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Regional Hunger and Vulnerability Programme

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REBA case study brief

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About REBA Case Study Briefs

What is RHVP?

The Regional Hunger and Vulnerability Programme (RHVP) supports improvements in policy and programme approaches to hunger and vulnerability in southern Africa with particular emphasis on the role of social protection.

The Regional Evidence Building Agenda (REBA)

Evidence-building, together with capacity-building and policy change, is one of RHVP's three interlinked activities. The Regional Evidence Building Agenda (REBA) is a cohesive framework that has guided the Programme's cross-country evidence-related activities between April 2006 and September 2007. The REBA consists of individual case studies of 20 ongoing social transfer programmes together with thematic studies covering cross-cutting design and implementation issues. The studies were carried out by locally commissioned researchers, mostly working through national research and consultancy institutions, in the six southern African countries covered by RHVP (Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe). All the case studies involved close collaboration with the agencies – government departments and government-appointed bodies, local and international NGOs, UN agencies and communities – that were implementing the social protection schemes under review. The research was supported and guided by a core team of international mentors which included Stephen Devereux (IDS, Sussex), Frank Ellis (ODG, University of East Anglia) and Lionel Cliffe (University of Leeds) and was coordinated and managed by Philip White (ODG).

REBA Aims

The REBA aims to support RHVP's efforts to promote improved policy and programme approaches to social transfers as a means of addressing hunger and vulnerability. REBA findings are feeding into a range of policy, advocacy and research outputs and processes, including policy briefs, best practice guidelines, national and regional learning events for policymakers, practitioners and civil society, a film series and research publications. In addition, by working through a network of national consultants, the REBA aims to increase national capacity to carry out analytical research on hunger and vulnerability within the six countries.

REBA Case Study Briefs

This series of briefs was prepared by Frank Ellis on the basis of the 20 individual case studies undertaken under the REBA. Based on these findings and those of the accompanying thematic studies, a parallel series of thematic briefs that cut across the case studies is also in preparation. The full reports of each case study will be made available in early 2008.

Small Livestock Transfers, Zimbabwe

Overview

The Small Livestock Project in Zimbabwe transfers livestock such as goats and chickens to vulnerable families in selected rural districts. The project is managed by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Zimbabwe through a partnership with a local NGO called Organisation of Rural Associations for Progress (ORAP). The project comes under the umbrella of DFID Zimbabwe's Protracted Relief Programme (PRP). The purpose of PRP is to stabilise food security and protect the livelihoods of vulnerable households in Zimbabwe, particularly those affected by HIV/AIDS. PRP is implemented by 12 NGOs (of which CRS is one) and their local partners.

The first phase of PRP ran from 2004 to 2007, with a recent extension to 2008. A new phase is in the pipeline for 2008 onwards. In its first phase, the PRP reached about 1.5 million beneficiaries per year within an overall budget of sterling £36 million (US$72 million). It is a mainly rural-based relief effort intended to support agricultural production through advice and inputs, as well as to provide clean water, and to support destitute people and those living with HIV/AIDS. The small livestock project is just one among a range of agricultural support projects funded by the PRP, including several farm input delivery schemes.

The part of the CRS small livestock project reviewed here covers livestock transfers to two districts in Matabeleland called Hwange and Bubi districts. The project began in October 2004, and the two districts considered here were among the earliest to benefit from the transfers, from an intended eventual coverage of 22 districts. By the end of 2006, beneficiaries in the two districts had received 1,634 goats, 10 pigs, 41 sheep, 3,103 chickens, 5,225 guinea fowl and 16 ducks (Dzingirai, 2007: p.12).

1 Sterling £ are converted here to US$ at £0.50 = US$1, even though this would not be accurate for the whole period under discussion. Zimbabwe dollars (Z$) have varied in value from Z$5 = US$1 to Z$250 = US$1 (official rates) between 2003 and 2007, with a devaluation to Z$30,000 = US$1 occurring on 6 Sept 2007. The mid-2007 unofficial rate was said to be around Z$250,000 = US$1.

Organisation

The international NGO Catholic Relief Services (CRS) is funded by DFID Zimbabwe through the PRP to organise small livestock transfers, among a portfolio of other projects aimed at the most vulnerable households in rural areas. For the livestock transfer project, CRS is partnered with the Organisation of Rural Associations for Progress (ORAP), a local NGO that was founded in 1981 and has built up a substantial track record of problem solving in local communities using participatory and inclusive approaches. ORAP in turn works through community-based organisations at the local level.

The CRS small livestock project utilises a number of different mechanisms for transferring stock to vulnerable families, and multiplying up the benefits of the scheme. It attempts to source livestock locally, or in closely adjacent districts, in order to minimise adaptation risks to local environments. In some cases livestock are transferred directly to beneficiaries; while in others beneficiaries are provided with a livestock purchase voucher that can be spent at a livestock fair organised by ORAP. These fairs are similar in intention and organisation to the input and education fairs described in other case-studies (see Case Studies Nos. 4 and 12). The transfer process does not, however, stop at the first-round acquisition of livestock by beneficiaries. The first recipients are required to 'pass on' a proportion of the successful multiplication up of animals or birds to other beneficiaries on the list, thus ensuring that the final number of beneficiaries are some multiple of the original recipients.

Vulnerability

The Zimbabwe economy has been in deepening crisis for five or more years. The outward manifestations of this crisis are hyperinflation (estimated to have reached 6,600 per cent in mid-2007) and a rapidly depreciating external value of the domestic currency (see footnote 1 above). Hyperinflation affects most severely those whose income and assets do not adjust upwards in value as fast as the rate of inflation, and the poorest and most vulnerable members of society are always the hardest hit.

Almost all recent macroeconomic data about Zimbabwe has to be treated with a great deal of caution, since accurate measurement is practically impossible when events are moving so fast. According to official UN data, Zimbabwe's GDP fell by more that half, from 7.4 to 3.4 billion US$ between 2000 and 2005; while per capita GNI declined by 25 per cent from US$460 to US$350. The discrepancy between these two rates of decline is explained by remittance income from outside the country underpinning the income levels of a great number of Zimbabweans. It is estimated that out of a total population of 13 million in 2005, roughly 3 million Zimbabweans are living outside their country.

Rapid economic decline increases the proportion of the population in poverty, as well as their vulnerability to food shortages. Additional factors are rainfall failures, causing production failures and food security stress in rural areas; and AIDS causing loss of able-bodied labour, chronic illness, medical and funeral costs. Zimbabwe currently has an overall estimated HIV prevalence of 20.1 per cent in adults aged 15-49 years. This has apparently come down from higher previous levels, although quality of reported data may be an issue. At any rate some 1.7 million Zimbabweans are thought to be living with HIV (2005 estimates) and there are an estimated 1.1 million AIDS orphans (UNAIDS, 2006).

The small livestock transfer project recognises the critical role that livestock plays in ensuring livelihood security for poor rural people, especially in semi-arid areas and places with large annual fluctuations in rainfall. Livestock are a direct source of consumption, a store of wealth (a 'walking bank'), and an asset that can be sold quickly at times of dire necessity. The districts targeted by the project are places where serious livestock depletion had occurred due to natural disasters and animal diseases.

Targeting

In Hwange and Bubi districts, the small livestock transfer project aimed to target the most vulnerable families, defined especially by widowhood from AIDS deaths and destitute families caring for small children or orphans. As specified by ORAP in 2004, its interest was in umunthu uyadubeka, meaning any person struggling to survive. Typically these are people 'without means of support', or those with no livestock in the form of cattle or goats.

Traditional leaders, especially village heads, participated in the compilation of beneficiary lists, with ORAP playing a verification role. It seems that targeting may have been reasonably accurate since as of late 2006, 65 per cent of beneficiaries were widows or families caring for orphans. Apart from women and vulnerable children, the project sought to include others struggling to survive, including the sick, caregivers to the chronically sick, the elderly, those with no remittances, and those with large families and high dependency ratios.

As occurs in many such projects, 'elite capture' was an ever present pressure in the beneficiary selection procedure. ORAP reported several cases where beneficiaries were de-registered on discovering that they were from the wealthiest families in the community. This included several cases where village headmen inserted their names into beneficiary lists. This problem applied also to prioritisation within the list, once the list had been compiled to the satisfaction of ORAP. Thus relatives or friends of more powerful individuals in villages tended to rise to the top of the list in terms of being the first to receive livestock transfers (or vouchers to spend at livestock fairs); while 'pass on' rules were sometimes found to have been flouted such that livestock that were passed on went to these better off individuals.

Also present in the small livestock project was a social envy dimension observed also in other social transfer case studies. This arises from the perception often articulated by villagers themselves that 'everyone considers themselves poor here', and therefore community members find it difficult to accept that some need assistance more than others. In some beneficiary villages conflict emerged between the included and the excluded from the project, and at one livestock fair in Hwange district fights apparently broke out between these groups (Dzingirai, 2007: p.12).

Coverage

It is difficult to gauge the coverage of the CRS small livestock project from information obtained from just two beneficiary districts. Small stock numbers distributed in those districts have already been summarised in the introduction to this case-study. According to data contained in Dzingirai (2007, pp.8-9), in 2004 and 2005 combined there were 1,187 beneficiaries in Bubi district and 1,310 beneficiaries in Hwange district. These beneficiaries were spread across 17 wards in the two districts, implying around 150 recipients on average in each ward, and a good geographical spread in the outreach of the project. Each recipient typically received 2-3 stock, comprising perhaps a goat and two chickens, or a goat and two guinea fowl.

Box 1: Positive Experiences from the Small Livestock Transfer Scheme

(key informant interviews conducted in early 2007)

Respondent 1, a child household head from Nkosikhosi, benefited from the programme in 2004 and got 1 goat and 2 chickens. He has so far sold 450 chickens from the proceeds and managed to pay school fees, buy uniforms for his dependents, clothes and food for the family. He also bought maize seeds for the 2005 farming season.

Respondent 2, a widow from Inkosikazi ward, who had received 2 chickens and 1 goat in 2004, bought 2 donkeys after selling a record 300 chickens and a goat.

In Bubi district, the 60-year-old Respondent 3 said he was able to pay in full the school fees for his grandchildren, in addition to their examination fees for 10 subjects. This he did after selling 200 chickens, his wealth from 1 chicken he received in 2004.

The success of the scheme rests heavily on the continued good health of the livestock delivered, and also on successful breeding from the initial transfer in order to multiply up animal or bird numbers. The pass-on component of the project particularly depends on this multiplication up. Evidence from field sites suggests mixed success in this regard. Unfortunately no data is available on pass-on rates at project sites, suggesting perhaps a monitoring weakness at that level. On the

other hand, examples are cited of successful multiplication of chickens (see Box 1 above), resulting in cumulative strengthening of livelihoods from the initial transfer.

While some respondents reported wholly positive experiences from being included in the scheme (as illustrated in Box 1), others had rather different stories to tell. Most of these in one way or another concerned the adverse impacts of animal diseases, especially Newcastle disease in chickens and various tick-borne diseases in goats and sheep. Some respondents had simply lost their initial stake quite quickly to disease. Others reported having to sell other assets in order to pay for vaccines for their newly acquired stock, resulting in little net gain in their overall livelihood position. Still others reported losing transfers that they used to get from better off relatives in the community, due to being included in the scheme.

Coordination

As far as can be ascertained from available documentation, coordination of this project works well in terms of the partnerships between the DFID PRP programme, CRS and ORAP. Monthly reports published on the website of the PRP programme show that CRS has an excellent reporting record to the PRP, as well as in balancing its books on the projects for which it is funded. Less is known about the success of the collaboration between CRS and ORAP. However, both organisations have substantial experience in the areas in which they work, and both have multiple project portfolios under their management.

In Zimbabwe, there is inevitably considerable ambiguity in the relationship between projects like the small livestock transfer scheme and the government of Zimbabwe at different levels, down to the district. While the umbrella PRP programme undertakes quite a few initiatives in collaboration with government agencies, the bulk of its projects are handled by international and local NGOs outside government. This can, of course, result in government agencies at local level perceiving that they have been by-passed by projects, resulting in an unwillingness to lend support that they could provide. In the case of the small livestock transfer scheme, several key informants stated that this was so in the relationship of the project to the district veterinary services, who did not make themselves available to help with vaccination of animals or in dealing with an outbreak of an infectious disease like Newcastle disease in chickens.

Cost Effectiveness

The October 2006 Output-to-Purpose Review of the PRP (Jones et al., 2006) noted that, with multiple NGO implementing partners each involved in several PRP activities, budget and cost information disaggregated by activity was often lacking. This applies in the case of CRS, which has been involved in several different activities alongside – and to some extent integrated with – its small livestock scheme, and to PRP livestock activities in general, which have been implemented by several of the NGOs. The Review also noted the paucity of data collected during implementation that might be used to assess impacts of individual activities.

However, a subsequent PRP cost-benefit study (Woolcock & Mutiro, 2007) attempted to gather additional information from the implementing partners to fill this gap. For small livestock interventions, factoring in DFID and household investment costs, and likely pass-on rates, milk and egg production, offtake and disease-related losses and herd/flock reproduction over a 25-year horizon, the projected cost-benefit ratio was estimated at an impressive 8.4. For all the PRP activities for which such cost-benefit ratios could be calculated, this was one of the highest. Furthermore, the study supported the conclusion that such interventions also have a high potential 'relief-effectiveness' on account of their ready adaptability to the situation of poor and vulnerable households.

Market Effects

The CRS small livestock transfer scheme has several potentially important and positive relationships with markets at local levels. First, the scheme attempts wherever possible to source the livestock required for its transfers in the same or closely adjacent districts. This helps to support local livestock prices, and expands the sale opportunities of small livestock in those places. Second, successful multiplication up from the initial transfer results in sale of stock for a variety of purposes, thus again expanding the size of the market for that stock in the local economy. As illustrated in Box 1 above, this may have occurred particularly as the result of increasing numbers of chickens in beneficiary communities. Third, possession of livestock assets can to some degree insulate families from the ravages of hyperinflation, since livestock values are likely to keep pace with the rate of inflation, except in rare cases (such as widespread enforced sales due to drought). Fourth, the holding of fairs is often argued to stimulate local exchange going beyond the value of the vouchers

exchanged by beneficiaries at each fair. This is because numerous buyers and sellers take advantage of the holding of the fair to turn up at that venue.

Asset Building

The small livestock transfer scheme is consciously and deliberately about building livelihood assets. The multiple roles of livestock in successful rural livelihoods in Sub-Saharan Africa is well known, and has been empirically verified in numerous studies. Livestock can provide the key to the successful construction of pathways out of poverty, and a moderate to high level of livestock ownership confers resilience in the face of livelihood shocks.

Strengths

The small livestock transfer scheme displays some important strengths as a means of building the assets of the most vulnerable, providing them with resilience in the face of risks, and also giving them the potential for accumulation and better livelihoods in the future:

(i) the project identifies an important niche amongst different ways of supporting vulnerable rural families through social transfers;

(ii) the project targets geographical zones in Zimbabwe where depletion of livestock holdings due to drought and disease has been severe;

(iii) the project incorporates some innovative ideas, including the concept of 'pass-on' in order to expand the number of final beneficiaries that can be reached with a given budget, and also the use of livestock fairs to stimulate local markets in small livestock and other goods and services (e.g. livestock medicines and veterinary services);

(iv) as far as can be ascertained, the project is well coordinated between funding agency (DFID PRP programme), implementing agency (Catholic Relief Services), and partnership organisation (ORAP);

(v) The activity on which the project focuses appears to have the potential for high returns to investment.

Weaknesses

The small livestock project is also found to possess some weaknesses, as seen from interviews with key informants and beneficiaries at delivery locations:

(i) livestock delivery is perhaps towards the higher risk end of the degree-of-risk range of social transfer schemes: this is because owning and successfully breeding livestock requires water, adequate grazing (for goats and sheep), vaccination against common and preventable diseases (like Newcastle disease in chickens), and skills in animal or bird care;

(ii) where these pre-conditions are not met, relatively high rates of loss in the initial transfers to beneficiaries may occur, with death from disease being the most likely reason for scheme failure in individual cases;

(iii) as occurs in many social protection projects of this kind, the monitoring of delivery seems to have been considerably stronger than the monitoring of outcomes, so that scheme success (in terms of the pass-on component, and the multiplication up of stock through breeding) is not possible to ascertain with any degree of accuracy;

(iv) as also occurs in many social protection projects in places characterised by widespread poverty and vulnerability, the small livestock project may have caused social friction due to the perception of non-beneficiaries that they were equally deserving of support as the beneficiaries.

Policy Lessons

The CRS small livestock transfer project is one among a substantial portfolio of projects that seeks to address the worsening circumstances of vulnerable people in the unstable economic environment of contemporary Zimbabwe. It has the advantage in the context of hyperinflation of delivering tangible assets, the values of which are likely to keep pace with the rate of inflation, and indeed successful breeding and multiplying up of small livestock can potentially enable families to accumulate even in the face of such disadvantageous economic circumstances.

Very little is known more generally about the true success rates of livestock transfer projects in southern Africa. Over the years, there have been many such projects across the region, sometimes specialising in exotic species (e.g. exotic goat projects), and sometimes delivering local animals or birds that should already be well adapted to their environments. However, evidence that these have resulted in sustained rises in livestock ownership by beneficiaries is seriously lacking. Unfortunately, and despite a high projected rate of return on investment, the CRS small livestock transfer project in Zimbabwe is no different in this regard, and therefore we do not know, say three years later, the success rate amongst direct transferees in keeping their livestock alive, nor the number and type of pass-ons achieved by the project, nor the overall livestock numbers that have resulted from the project. The chief lesson here, then, is that for a project of this type that depends on asset accumulation in order to be counted a success, outcomes need to be monitored well beyond the season or year of original transfer delivery and preferably for several subsequent years.

Sources

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More Information

REBA material, including these briefs and fuller case study reports, as well as information regarding the REBA process can be viewed and downloaded from: http://www.wahenga.net/index.php/core_activities/building_evidence

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