

What is RHVP?

The Southern Africa Regional Hunger & Vulnerability Programme (RHVP) is a three-year programme of support for policy-makers concerned with food security, social protection and vulnerability analysis in the SADC region. RHVP is funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), and managed by an international consortium led by the UK-based consultants MASDAR. The programme will run from July 2005 to June 2008, with a possible extension until June 2010.

Why RHVP?

There is a broad consensus that the critical failures of food access that affected six SADC countries (**Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe**) in 2002-03 were triggered by short-term climatic factors, but resulted from a longer-term increase in vulnerability to livelihood shocks. Growing numbers of households in the region are liable to be tipped into hunger and destitution by even a modest shock to such livelihood mainstays as their production, income, market access, mobility or health. A mix of underlying factors is blamed, including: failed growth and poorly managed economic reform; HIV/AIDS; agricultural stagnation; poor transport infrastructure; erratic food security policies; declining government capacity to deliver basic services; and persistent widespread poverty.

The main concern of RHVP is that while this latest crisis was contained by a massive and costly humanitarian operation, further such crises are likely to occur in the region unless the underlying causes can be tackled through longer-term measures to reduce vulnerability and through more enlightened responses in the future.

Preparatory studies have identified three particular constraints which need to be resolved:

- a lack of scaled-up alternatives to food aid as a response to structural, predictable food insecurity;
- critical inadequacies in information on, and understanding of, food insecurity, vulnerability and appropriate responses;
- weaknesses in applying information in the design of responses in and outside crisis periods.

RHVP objectives

RHVP aims to improve food security at both national and regional levels in the SADC region. This will be achieved by:

- improving capacities of national governments to initiate or expand **social protection programmes**;
- strengthening and helping to institutionalise systems for **vulnerability assessment and analysis** (VAA) in support of social protection policy;
- supporting complementary **investigative work** to identify and improve understanding of new approaches to reducing hunger and vulnerability.

RHVP approach

RHVP is not a 'blueprint' programme. Flexibility to respond to new ideas and adapt to changing circumstances will be a guiding principle. A strongly regional approach will be maintained, working through existing regional institutions to maximise shared lesson-learning and linkages to other donor-funded programmes. It has three interlinked components as described below.

- Social protection policy network

Government and donor interest in social protection as a means of addressing poverty and vulnerability is growing fast. But appreciation of social protection concepts and the potential for using different instruments in different contexts is limited, especially amongst policymakers.

RHVP will help to develop a regional network on social protection, tapping into and sharing the knowledge and experience of policymakers, practitioners and researchers through a dedicated web portal and through proactive, targeted advocacy.

Using VAA outputs, this network will aim at a stronger regional policy dialogue and increased awareness among key stakeholders about possible roles for social assistance. It will encourage a transition to accountable, on-budget systems for state-supported resource flows to tackle chronic food insecurity. Design issues for cost-effectiveness and reliability, including the potential for cash and other non-food

transfers as an alternative to food aid, will be highlighted.

- VAA support

RHVP will provide long-term technical assistance to enhance VAA capacities across the region, working through the SADC Regional Vulnerability Assessment Committee (RVAC) and its counterparts at national level. The aim will be to build on existing competencies to develop a more holistic VAA framework that can better inform social protection policy for longer term disaster risk reduction as well as short-term crisis response.

This requires better understanding of *who* is vulnerable, *when, where, how* and *why*, as a basis for identifying *what* responses are appropriate. RHVP support will help to harmonise, though not necessarily standardise, VAA methodologies across the region.

- Investigative work

Closely linked to these first two components, investigative work will be undertaken to improve the evidence base for national policy development on hunger and vulnerability. This will focus both on improving understanding of food insecurity in the region, and on providing relevant, credible evidence for designing social protection and other policy responses (for example on HIV/AIDS, governance, gender, trade and markets) based on comparative analysis of experience within the region and elsewhere.

This work will seek to establish a more holistic framework for analysing linkages between chronic poverty and transitory food insecurity, and probe the implications of multiple vulnerabilities – social and political as well as economic. A broad investigative approach to social protection will recognize its potential for promoting development as well as protecting people from hunger and destitution.

Emphasis will also be placed on effective dissemination of the results of investigations, presenting and targeting findings in a way which maximises their influence on 'drivers of change' and furthers the adoption and implementation of improved social protection policies.

Management and phasing

RHVP management

RHVP will establish national focal points in each of the six priority countries, and a VAA support office linked to the SADC RVAC in Botswana. A programme management office in South Africa will provide overall coordination and liaison with DFID Southern Africa. Independent guidance will be provided by a Programme Advisory Committee comprising staff of organisations active in social protection policy and programming in the region, including national governments, SADC, DFID and other major donors, UN agencies and NGOs.

A pool of international expertise

The MASDAR consortium has established a pool of expertise within and outside the region, with an international reputation for excellence in research and policy work on hunger and vulnerability and a solid regional track record, which will be deployed by the RHVP management as required.

Programme phasing

An initial **design phase** from July to October 2005 will include in-depth consultations with key regional and national stakeholders to establish the strengths and weaknesses of VAA capacities across the region, the status of poverty reduction strategies and the roles of social protection and risk reduction policy and programming in the six focus countries. This will lead to the identification of priority needs for RHVP support.

Based on these consultations, which will involve a series of national and regional workshops, a detailed Implementation Plan and a Programme Management Manual will be produced, setting out design features, methodologies and programming for the main **implementation phase** (October 2005 onwards). This will be shared with stakeholders and reviewed at intervals during the remainder of the programme.

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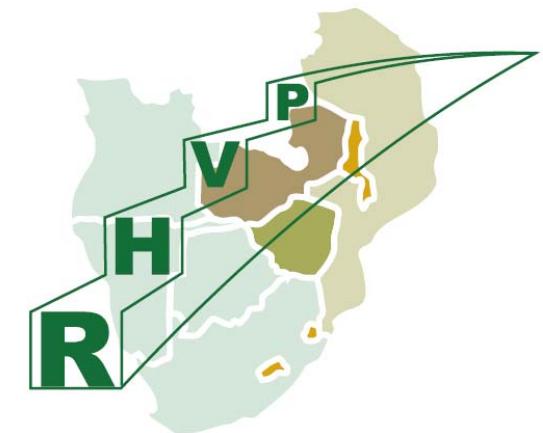
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