, as collateral for business ventures and so on. Water, similarly, is of course vital for all livelihoods, whether for domestic or livestock drinking or for small-scale irrigation or catchment management. Wild resources in the case study areas, as article 3 (this *Bulletin*) shows, are highly varied across the study areas, from forestry for timber concessions, to wildlife for hunting and safaris, to recreational amenities for tourism. As a source of livelihood, such resources may have direct uses through local consumption, but also the potential for commercial activities and joint ventures with private sector operators

In each of the three countries, and across each of the three resources focused on in this research, there are a variety of ongoing policy debates connecting livelihoods and resource development. Each, in different ways, presents a vision for rural development and livelihood options, prescribing in turn the institutional and governance arrangements required. Thus user committees, management councils, decentralised local authorities, participatory planning approaches, joint venture arrangements and so on, come as part of the policy package. So, for example, policy narratives on land and land reform in Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe suggest different perspectives on the relationship between land and livelihoods for the poor Land policies are highly contested and often fast-changing, influenced by both local action on the ground, and broader national and international debates (see article 5, this *Bulletin*). Water policies are similarly variable and dynamic, with a strong push towards the definition of water rights in the region and, with this, the development of associated institutions: catchment councils, borehole committees, to regulate and manage use (see article 4, this *Bulletin*). In the wild resources area, policies have emphasised the importance of making use of public, often communally held, resources through joint arrangements with the private sector in order to add value, enter new markets and so, hopefully, create livelihood opportunities for the rural poor (see article 3, this *Bulletin*). The various ways such policies have been constructed and implemented are discussed in the three articles of Part II through an examination, in particular, of what has actually happened on the ground in the case study areas, and what impact this has had – positive and negative – on rural livelihoods

The final phase of the research programme has focused on synthesis and cross-cutting analysis (May 2002–March 2003).Throughout the previous two phases, a series of cross-cutting themes were identified. Gaining access to resources, whether land, water or wild resources, is conditioned by the wider policy context Such policy contexts frame the way interventions are thought about and acted upon. In the past decade or so a number of "conventional wisdoms" have dominated government and donor policies alike in southern Africa, as elsewhere These conventional wisdoms frame policies in different ways. Three such framings were identified as being important in donor and government policy discourse in the three countries and across the three resource themes These were 'pro-poor growth and the role of private sector investment and markets', 'decentralisation' and 'rights-based approaches'. Each suggests different routes by which people may gain access to resources: by gaining access to markets or private sector investment; through devolving power and control to the local level through decentralisation; and through granting of rights over resources through legal and constitutional measures and mobilisation around such rights In different ways, then, policy framings emanating from these starting points suggest different "takes" on the idea of sustainable livelihoods, and the practical actions needed.

These framings are, of course, not mutually exclusive It is perfectly possible to argue for a rights-based approach in the context of a process of redistribution through decentralised mechanisms, with the possibility of joint initiatives with the private sector, levering private investment for making the most of redistributed assets But we need to be clear about what does and does not work, and avoid the fudge of arguing for all things at the same time, or, more often, arguing one line (today most likely a neo-liberal economic reform agenda) with other bits added on (poverty, livelihoods, participation).

6 Perspectives on governance: implications for a sustainable livelihoods approach

Articles 6, 7 and 8 in this *Bulletin* highlight the research team's reflections on these policy framings The following sections summarise some of the key arguments of each of the main policy narratives investigated in the research, with some hints at the findings, which are more fully discussed later in the *Bulletin*.

6.1 Pro-poor growth, the private sector and markets

This has perhaps become the dominant narrative in recent years, and is associated with a neo-liberal agenda on development, embraced to varying degrees in all three countries, at least until recently, and pushed heavily by donors, most notably the World Bank. It is also firmly associated with Africa-focused initiatives such as NEPAD The argument runs thus: via market-based interventions, and the investment of private capital, usually from outside the locality, the asset value and benefit stream from resources can be enhanced. This will have benefits for local people as employment is generated, multiplier effects are created, and benefit-sharing options become available To kick start this virtuous cycle there may be need for public investment in things like infrastructure and incentives supplied to private sector interests provided by the government. Public-private partnerships of various sorts are envisaged, which, in some cases, can involve community groups.

The issues raised by our empirical work include: the problem of weak/thin and uncertain markets; the lack of public investment to attract external, and particularly foreign, investment; the highly politicised and historically contextualised nature of markets; the scope for rent-seeking/corruption; and the lack of regulatory control and capacity of government. Who actually benefits from such initiatives is another question, given potentially unaffordable user fees, difficulties of market entry, high transaction costs, lack of skills and capacity and so on, especially for poor people.

These issues are highlighted in the examination of the tourism and forestry approaches being implemented in the Eastern Cape (article 3, this *Bulletin*; *SLSA Research Paper* 6), the water sector, particularly in South Africa (article 4, this *Bulletin*; *SLSA Research Paper* 17), and in land privatisation in Mozambique (article 5, this *Bulletin*; *SLSA Research Paper* 11). More regional implications are highlighted in the context of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park initiative spanning all three countries (article 3, this *Bulletin*; *SLSA Research Paper* 4).

6.2 Decentralisation

Decentralised approaches have become a standard feature of rural development across southern Africa Decentralisation is seen as a must for any development intervention it appears, and the amount of donor money being spent on decentralisation initiatives of various sorts is one indication of the popularity of the concept The argument runs that, if resources are managed at the local level, by communities or local government, then they will be looked after better, and more efficiently Systems of accountability are more effective and transparent as a result, and the local leadership can make effective demands on the central state Such decentralised arrangements thus allow more community participation and therefore the voices of people are more likely to be heard in policy decisions.

However, as a wealth of evidence from the case studies demonstrates, it is not as simple as that Much local government decentralisation is simply deconcentration, with local authorities left with little power and few resources. Multiple, parallel decentralisations result in often competing and conflictual relations at the local level, for instance between new local government players and more "traditional" authorities. In this highly politicised setting, there are plenty of opportunities for capture of processes by local elites, government officials and private players, with very limited forms of effective accountability, horizontal or vertical (see article 7, this *Bulletin*). A cautious central government, for fiscal, administrative and political reasons, may resist a complete devolution of powers over budgets and decisions and the result is often competition between central line ministries and newly formed local governments. For poor people trying to make their way through this institutional maze, the costs may be high. It may be both highly time-consuming (attending meetings, visiting different offices, negotiating across authority structures) and potentially require cash that they can ill-afford to spend (bribes, travel etc.). In other words, in many circumstances (very common it seems) decentralisation – or at least the version(s) being promoted currently – may not be good for people's livelihoods.

Case material that speaks to this debate is found across all three countries, including the complexities of local administration in the Eastern Cape (*SLSA Research Paper* 5), the competition between traditional leaders and governmental authorities (or their absence) in Zambézia in Mozambique (*SLSA Research Paper* 13), and the new political order emerging in rural Zimbabwe, with the Rural District Councils bypassed by war veterans and party organisations (*SLSA Research Paper* 3). The whole question of the role of traditional authorities (chiefs, headmen, spirit mediums etc.) in contemporary political settings is, of course, an ongoing debate, as is, more generally, the changing role of the state, especially given the neo-liberal stance adopted firmly in South Africa and Mozambique, and the new authoritarianism that appears to be the case in Zimbabwe.

6.3 Rights-based approaches

There has been much talk about a rights-based approach to development, particularly in the South African context, where debates over the post-1994 constitution were very much framed in terms of rights and new forms of citizenship in the new South Africa. A range of legislative provisions, particularly in respect of land and water resources, have been passed which are seen as models of a rights-based approach. The argument for this approach has been that, with clearly specified rights to resources, citizens can mobilise to gain access to them on the basis of clear, transparent legal provision. With the law providing the basis for negotiation, parties are accountable and decisions are clear, it is argued. More generally with a rights framework, particularly one that is constitutionally enshrined, there is a basic political signal that rights matter, and that people should organise and claim rights through accountable political and legal processes.

But the big question is how these new-found rights are translated into practice, and whether the envisaged level of rights-claiming by poor people can or does exist. Here we come across a range of issues: How organised are poor people? What access to information and organisational, negotiation, legal and other skills do they have? How do they construct their citizenship in the contemporary setting – as rights-holders or more passively as consumers or beneficiaries of state or donor assistance? How do politics, power and interests affect the ability of rights-claiming in practice in particular settings? How do multiple legal orders affect the ability of people to claim rights? Which gain precedence over others, and who wins out in the end? Is the institutional context for rights-claiming effective? To what degree is it really a level playing field set by principles of equality in the constitution? How do local contexts – institutions and politics – affect the ability of people to negotiate access to resources to which they are entitled?

Discussions in this *Bulletin* attempt to look at these questions. Article 8 looks at the practice of rights-claiming in the context of legal pluralism and complex, politicised institutional settings, and so focuses our attention on how and if rights are made real. Rather than just considering rights in abstract legal or constitutional terms, our focus on the relationship between actors and institutions perhaps offers some fruitful insights into the rights, livelihoods and development debate, both conceptually and practically. Cases discussed include a comparative look at the rights-based approach in respect of the recently passed Water Acts in South Africa and Zimbabwe (*SLSA Research Paper* 20). Also, land rights approaches across all three countries differ in interesting ways, suggesting implications for how land and tenure reform provisions are realised in practice (*SLSA Research Paper* 19).

7 The challenge of redistribution

Part III, and much of the resource-focused discussion in Part II, highlight both the potentials and limitations of these three framings of policy in the southern African context. As we have seen, pro-poor growth, decentralisation and rights-based approaches are central to mainstream government and donor discourse in the region. But our analysis suggests a further set of issues, which have not, of late at least, been central to policy rhetoric and practice. These centre on issues of redistribution (see Lahiff 2003 for a discussion focused on South Africa). One of the main over-arching conclusions of the research – which has consistently emerged across all countries, all resource themes and all policy areas – is that redistributive measures – and in particular the redistribution of key assets, notably land – are a prerequisite to successful rural development efforts, under any policy framing (see article 9, this *Bulletin*).

Given the historical inheritances of highly skewed asset (and particularly land) distribution from the colonial and apartheid eras, it is not surprising that redistribution issues are an important part of the policy debate in southern Africa. In the period following independence and the end of apartheid, a redistributive agenda was centre stage in all three countries, at least at the rhetorical level. In Mozambique, FRELIMO (Front for Liberation of Mozambique) had a radical Marxist-Leninist-inspired strategy of nationalisation from independence in 1975. In South Africa the new ANC government unveiled the Reconstruction and Development Programme in 1994, centred very much on redistributive efforts to generate economic growth. Similarly, soon after independence in 1980, the ZANU(PF) – Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front) – government of Zimbabwe announced their first five-year plan based on growth through equity, with land reform for smallholders, as in South Africa, seen as very much part of the equation.

Two arguments are made for redistribution policies: one political, the other economic. The most powerful and politically potent, of course, is the one based on redressing past inequities (especially in relation to particular racial inequalities). But this is reinforced by an argument that posits that, without more equitable asset distribution, the prospects for longer-term economic growth (and with this, political stability) will be jeopardised. The economic argument provides a justification for dealing with issues of inequality, and for transferring resources to the poor and marginalised. Such strategies, however, are not easy to carry politically, as elite interests will almost inevitably be challenged. Given the power base of governments in the region, often reliant on fragile alliances with new (black) elites, commerce and international donors, the opportunities for substantial and meaningful redistribution were perhaps overstated and largely of a rhetorical nature in the flurry of post-independence and post-apartheid enthusiasm. Once the *real-politik* of international donor conditionalities, foreign investment requirements and the lobbying of a new elite struck home, governments changed their tune in practice, if not their election-time rhetoric. Thus by 1996, the ANC government in South Africa had embraced GEAR (the Growth, Employment And Redistribution programme), with a reversal of the logic of the RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme), arguing instead for redistribution through growth – trickle-down, rather than radical, root and branch reform. In the same way, FRELIMO and ZANU(PF) – once-radical Marxist-Leninists with a post-liberation vision for a socialist transformation – adopted structural adjustment policies, including wholesale liberalisation and privatisation (euphemistically termed "restructuring" in South Africa) of public assets, alongside major retrenchments in public sector services.

Alongside this redistribution of assets from the public to the private sector, some additional policies were instituted which ensured that the free market did not rule everything. Instead, policies for "indigenisation" (in Zimbabwe) or "black economic empowerment" (in South Africa), ensured that the new black elite – key to the electoral success of the ruling parties – were given preferential options (see article 6 in this *Bulletin* and *SLSA Research Paper* 18). While this has resulted in significant redistribution of assets and businesses from white-owned to black-owned, it has hardly resulted in a reduction in basic inequalities. Indeed, by most measures, inequality has increased over the past decade, with the previously poor and marginalised, mostly residing in the rural areas, becoming more so.

Without the required tax base, and indeed a reluctance to raise taxes from the relatively better-off, governments in the region have not offered substantial resources to the poor in order to encourage economic regeneration (cf. Moore and Rakner 2002). Indeed, the argument has often been made that such groupings are really only "welfare cases", where social safety nets (direct transfers and public provision of goods and services, including food aid, food-for-work, pensions etc.) are required, rather than investments for productive, sustained development of livelihood opportunities (see Devereux 2001; Farrington and Gill 2002). Reliance on donor subventions, particularly in Mozambique and Zimbabwe (pre-2000), either in terms of project funding for rural development and service delivery or, more recently, budget support, has meant that governments have had to worry less about their responsibilities to the rural poor, relying instead on the international development community's commitment to poverty reduction.

Instead, during the 1990s, and up to the present in Mozambique and South Africa, there has been, rather than a redistribution focus, an overwhelming dominance of the neo-liberal paradigm for development, although softened somewhat with some social protection add-ons, and some concessions to "black economic empowerment" or "indigenisation". Given the clear need for some level of redistributive efforts if rural development efforts are to have any impact, what are the prospects for the (re)emergence of a redistributive agenda in southern Africa?

At the beginning of our research, we might have surmised that such prospects were very unlikely Yet, events in Zimbabwe since 2000 have somewhat changed the picture Here, land redistribution has become the central plank of a sometimes violent, often haphazard, nationalist politics, which has sent shockwaves through the political elite of the region, along with the donor community. Maybe the powder keg of unmet promises in the region is about to be set alight more generally? Maybe the livelihoods crisis is in part the result of the failure to meet the redistributive challenge head on? Maybe a rural politics of land, livelihoods and asset inequality will emerge as a challenge to the dominant, elite and urban-led, economic reform package?

A big question raised therefore is how can state – and indeed donor – thinking and capacity be enhanced to develop an approach to meaningful redistribution for southern Africa, that enhances the sustainability of livelihoods, reduces poverty and that, in the longer term at least, encourages economic growth? Only with such a platform, the articles in this *Bulletin* argue, can the "pro-poor" potentials of market engagement and private sector partnership, rights-approaches and decentralised democratic governance be realised.

8 Conclusion

Commenting on the challenges of poverty reduction policy for DFID, Sue Unsworth notes:

> Poverty reduction requires a longer term, more strategic understanding of the social and political realities of power, and confronts us with ethical choices and trade-offs which are much more complex... A more historical, less technical way of looking at things can provide a sense of perspective (Unsworth 2001: 7).

Our findings would very much echo these sentiments. The field-level understandings of livelihoods in practice highlight how, in reality, the world of institutions and policies are intensely complex and uncertain, power-laden and political. Technical approaches to "good governance", through public administration and management interventions for decentralisation, or legalistic approaches to rights, for example, are clearly insufficient, as the case study findings testify.

Often such "good governance" interventions are premised on some unrealistic assumptions about the functioning of both the state and civil society, which, as we found in southern Africa, do not stand up to scrutiny. Systems of patronage politics, "traditional" chiefs and headmen, spirit control over resources, are all part and parcel of real political systems (see *SLSA Research Paper* 3 for Zimbabwe). They overlap with new forms of elected authority, sometimes, but not always, associated with political parties, and old, colonial state forms designed for very different purposes to the democratic, efficient bureaucratic ideal of today. This complex, hybrid pattern is very much the reality, and cannot be wished away. In much of Africa, including to a varying extent the study areas where this research was focused, the public sphere of governmental authority intermingles with the private spheres of patrimonial authority, commerce, kin and other relationships (cf. Bayart *et al.* 1999; Chabal and Daloz 1999). Civil society, as an autonomous, independent grouping able to hold state power to account, does not exist in the way so often assumed. Instead, again, hybrid actors and complex alliances and associations are evident, with actually very limited separate, independent political activity. NGOs, regularly equated with "civil society", are often simply conduits for external aid, and substitutes for the state in service delivery, and serve little, if any, political role. The private sector too can barely be regarded as an independent grouping, so bound up is it in intimate connections with the state.

Thus the standard discourse of civil society-state relations, or public-private partnerships requires much more unpacking than is conventionally done, in order to reveal the complex webs of connections, lines of authority and power relations embedded in such relationships. State authority and power are dependent on these relationships. With limited potential for tax-raising in the rural areas, local authorities must rely on other sources of revenue, including dependency on donors and the central state, and thereby diverting channels of authority and accountability away from the local populace. In order to develop a realistic vision of what governance reforms might enhance sustainable livelihoods, and particularly encourage the development of a redistributive agenda as the basis for poverty reduction and rural growth, an understanding of such political complexities is a basic starting point (cf Moore and Putzel 2000; Luckham *et al.* 2000). If the simplistic technocratic and managerial assumptions so often embedded in "good governance" talk are abandoned in favour of something more related to what is found on the ground, then a more realistic agenda for policy action might emerge.

This research has highlighted the diversity and dynamism of rural livelihoods in southern Africa. Livelihoods are embedded in complex and contested governance contexts, where politics and power relationships must be at the centre of any analysis Simple models imposed on complex settings, as we, along with many others before us, have found, just do not work, no matter how polished the rhetoric or how neat the managerial or administrative prescription. Thus in practice community-private partnerships, decentralised local authority, community-based sustainable development or user committees emerging from rights-based approaches, for example, are not straightforward. Uncertainties, trade-offs, conflicts and power dynamics are inevitable, and need to be brought to the centre of rural development thinking and practice. We need therefore to go beyond the "Washington consensus" of market-led reform in several ways. Not only is there a need to consider how "missing institutions" are undermining the livelihood opportunities of the poor (cf. Kydd and Dorward 2001), but we also need to consider how the structures and processes of politics and power also are key. The articles that follow therefore highlight some of the dilemmas and challenges ahead, both in relation to particular sectoral areas – wild resources, water and land (Part II) – and in relation to policy themes – pro-poor growth, decentralisation and rights (Part III). The final article summarises some of the key future challenges centring on the politics of livelihood opportunity, if repeats of the current southern Africa livelihoods crisis are to be avoided.

Notes

1. NEPAD is a commitment by African leaders to eradicate poverty and place the African continent on a path of lasting growth and development (Matlosa 2002, Chabal 2002); see www.nepad.org.

2. The "new architecture of aid" (cf Farrington and Lomax 2001) offers budget support to governments on the basis of agreed "partnerships" between donors and national governments. The World Bank's process of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers have become the favoured mode, with most bilateral aid donors buying into the process.

3. There has been a flurry of new policies emerging from donors responding to this See, for example, World Bank (2000b), updating Vision to Action (World Bank 1997), IFAD (2001), DFID (2002) and the EU (Mikos 2001). A number of reviews discuss these, notably the *Development Policy Review* special issue edited by Ashley and Maxwell (2001).

4. The complete list of *SLSA Research Papers* is found on page 116 of this *Bulletin* and full text versions are available at www ids.ac uk/slsa.

5. An earlier IDS-coordinated programme on sustainable livelihoods (1996–2000) examined livelihood dynamics at the local level in Ethiopia, Mali and Bangladesh, and identified the influence institutions and policies have on livelihood options. The SLSA programme took this sort of understanding as its starting point. It invested less in detailed micro-level analysis of livelihood change, but more in the institutional and policy questions across levels.

6. An estimated £200 million was spent on "sustainable livelihoods" projects, e.g. by DFID between 1998 and 2001.

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