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Moving Beyond Food Aid

Gary Sawdon

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Food Security in Southern Africa

Causes and responses
from the region

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IFAS

PO Box 542 - Newton 2113

Johannesburg - South Africa

Tel 27-11-836 0561

Fax 27-11-836 5850



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MOVING BEYOND FOOD AID

Incorporating Livelihoods Analysis into Vulnerability Assessments in Swaziland

Sawdon Gary, Save The Children

1. CONTEXT

Swaziland is a small land locked country surrounded by the Republic of South Africa. It has a population of approximately one million. 60% -70% of this population are from rural areas and are predominantly involved in a subsistence agriculture economy.

Although the small kingdom is perceived to be middle income, previous livelihoods and poverty reports, reveal that at least 60 to 70% of the Swazi population live below the poverty line. It is now recognised that the current food security crisis is not simply the effects of a drought. Overall livelihoods have been deteriorating at a rapid pace. The national currency has devalued dramatically and the consumer price index has risen sharply in the past four years. Current vulnerability assessments have shown that poor and middle-income groups have faced a general decline in access to casual and wage labour. Inflation and prices rises have reduced savings and assets, resulting in their inability to withstand future livelihood shocks.

Swaziland ranks amongst the top five countries in the world most affected by HIV/AIDS. The excess morbidity and mortality due to the disease has and will soon have wide ranging socio-economic impacts on households, communities, and the national economy. According to the 2002 Sero-Surveillance report, HIV prevalence among antenatal clinic clients was as high as 38%. (15 - 49 years) At the end of 2002, AIDS related deaths were estimated to be above 50,000. The number of AIDS orphans (30,000 in 2001) is now projected to rise at an average of 10,000 per year between 2002 and 2011. (Stanecki Projections).

For both the short and long term prognosis, communities, the Government of Swaziland and international agencies will need to be able to respond to the recurrent vulnerability of households throughout Swaziland. In both rural and urban areas, non-farm household incomes and livelihoods will continue to be vulnerable to a range of economic shocks and environmental stresses. All indicators point to a continuous structural decline in the role of migrant remittances and growing poverty in the wake of poor economic growth.

1.1 The National Disaster Task Force and the Swaziland Vulnerability Assessment Committee

In consideration of these alarming trends, the Swaziland VAC & SC (UK) along with many other stakeholders, including NGO's and Donors, recognise the need to strengthen the approaches and methodologies for gathering and analysing vital livelihood information for development and emergency purposes. The previous year's food security crisis in Swaziland has, once again, provided an impetus for the need to re-orient and strengthen existing state systems and approaches.

The current food crisis, affecting six countries in Southern Africa, has promulgated the establishment of National Vulnerability Assessment Committees (NVAC) within the region. The Swaziland NVAC, under the umbrella of the NDTF, was established as part of a collaborative initiative with the SADC-FANR RVAC. The overarching goal of the NVAC is to incorporate a livelihoods approach to vulnerability assessments in Swaziland. (e.g. one that embraces a multi-sectoral approach, which integrates the analysis of HIV/AIDS, health, water, etc with issues of food access and availability.)

Since July 2002, the Swazi NVAC has successfully conducted two emergency food need assessments in collaboration with SADC-RVAC. These assessments have largely increased the relevance and visibility of Swaziland VAC, as a key stakeholder in food security analysis in the country. After an initial focus on food aid requirements and after intensive debates, it is increasingly clear that responses to the current humanitarian crisis needs to go beyond short-term food aid needs to longer term livelihood programmes. As a key source of information for decision makers, it is equally critical that the Swaziland VAC assessments be broad and reflect priorities beyond just food needs.

In order to address this need, the SADC-FANR VAC has proposed that the April/May round of humanitarian assessments are conducted using a livelihoods based methodology. At the recent NVAC stakeholders meetings held in Pretoria from March 7th to 11th, the NVAC's from the six most affected countries, endorsed the LBVA approach and each country has developed operational plans. Overall, this will enhance an understanding of the factors underlying current food access problems, as well as, presenting a range of intervention options going beyond food aid.

The proposed methodology builds on existing work already done by the Swaziland VAC in the previous assessments. However, these proposed approaches require well-trained and highly motivated VAC members, as well as, a strengthened and institutionalised VAC.

1.2 Swaziland's Experience with Livelihood Approaches

People's livelihood systems are affected by both internal and external factors. Livelihood approaches to vulnerability assessments can provide an understanding on how and to what extent the combination of external and internal vulnerability affects the livelihoods of people. Linking this information together with the likely impact of shocks can provide a proper analysis for decision-makers to predict and prepare for emergency responses, as well as developmental programme planning. Recognising the significance of understanding people's livelihoods fully is an imperative for Swaziland. In order to achieve this vision and to strengthen the initiatives of the Swazi NVAC, institutional strengthening and capacity building are needed.

Introducing a livelihoods approach to vulnerability assessments dates back to 1997. At that time the approach was known as RiskMap. Using this approach, the first Household Food Economy assessment was carried out, with the first national livelihood baselines established in April 1998. EU (ECHO) supported this initiative. The main players involved were the Ministry of Agriculture and Co-operatives (MOAC), Save the Children Swaziland and the Lutheran Development Service. Over the subsequent years, the livelihood database has been used to model and provide appropriate recommendations and responses to several natural disasters.

2. CONSTRAINTS AND WEAKNESSES (SWAZILAND AND THE SADC REGION)

The nature and depth of the 2001-02 food security crisis in Swaziland, and the SADC region as a whole, has raised a number of structural and institutional concerns that need to be resolved. These include:

- On the whole, existing livelihood research and data is fragmented and not consolidated. As well, there is a strong need to extract this data out of the food aid debate and place it in the wider context of alternative and longer term livelihood interventions.
- Weak institutional arrangements and lack of capacity have been identified as major constraints to the longer term aims of the Swaziland VAC.

- An identified need to enhance and considerably strengthen the planning and policy levels with accurate and accessible information concerning household livelihood information; providing an invaluable input into policy and planning for both emergency and development planning.
- A more comprehensive, systematic and comparative understanding of the situations of the impacts of HIV/AIDS, rural and peri-urban environments,
- To strengthen and build capacity in interpretation and analysis of livelihood information and dissemination of relevant information and analyses to relevant stakeholders.

3. PROPOSALS ON THE NEXT STEPS

In consideration of the livelihoods research that has taken place (both in the recent NVAC and previously) and the recent updating of the livelihood baselines, Swaziland is now poised to use this information to gain a much deeper analysis of livelihoods and to provide alternative options, beyond food aid, for policy and decision makers. However, as noted above and in recognition of a multitude of livelihood problems, there is, additionally, a strong need to extract this data out of the food-aid debate and place it into a wider context of alternative short term response tools and appropriate mid term strategies.

In order to take this process forward, there is a strong need for the Swaziland VAC to:

- Strengthen its institutional viability;
- Initiate a strategic review process and consolidate all relevant livelihood information
- To obtain much deeper understanding of the livelihood needs and provide appropriate recommendations on identified acute and problematic areas in Swaziland (e.g. impact of HIV/AIDS, livelihood failures low-veld areas, etc.)

4. SPECIFIC AREAS MAY INCLUDE ...

1. Explore an appropriate national institution, where livelihoods analysis can be imbedded and identify key areas of institutional strengthening and capacity building requirements.
2. Provide leadership on a process that reviews existing vulnerability data, and thereby considers alternatives to food-aid for short-term response, as well as appropriate mid-term strategies to reduce vulnerability.

3. Build capacity (through training, workshops etc) in the relief-development community, and critically within the government, to carry this strategic process forward more autonomously
4. Conduct further Livelihoods Based Vulnerability Assessments in the acute, problematic areas of Swaziland, primarily in the Low-veld Cattle & Cotton Food Economy Zone and portions of the middle-veld.
5. Incorporate issues relating to HIV/AIDS impact into the livelihood analysis.
6. Where possible, to influence and link with government policy, to support relief, mitigation and development strategies more appropriately.
7. Explore, within alternative strategies, the issue of targeting assistance more effectively against need and vulnerability.
8. To initiate a process of producing tools for analysing urban and peri-urban livelihoods.
9. Link with any comparable initiatives in other countries in the region (SADC-RVAC and other NVAC initiatives).
10. Begin laying foundations to establish appropriate livelihood based monitoring systems with trained nationals able to operate analytical tools
11. Policy recommendations that will ensure appropriate emergency response building resilience amongst vulnerable communities.
12. Clear framework for institutional management of livelihoods and food security related issues.
13. Work with other stakeholders to come up with tangible strategies to address vulnerability posed by food insecurity and HIV/AIDS.