

LINKING RELIEF WITH DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA: A SADC PERSPECTIVE ON THE 1991/92 DROUGHT EMERGENCY

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1 INTRODUCTION

This article reflects on the issue of linking relief and development from the perspective of the Food Security Technical and Administrative Unit of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). SADC is a regional organization linking 10 countries in Southern Africa.¹ The Food Security Unit has the responsibility of coordinating the regional food security programme. It is grouped into four areas, namely: food policy analysis and research generation and exchange of information; food availability; and food access.

A regional perspective has proved to be useful in Southern Africa. In a normal year, the region is characterized by food surpluses in some countries (e.g. Zimbabwe and Malawi) and by a deficit in others (e.g. Botswana, Lesotho and Namibia): there is active trade between surplus and deficit regions. Even when trade takes place with countries outside the region, several SADC members may be involved, because several member countries are land-locked and depend on transport links in neighbouring countries.

The experience of SADC has traditionally been that regional cooperation is most effectively based on information exchange and cooperative planning. Early attempts at joint investment, for example in a common food security reserve, were less successful. However, recent experience has shown that broader community-level action is both necessary and possible: the 1991/92 drought provides a good example of successful cooperation.

In terms of linking relief and development, there is now scope to move forward on a Community basis: information, infrastructure, technology development and training are all possibilities.

The article begins with a brief review of SADC's experience during the drought of 1991/92. It then

addresses the question of linking relief and development.

2 THE 1991/92 DROUGHT

As early as August 1991, the Food Security Technical and Administrative Unit (FSTAU) warned the SADC Summit that the region's grain stocks were at precariously low levels, owing in part to the below average harvest of the previous year. By December 1991, the situation looked critical. Early warning reports that the harvest in the region was likely to be affected by a continued drought, and that very large quantities of food imports would be necessary, began to surface across the region. By the end of January 1992, these warnings were substantiated. Some 2.06 million square miles of land were reported to have been stricken by drought. In addition, of the 86 million affected people, 18 million were believed to be at serious risk.

Agriculture was not the only sector affected: small-scale trading, family remittances and other traditional 'coping mechanisms' were threatened for urban dwellers as well. Because of the lack of water and energy, manufacturing enterprises faced the need to retrench workers. The economic contraction, in turn, threatened the service sector.

Estimates indicated that aggregate cereal production would fall to 6.2 million MT, or just over half normal production. The cereal import requirement for the SADC region was estimated at 7.7 million MT by October 1992. In addition, South Africa estimated its own cereal import needs at 5.5 million MT. This meant that over 13 million MT of cereals, representing a six-fold increase above normal cereal imports, would need to be imported from overseas and would be added to existing regional transport flows. Counting the cost of food, transport, internal storage and handling and non-food costs, the total bill for the SADC region was estimated at about \$US 2.6 billion, equivalent

¹ Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

to over 12 per cent of the region's GDP. Adding South Africa's estimated USD 1.5 billion for food imports raised the total cost to nearly USD 4 billion.

Serious concerns were raised over the transport and logistical capacities of the region's transport system, as unprecedented tonnages were expected to be mobilized and moved within the shortest time possible. The shortcomings in the region's transport system resulted from a combination of war damage, insufficient locomotive power, railway wagons and road vehicles, and deferred maintenance of infrastructure and handling equipment. Also worrying were the deficiencies identified in regional logistics coordination and transport service management. Many problems arose from a shortage of management skills among the major transport service operators, which were by and large state-owned.

The response to the emergency showed that regional organizations made an important contribution, supporting and supplementing national efforts. The drought response has been recognized as successful.

First, the SADC Early Warning System, acting through the Regional Early Warning Unit based in Harare, was instrumental as early as 1991 in alerting SADC member States and the donor community of the impending drought. The system, supported by DANIDA but implemented by the UN's Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), also continued to monitor grain production, consumption requirements and import needs throughout the emergency. This performance by the System clearly proved its worth, underscoring the necessity of retaining a high level of early warning capability throughout the region.

An important point here is that there was a coordinated regional appeal: this was acclaimed by the UN, donors and NGO's as it rationalized the appeal for funds, showing relative needs among countries and reducing competition for donor funds.

Second, a Logistics Advisory Centre (LAC) was established by the SADC Ministers of Agriculture and Transport on 16 April 1992, as an executing agency for coordinating the massive tonnes of drought relief over 15 months. Also established were a Regional Task Force, Transport and Logistics Committees and six 'corridor groups' to facilitate corridor utilization.

After the SADC/UN Appeal, efforts were made by SADC to coordinate, at the policy level, the movement of food imports and to minimize transport impediments. SADC members devised a common strategy which was carried out by the LAC, with the technical assistance of the World Food Programme (WFP).

The LAC's main tasks were: collating and disseminating information about food imports; facilitating and monitoring movement of food imports from ports of origin to recipient countries; identifying and resolving logistical constraints; and putting into place a long-term drought-preparedness capacity within the region. It also acted as a clearing house for the approval and disbursement of funds for logistical projects (locomotives and shunting tractors, prefabricated storage facilities, tarpaulins, radio equipment, etc.) with funding from various donors. The LAC also held a workshop to train transport and logistics personnel for in-country movement of drought-relief goods.

Despite the overall success of the operation, a number of problems were encountered which made timely intervention difficult or impossible. Some of these were institutional. For example, financial delegation to the LAC was insufficient, which meant that approvals had to be made through WFP headquarters until late 1992. In another case, delayed customs clearance for imported spares for rail wagons held up US\$ 500,000 worth of components for six months. In yet another example, a railway tender board did not comply with the UN procurement rules and tender procedures for the purchase of sleepers, following which the selected supplier failed to deliver expeditiously. After eight months, the purchase had to be cancelled as it was no longer relevant to the relief effort.

Problems also arose because of donor delays in responding to the crisis, which caused bunching of food aid deliveries, and because of problems with delivery schedules. For instance, the month of November alone saw 800,000 MT being handled, thereby causing congestion as well as delays in throughput and offtake from the ports. Even though Dar was the low cost port for Zambia and Malawi (via Mbeya), the shippers preference was Beira, which became so congested that vessels had to wait up to three months to secure a berthing space. Partly as a result of these problems, logistical costs (including non-food items) exceeded food aid costs

by a ratio of 2:1. There were also problems with food quality: Dar-es Salaam port found 25 per cent of the arriving ships infested with foreign pests such as the Larger Grain Borer. Large quantities of grain came into the region contaminated with pesticides above accepted standards.

3 THE LINK BETWEEN DROUGHT RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT

SADC's experience suggests that the successful management of drought requires that governments create a strategic framework for resource mobilization which can ensure that short-term relief efforts support longer-term development. Since drought is a recurrent phenomenon representing a calculable risk to income growth and stability, policy response should be based primarily on measures which reduce long-term vulnerability and which increase incomes, combined with insurance mechanisms and contingency plans which enhance the level of preparedness including local coping mechanisms. There are six main areas where regional action can be effective.

First, a regional contribution is needed to the development and strengthening of information systems. Although early warning systems operated well during the drought, there was too little information available on water resources and needs and on household food security. Development of early warning should now concentrate on strengthening information systems to monitor household food security. A pilot food security and nutrition information systems project is underway in three countries, but more effort is needed to identify and document what has already been done and to ensure information is more widely distributed.

A second area concerns irrigation and water resource development. Food security in Southern Africa depends on irrigated, and not just rain-fed grain production. By December 1992, the region was experiencing constraints in providing water through boreholes involving a shortage of spare parts, lack of transport and delays in tendering procedures. Because of lack of materials, downtime for drilling rigs was nearly 50 per cent and the private drilling sector was booked eight months in advance. Insufficient raw materials could be imported, local manufacturers could not make sufficient pump heads, cylinders and valves for rural hand pumps (Republic of Zimbabwe, NAC, 29 April 1992: 8,13). Donors imported rigs, but these were only fully in place

by mid 1993. These delays suggest that drilling rigs should be considered part of development plans and integrated into the overall national water programme.

The drought also reminded Zimbabwe that 60 per cent of the communal farmers are in semi-arid zones. Therefore, more attention is needed to small-scale semi-arid agriculture at all levels perhaps by suggesting cost-effective improvement to traditional methods. Further, rehabilitation of rural production can help to reduce urban employment. If special attention is given to women, particularly in training and credit facilities, rural development can also reduce gender inequality while improving food security.

A third area concerns seed development and gene banks. The Southern African Centre for Corporation in Agricultural Research (SACCAR) coordinates research in drought-resistant cereals. Varieties of sorghum and millet have been tested in all ecological zones of the region. In the semi-arid zones of Zimbabwe, small farmers who planted two sorghum hybrids and three pearl millet varieties developed by SADC, harvested about one tonne per hectare, while their maize was a complete failure (Financial Gazette 3/9/92). The SADC Gene Bank seeks to preserve the region's plant resources, seed preservation, exchange and storage.

FSTAU has developed a project on small-scale seed production which focuses on small grains and is targeted towards small-scale farmers. Several training workshops have already been conducted. A project for regional seed development will get underway as soon as funding is made available.

The fourth area has to do with human resource development and donor intervention. Besides serious delays and inappropriate emergency mechanisms during the drought period, the region also faced the problem of parallel institutions being set up by the donors as many donor governments found it easier to fly in their own teams. A good example were the pre-drought assessment missions to verify the data. These assessments reduced the credibility of SADC EWS data and resulted in duplication of effort and a delay in the preparation of the appeal to donors.

Further, 'parallel institutions', set alongside government or regional programmes, tend to replicate what is already in process. They utilize funds which could

be invested in building capacity of the local institutions. Donor funds would be much more efficiently spent if used to train local personnel or to bring southern neighbours to share their expertise. Donor aid would be more cost-effective if it took advantage of local skills.

Human resource development through donor intervention does provide training. On the other hand, expatriates who become a majority in a planning or financial sector of a ministry have failed to transfer skills and build national capacity. In an emergency, expertise about local situations is as important as any technical innovations, be it a logistical advisory centre, and early warning system or simply collection of nutrition data.

The fifth area concerns strengthening existing structures. Prior to the 1991/92 drought, all countries had set up national early warning units which were linked to the regional early warning system. They provided information on the onset of drought and on its impact on agriculture and crop production. Where there were delays in response, this was largely a reflection of a lack of capacity within government and donors, rather than inadequate data. The major bottlenecks seemed to be in the institutions charged with responding to emergency. In some cases they did not have adequate resources and, in others, their roles and responsibilities were not properly defined. Therefore, those programmes that helped avert food crises situation should be maintained and strengthened.

Finally, training, research and development for sustainable agriculture. Training should focus on

agricultural land use and land management; agricultural extension services; exchange of research data on natural resource management; rural industries and production; and food security policy and policy analysis.

SADC needs to develop a sustainable capacity for research within the region, covering a number of topics: regional trade (including ways in which food deficit countries can be assured access to surpluses); how to protect/monitor expenditure on health and education under Structural Adjustment Programmes; real safety nets; how to help people remain on the land in drought-prone areas; identification of the poor and why; how to disseminate information on the production, storage and post-harvesting processing of small grains.

4 CONCLUSION

The ripple effects of the drought have continued to slow recovery and dim development prospects in the SADC region. Many governments which were forced to divert funds from development projects to food relief, exhausted their foreign exchange reserves and now face rising budget deficits and foreign debt burdens as a substantial percentage of food aid was actually 'food loan.' If relief aid, worth \$US 4bn in financial terms, had been put into developing regional capacities as a drought-proofing mechanism, future droughts would be less costly to donors and recipients alike as the region will be able to rely on its resources (agricultural, human, water, etc.). Economic development is a precondition for successful linking of relief and development.