



# **Coping with Poverty in Malawi**

**Proceedings of a workshop  
held at the Holiday Inn Hotel, London**

**5th – 6th May 1999**

**Neil Marsland  
Andrew Long  
Alistair Sutherland**



**Natural  
Resources  
Institute**

**DFID** Department for  
International  
Development

# **Coping with Poverty in Malawi.**

**Proceedings of a workshop held at the  
Holiday Inn Hotel, London**

**5<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> May 1999**

**Neil Marsland  
Andrew Long  
Alistair Sutherland**



## Table of Contents

	<b>Page</b>
<b>I. INTRODUCTION</b>	
(i) Background	4 - 5
(ii) Opening remarks	6
(iii) Workshop themes	7
<b>II. CURRENT UNDERSTANDING ON COPING STRATEGIES IN MALAWI</b>	
(i) Poverty Coping Strategies in Malawi: How much do we know?	9 - 41
(ii) Coping with Poverty in Malawi: Conceptual Underpinnings and Methodological Biases	42 - 54
<b>III. POVERTY COPING STRATEGIES AND THE SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS APPROACH.</b>	
(i) Notes on the contribution of Sustainable (Rural) Livelihoods concepts to understanding poverty coping strategies in Malawi.	56 - 64
<b>IV. GROUP WORK</b>	
(i) Prioritising under-researched areas for poverty coping strategies in Malawi	66 - 70
(ii) Observations on the contribution of the SL approach to assessing adequacy of current information on poverty coping strategies in Malawi	71
(iii) Comparison of priorities derived from the group work sessions at the Lilongwe and London Workshops	72 - 73
<b>V. INFORMATION EXCHANGE ON POVERTY IN MALAWI</b>	
(i) Introduction and Summary	75
(ii) Malawi Coping Strategies: E-mail dialogue and / or website? Preliminary observations and proposals	76 - 77
<b>V. APPENDICES</b>	
(i) Workshop Timetable	79 - 80
(ii) List of Participants	81
(iii) Relevant documents circulated at the Workshop	82

# I. INTRODUCTION

## (i) Background

A workshop was held on May 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> at the Holiday Inn, London (Victoria) on the subject of Poverty Coping Strategies in Malawi. It was organised and facilitated by a three man team from the Social Sciences Department of the Natural Resources Institute (NRI), University of Greenwich, and followed-on from an earlier workshop held in Malawi in March.

Both workshops were funded by the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID), and are part of a consultancy entitled "Malawi: Poverty Coping Strategies Study" which is currently being undertaken by the NRI. The purpose of the consultancy is to develop a better understanding of coping strategies employed by resource poor households in the face of widespread and chronic poverty. Such an understanding will help in the design of more effective and more appropriate short-term safety net interventions and longer-term poverty reduction strategies.

**Lilongwe workshop:** In the March workshop, a number of gaps in knowledge with respect to coping strategies were identified. The consensus of the workshop was that it was important that certain of these gaps were addressed as soon as possible, as their existence would hamper the development of effective and efficient short term poverty alleviation interventions as well as longer term poverty reduction initiatives. The most pressing needs were to address the following:

- Knowledge of rural labour markets: especially important in the context of plans to introduce self targeting public works programmes which require decisions about appropriate intervention wage rates.
- Social networks (kin and non-kin) determining the distribution of resources (cash, food, inputs, employment – thus links with labour markets).
- Improved understanding of poverty. A food-centric household level conceptualisation of poverty was evident in the literature. This understanding had shaped understanding of coping strategies. Thus other non-food aspects of poverty (poor health, education, shelter, physical security, lack of political power) and how people cope with these were probably under – reported.
- Process data, to give an indication of livelihood trajectories of social units (individuals, households, communities) in the "vulnerability context" of exogenous shocks, seasonality and long term trends such as HIV AIDS.

**London Workshop:** The workshop held in London on 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> May intended to draw and build on the outputs of the earlier workshop. Specifically, the London workshop was intended to:

- Validate the knowledge needs highlighted in the Lilongwe workshop.
- Attempt to "fine tune" the diagnosis of key knowledge needs by applying the Sustainable (Rural) Livelihoods framework.
- Discuss mechanisms for generating electronic dialogue between Malawi "experts" which can feed into DfIDCA decision making on poverty programmes in Malawi



The London workshop was divided into five parts: An introductory session where the workshop themes were introduced; A second session where current understandings of poverty coping strategies and the reasons for the observed pattern of understanding in the literature were presented; A third session where the implications of current knowledge and understanding were debated and presented by workshop participants; A fourth session where the contribution of the Sustainable Livelihoods approach to understanding information needs was presented and discussed; and a final session in which proposals for setting up a web site on poverty coping strategies in Malawi were discussed. The ordering of this workshop report reflects this sequencing.

Whilst our thoughts have developed since the time of the Malawi workshop, the presentations in this report still represent “works in progress”. They will be developed to form the basis of the final report for the Malawi Coping Strategies Study to be produced by the end of June 1999.

Neil Marsland  
Andrew Long  
Alistair Sutherland  
NRI  
June 4<sup>th</sup> 1999

**(ii) Opening Remarks (Eric Hanley, DFIDCA Harare)**

Dr Hanley set out the reasons for the poverty coping strategies study and the London workshop. The key points of his address are as follows:

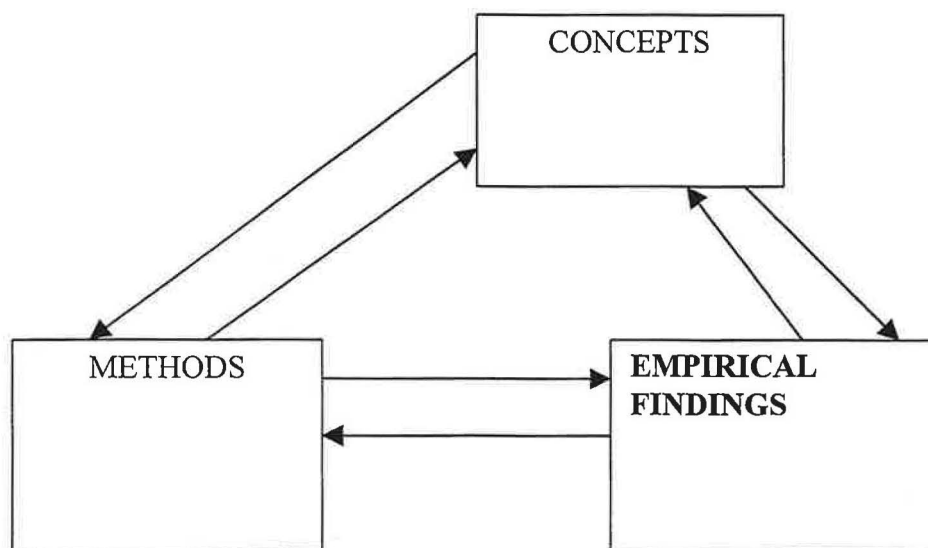
- DFID Central Africa is concerned not to address poverty issues in a fragmented way.
- The need for a full understanding of poverty issues is of heightened importance given the fact that DFID spending in Malawi is scheduled to double over the next couple of years, and DFID is concerned to design and deliver effective and efficient programmes with this increased budget.
- One important aspect of understanding poverty is finding out how the poor in Malawi deal with it. Given the deep poverty existing in Malawi, it is surprising in some ways that mortality and morbidity are not higher. People must be coping somehow, but how? It is important to understand this so that programmes and projects can be designed so as to ameliorate the effects of “damaging” coping strategies, and enhance - or at least not displace - positive strategies.
- The Poverty Coping Strategies study is intended to gather all available information and insight into coping strategies in Malawi. This workshop is an important part of this process.
- Looking to the future, it is envisaged that the establishment of a web site will enable workshop participants and other experts from around the world to contribute to DFID thinking and policy in relation to poverty in Malawi

**(iii) Workshop Themes (Presented by Neil Marsland, NRI)**

**CORE OBJECTIVE:**

TO REACH A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES AND POVERTY IN MALAWI.

**SOME BUILDING BLOCKS....**



**ARGUMENT:**

The ways in which the concepts, methods, findings triangle has been employed in understanding livelihood strategies and poverty in Malawi has led to a “patchwork quilt” of knowledge on poverty coping strategies: Some aspects of poverty coping are understood in considerable depth, others are understood somewhat, and others are not understood very well if at all.

**KEY ITEMS FOR PRESENTATION AND DEBATE:**

- What aspects of the patchwork are understood well and what aspects are not?
- What are the reasons for the observed pattern of understanding?
- How can understanding be improved?



## **II. CURRENT UNDERSTANDING ON COPING STRATEGIES IN MALAWI**

**(iii) Poverty Coping Strategies in Malawi:**

**How much do we know<sup>1</sup>?**

**(presented by Neil Marsland, NRI and Stephen Devereux, IDS)**

**INCOMPLETE DRAFT: TO BE USED FOR INFORMATION ONLY  
NOT TO BE CITED**

**Objectives of the paper:**

- To report key findings of current literature on poverty coping strategies in Malawi.

**I. ORGANISING CONCEPTS**

**1. Coping with what?**

Forces driving people in to poverty can be categorised in a number of ways. One way of looking at the issue to think in terms of the “VULNERABILITY CONTEXT”, a phrase taken from Dfid’s Sustainable (Rural) Livelihoods framework. The livelihood context frames the external environment in which people exist, and over which they have limited control. Key forces shaping the context can be grouped into:

- Trends
- “True” Shocks
- Regular or seasonal shocks

Table 1: Examples of Trends, Shocks and Seasonality<sup>2</sup>

Trends	“True” shocks	Regular or seasonal shocks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Population trends</li><li>• Resource trends</li><li>• National/international economic trends</li><li>• Trends in governance</li><li>• Technological trends</li><li>• Human health trends</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Human health shocks</li><li>• Natural shocks</li><li>• Economic shocks</li><li>• Conflict</li><li>• Crop/livestock health shocks</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Of prices</li><li>• Of production</li><li>• Of health</li><li>• Of employment opportunities</li></ul>

<sup>1</sup> This presentation draws heavily on DFID financed studies: "Making less last longer: Coping with food insecurity in Malawi: Draft " By Stephen Devereux (IDS Sussex) and Christina Gladwin (University of Florida) and "Coping Strategies in Southern Malawi: Findings from a Field Survey" By Maxton Tsoka and Peter Mvula (Chancellor College)

<sup>2</sup> Devereux (1999) uses a similar categorisation with examples of specific relevance to Malawi:

- “ (1) processes - including steadily declining landholdings and soil fertility (in rural areas), rising prices due to repeated devaluations (mainly in urban areas), Demographic changes due to HIV / AIDS (both rural and urban);
- (2) regular shocks - e.g. seasonality, which is predictable in its cyclical occurrence but not in its severity;
- (3) ‘true’ shocks - unpredictable events such as a drought (effectively an episode of extreme seasonality) or rapid price inflation following a currency devaluation.

In terms of a rural / urban distinction, in Malawi (arguably) the urban poor have been more affected than the rural poor by economic shocks such as devaluations (for evidence of this in Malawi see Mataya and Chulu (1997)), whereas the rural poor are more affected than the urban poor by seasonality.

## 2. Surviving, Coping or Adapting?

“Poverty coping strategies” is a catch-all term. In practice, poor people employ a range of strategies to deal with poverty. These strategies can be classified:

Livelihood strategies in vulnerable contexts:

- accumulation strategies ( seek to increase in stocks of assets and resources)
- adaptive strategies (risk-spreading diversification, etc.)
- coping strategies (non-erosive disaccumulation)
- survival strategies (erosive disaccumulation).

*Accumulation strategies:*

- Many different types depending on context eg production: food, cash crops, livestock and or formal and informal employment

*Adaptive strategies:*

- longer term shifts in livelihood strategies
- spread risk through adjustment and diversification

*Coping strategies:*

- temporary adjustments in the face of rapid change
- minimise the costs of adverse livelihood shocks

*Survival strategies:*

- to prevent destitution and death

Whilst conceptually, these are discrete, in practice they are a continuum. A high proportion of strategies employed by the poor to deal with poverty in Malawi are best characterised as coping or adaptive.



### 3. Relationships between the vulnerability context and livelihood strategies

Adaptive behaviour is a response to *trends / processes* of change, while coping and survival strategies are reactions to *shocks*. 'Regular shocks' fall somewhere between these two - since seasonality is predictable, households have developed adaptive mechanisms such as going for *ganyu*, but coping strategies might be needed if a particular hungry season is unusually severe. Although the shocks and stresses identified here are *generic* (everyone is equally *exposed* to seasonality, drought, or devaluation), their effects are differentially distributed: they vary and are household *specific* (each household has a unique *resilience* or ability to cope)... vulnerability is a function of two elements: exposure or risk and sensitivity or resilience". (Devereux 1999: 11)

### 4. Functional classification of survival, coping and adaptive strategies

How can we categorise types of coping and adaptive strategies? Some of the existing PRA literature (eg CARE 1998, UNDP 1997) makes the distinction between nutritional, economic and social strategies. An additional distinction that separates nutritional and economic from social is that the former employ resources of and relationships within the unit of analysis in question (usually the household) whereas the latter draws on resources outside of that unit. A final category is taking advantage of formal safety net assistance where this exists.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that whilst these categories are conceptually discrete, in practice they overlap. For example, field *ganyu* may have a "social" element to it in the sense that the terms upon which it is given and received may be due to patronage.

Certain coping and adaptive strategies come up repeatedly in the literature:

Table 2: Coping strategies identified in the literature.

Strategy	Rural	Urban
<b>Nutritional strategies:</b>		
Eat smaller portions to make food last longer	Yes	Yes
Reduce number of meals per day	Yes	Yes
Reduce nutrient content of meals	Yes	Yes
Change nutrient content of meals	Yes	Yes
Consume green maize	Yes	
<b>Economic strategies:</b>		
Increased activity in local labour market	Yes	Yes
Expenditure reduction	Yes	Yes
Forced sales / renting of assets	Yes	Yes
Increased activity in product markets (informal)	Yes	Yes
Agricultural diversification and “involution”	Yes	
Temporary migration (rural-rural and rural-urban)	Yes	Limited?
Temporary migration (urban-rural)	Yes	Limited?
Changes in household demography	Yes	Yes
Borrowing money from money lenders	?	Yes
Take children out of school	?	Yes
Child labour for cash	?	Yes
Relocation to lower cost areas		Yes
Theft	Anecdotal and under-reported	Anecdotal and under-reported
Sex work	As above	As above
Permanent migration (rural – urban)		Limited ?
<b>Social strategies<sup>4</sup>:</b>		
Increased reliance on kin networks	Yes	Yes
Increased reliance on non-kin networks	Yes	Yes
Increased reliance on other social institutions	Yes	Yes

The depth with which these areas are covered, however, differs considerably.

<sup>4</sup> For money (gifts and loans), food, employment, and shelter. Thus social strategies may be economic and/or nutritional in character.

## II. RURAL POPULATION

### 1. Overview of Coverage of the Literature

Various studies which address coping and/or adapting. These include: Peters (1995); MEPD et. al. (1995); MEPD et. al (1996); CARE (1995); CPAR (1996); Muller - Glodde (1998); Mthindi et. al (1997); Pearce and Ngwira (1996); UNDP (1997); Msoka and Mvula (1999- draft); Devereaux and Gladwin (1999-draft); Scheffers (1998-draft); Boonstra (1998-draft); Poppinga (1998-draft); Mastwijk (1998-draft).

Most studies tend to use the **smallholder household** as the key unit of analysis. This is understandable as about 70 – 75% of Malawi’s population lives in such households. What it means, however, is that strategies employed by permanent estate workers and tenant farmers are much less understood. There has also been greater emphasis on the **Southern part** of the country than the North. This is also understandable as poverty problems are more acute in the South. Again, however, this focus means that our understanding of coping amongst the poor in the North is less researched than in the South. Finally, there has been much more emphasis on strategies which use the **households own resources** (nutritional and economic strategies) than those which draw on resources outside the household (social strategies). This means that we know considerably more about the relationship between coping and adapting and natural, physical and financial capital at the household level than we do between coping / adapting and social capital.

Table 3 gives an impressionistic guide to the quantity of information available for different dimensions of smallholder coping and adapting in Malawi.

Table 3: The Rough Guide to Smallholder Coping and Adapting Literature in Malawi

Type of strategy	Coping with exogenous shocks	Coping with seasonal shocks	Adapting to trends
Nutritional	***	****	**
Economic	***	****	***
Social	**	**	*

In addition, there are some aspects of coping within these broad categories, which whilst they are known to exist, are under-reported. Theft and sex work would fall into this category.

### 2. What proportion of rural smallholder households is particularly vulnerable to shocks and strains?

Smallholders make up around 70 – 75% of Malawi’s population (Brown et. al. 1996:7). Data from the 1992/93 National Sample Survey of Agriculture (NSSA) indicated that about 30% of them fell below the “calorie needs line” that is their per capita annual income (which includes the imputed value of food production) was insufficient to purchase 200kg of maize at 1992 prices – these are clearly chronically food insecure. Slightly better off, are those households with incomes above the



“calorie needs line” but below the level required to buy a minimum level of basic needs, including clothing and shelter. NSSA data indicated that 13% of smallholders fell into this category. Whilst these households might conceivably escape chronic food insecurity, in practice trade-offs between food and essential non-food items results in intakes being compromised. Even at best, these households are highly vulnerable to external shocks<sup>5</sup>.

As Table 4 shows, the geographical distribution of poor smallholder households is skewed towards the southern region.

Table 4: Distribution of smallholder households below poverty percentiles by ADD: 1992/93

ADD	% of HHs below 20 <sup>th</sup> percentile	% of HHs below 40 <sup>th</sup> percentile	No. of HHs below 20 <sup>th</sup> percentile	No. of HHs below 40 <sup>th</sup> percentile
Karonga (N)	12.0	29.6	5,611	13,841
Mzuzu (N)	20.7	40.3	31,846	61,999
Kasungu (C)	2.5	8.5	6,456	21,949
Salima (C)	14.4	32.6	21,369	48,378
Lilongwe (C)	21.3	43.0	83,719	169,011
Machinga (S)	23.2	43.7	95,025	178,990
Blantyre(S)	26.3	51.3	125,510	244,815
Shire Valley (S)	22.5	41.7	31,818	58,969
Total			401,353	797,953

Notes:

(N), (C), (S) indicate Northern Region, Central Region, Southern Region respectively. Average household size in Malawi is about 5

Source: World Bank 1995 and FEWS

### **3. What are the key coping and adapting mechanisms identified in the literature?**

#### **3.1 Coping with seasonal shocks**

This is the area for which there is the greatest amount of literature. MEPD (1995) has given a profile of coping strategies employed by the “average” smallholder household.

<sup>5</sup> It is necessary to sound a word of caution about these figures. First, they are based on a “snap-shot” of one year. Second, the calculations are derived from estimates of income taken from questionnaires administered by the ADDs. There is a considerable degree of variation in the quality of such information.

**Table 5. Coping strategies for the “average” smallholder household in Malawi (December 1995) : (Households coping with seasonal strain)**

Coping Strategies	'Survival Days per Month	% Value of Contribution
<b>Nutritional Strategies:</b>		
• Reduced number of meals	2.1	7%
• Consumption of wild foods	1.2	4%
• Consumption of seed	0.3	1%
<b>Economic / Income Strategies:</b>		
• Ganyu	6.3	21%
• Selling possessions to buy food	0.3	1%
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>34%</b>
<b>Social strategies / Informal safety nets:</b>		
• Meal sharing with relatives, neighbours	1.2	4%
• Loans of money or food	1.2	4%
<b>Formal safety nets:</b>		
• Free food from govt., church, donor, NGO	1.2	4%
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>13.8</b>	<b>46%</b>

Source: Compiled from MEPD et al. 1996:15

### **3.1.1 Key points on the most important seasonal coping strategies identified in the literature.**

#### **3.1.1.1 Nutritional strategies:**

**Reduced consumption and changes in content of meals:** During "hungry season", poor rural households modify consumption in various ways: fewer meals, smaller portions and cheaper ingredients.

Case study:

"One elderly widow interviewed in rural Zomba in late January 1999 told us: “*At this time of year we have little food and we have to make it last longer.*” After the harvest her household normally consumes a 50kg bag of maize in two weeks, but in the hungry season they stretch a bag to three weeks, by cutting down from three meals a day to two and sometimes only one. Not only the number of meals but also the size of portions is reduced: instead of two or three scoops of *nsima* they will serve only 1½ scoops per person. During the hungry season they rarely include meat and fish in the relish that accompanies *nsima*; instead the relish comprises mainly green vegetables - even beans are a luxury during these months. People also switch to free but inferior

foods - wild tubers, vegetables, pumpkin leaves, fruit such as bananas and even cooked green mangoes".

(Devereux and Gladwin: 23)

**Eating premature maize:** This practice reduces the size of the harvest both directly and in the sense that maize harvested too early provides less than half the amount of food that it does if harvested when ripe.

### 3.1.1.2 Ganyu

“Doing *ganyu* .... is the most common way of trying to cope with poverty” (QUIM 1998:vii). Given the dominant contribution that *ganyu* (defined here as casual agricultural labour) makes to total livelihoods in rural Malawi ....., it is clear that *ganyu* is far from an atypical response to unusual stress or shocks; rather, it has been incorporated into rural livelihood systems throughout the country.

(Devereux and Gladwin: 18).

Key points about ganyu:

- Working on other farmers' land competes directly with own-farm production of food and non-food crops. This leads to lower yields and a dependence on ganyu the following year.
- Economic returns to field ganyu are very low, generally below the legislated national minimum wage and it is probable that they are falling in real terms (although up to date figures are difficult to find).
- Ganyu redistributes labour from poorer to wealthier households. As labour is scarce in poorer households then this exacerbates wealth inequality.
- Going for field ganyu is associated with and reinforces chronic poverty and seasonal food insecurity.
- Ganyu performs a vital informal safety net function - it is available at times of peak economic and nutritional stress each year - during the hungry season. There is possibly a moral economy dimension to ganyu.

### 3.1.1.3 Strategy types across wealth groups and annual cycles.

Several village level PRA studies have been done in Malawi in recent years. Invariably, some attempt to disaggregate populations by wealth status of households is done. CARE (1996) illustrated the different impact of seasonality on different wealth groups by presenting wealth and coping/adaptive strategies for five households in Kachule village Lilongwe district.

Table 6: Nutritional, economic and social strategies across wealth groups.

Variable	Household type			
	Well Off (Opeza bwino)	Fairly well-off (Wopeza bwino pang'ono)	Poor (Wosauka)	Very poor (Wosauka zedi)
Land size and crops produced	Over 5 acres Maize (4.5 acres) Tobacco (1 acre) Dimba crops	5 acres Maize (3 acres) Soya (1 acre) Sunflower (1 acre)	4 acres Maize (3 acres) Tobacco (1 acre)	1.5 acres Maize (1 acre) Uncultivated ( 0.5 acres)
Nutritional strategies	Reduce quantity of food in meals	Reduce quantity and frequency of meals	Reduce quantity and frequency of meals, cook bananas.	Reduce frequency and quantity of meals; cook banana paste; consume wild foods and guavas and mangoes; drink hot water and sleep.
Economic strategies	Use savings from sale of tobacco, sell livestock	Ganyu: (loading logs)	Ganyu: (piecework for food)	Ganyu (piecework for money, piecework for bran)
Social strategies	Receive remittances from friends in town		Receive food from friends and relatives	Receive food from friends and relatives

Note: The cells list the strategies in the order in which they are adopted. Source: CARE (1996: 31-32)

Focussing specifically on economic strategies, data from Nasala village illustrates both the diversity of strategies and, as for Kachule village, the clear differences across wealth groups. Ownership of bicycles and ox carts means that the better-off in the village are more easily able to undertake activities such as sales of firewood and thatching grass. The less well-off are more likely to engage in ganyu and also low income activities such as sale of clay and beer making. (CARE 1996: 19)

Finally, Box 1 illustrates the seasonality in strategies undertaken by a “very poor household” in the villages investigated in the CARE study. On average, 35% of households in the villages were classified as very poor in wealth ranking exercises.

Mr. Phiri's household is an example of a “very poor household” as classified by the CARE team. The household consists of himself, his wife and their eight children. In a “normal” (non-drought) year during the 1990's he has produced between 6 and 10 bags of maize. He sells half of this to purchase basic necessities and keeps the remainder for food. The following calendar was constructed to illustrate his livelihood and coping strategies throughout a “typical” year.

**January:** Experiences acute food shortages. Relies on ganyu for food and income. Stays several days without food . General difficulties to obtain ganyu or money. Survives on guavas and mangoes.

**February:** Survive on green vegetables eg pumpkin leaves. Eat green bananas and banana porridge. Drink hot water and sleep. Family experience malaria and diarrhoea.

**March:** His children swell and suffer from malnutrition. Eat green maize or green maize porridge. Experiences acute food shortages. Piecework is very scarce so has limited sources of income. Eats relish (vegetables) without salt. Malaria, and diarrhoea continue.

**April:** Food begins to be available. Begins to eat sweet potatoes, green maize. Disease rates are still high.

**May:** General easing of food problems as harvest is in. Piecework is easier to find, but still irregular.

**June:** Family cuts grass and sells it at the local trading centre. Food still available from harvested maize. Also consume dried vegetables.

**July:** Main source of income is from the sale of grass. Food stocks begin to run low, and it is difficult to find ganyu.

**August:** Food shortages increase and the family begins to sleep without food. Illnesses begin to appear.

**September:** The land is dry and the level of diseases begin to increase. Maize bran is the main food consumed and the family begins to rely more heavily on banana pasts flour for nsima. There is very little or no ganyu available.

**October and November:** Illness continue to increase. Food shortages become acute.

**December:** If it is raining, ganyu can be found. With rain also comes some green leaves and wild foods which can be eaten. If rains are late then the situation is worse than November.

SOURCE: CARE (1996) Kachule village study.

A similar picture is presented in the UNDP “PAPSL” village reports from Mchinji district UNDP (1997)<sup>6</sup>.

### 3.2 Coping with exogenous shocks

The two major “true” (exogenous) shocks affecting rural smallholders since 1990 have been the first major drought of the 1990’s (1992) and the sudden currency devaluations of recent years – particularly the major devaluation of last August. In a recent study, Devereux and Gladwin commissioned a survey in two areas in Southern Malawi: one rural area in Zomba district, and one urban area in Blantyre city. Table 7 presents the strategies employed by the rural Zomba sample in coping with the effects of the August 1998 kwacha devaluation.

**Table 7: Coping strategies in rural Zomba by sex of household head, February 1999:(Households coping with devaluation shock). Purposive sampling biased towards female headed households within the “third poorest” EPA in Zomba district in terms of food security according to Zomba RDP.**

Coping strategy	Adoption rate (%)	
	Female H.H	Male H.H
<b>Nutritional strategies</b>		
• Ate smaller portions to make food last longer	96.8	97.3
• Reduced number of meals per day	87.1	93.2
• Ate less relish to save money	64.5	74.0
<b>Economic / income strategies</b>		
• Used less candles or paraffin to save money	87.1	83.1
• Bought less firewood to save money	33.3	23.3
• Went for food or cash ganyu	61.3	57.5
• Sold livestock or poultry to buy food	16.1	15.1
• Sold vegetable crops to buy maize	12.9	11.0
• Sold household assets to buy food	6.5	5.5
• Rented out land to get cash for food	6.5	2.7
• Sold tobacco to buy maize	-	1.4
• Sold land to buy food	-	1.4
<b>Social strategies / Informal safety nets</b>		
• Asked relatives or friends for help	30.8	

Compiled from “Malawi Coping Strategies Survey: Draft Report” Tsoka. M and Mvula P., March 1999

<sup>6</sup> PRA studies confirm that cattle sales to acquire food are low in Malawi by African standards. The reasons are explained by the QUIM report (1998).

“Keeping cattle to be sold in dire times used to be a coping mechanism of the better-off in previously strong cattle areas. Due to decreasing security and increasing theft, however, this is no longer regarded a viable option” (QUIM 1998:57).

Devereux and Gladwin give the following commentary on these findings:

### 3.2.1 Nutritional strategies

Dietary adjustments were adopted by more rural respondents, and to a greater intensity, than by urban respondents.<sup>7</sup> Given the exceptionally high proportion of respondents who imposed cutbacks in both the quantity and quality of diets on their families during the 1998/9 'hungry season', there is no doubt that this population suffered quite severe nutritional stress. The percentage of rural households who reported eating just one meal a day increased from 2% after the harvest to 74% in the hungry season. The most frequently given explanation was that respondents could not afford to buy sufficient food after the household granary was depleted. Maize was purchased in small quantities (averaging 8.5kg per purchase) and rationed to last as long as possible.

Although the sample size is small, there is some suggestion that female-headed households attempted to protect their families' food consumption more - for instance, reducing the number of meals and cutting back on relish was adopted by slightly more male- than female-headed households. However, almost every household reported reducing the size of portions at meals, mainly by using less *nsima* (a quantity adjustment), and almost everyone switched to cheaper and less nutritious relishes, such as vegetables without meat or fish (a quality adjustment). Possibly as a consequence of preferentially protecting family food consumption, female-headed households were more likely to reduce their non-food expenditure, as Table 4 reveals for the case of fuel (firewood, candles and paraffin).

### 3.2.2 Economic strategies

The most common source of additional income for food purchases was going for more *ganyu* than usual. Almost all households which did not adopt this strategy and had no other income-generating activity complained that *ganyu* was not available in the area - or even outside, since ten households sent members away to look for work, only some of whom were successful. Because crop production is constrained by land scarcity and restricted access to inputs, and because livestock are not owned by most of these households, sales of cash crops and livestock were limited to comparatively few households: there was only one tobacco farmer in this sample, for example. A few households resorted to more drastic means of raising income, including renting out or even selling their land, and selling household assets such as radios.

### 3.2.3 Social strategies

Expectations that informal safety nets would be stronger and more effective in rural areas because of the supposed depth and strength of family networks in the villages were confounded by responses which suggested that support from relatives, friends and neighbours was less extensive and less substantial than in the Blantyre urban

---

<sup>7</sup> This assumes that any systematic bias in responses (such as a tendency to exaggerate problems) is uniform in both direction and extent across the urban and rural samples.



sample. Focus group discussions highlighted a widespread perception “that the spirit of helping those in need in the communities is dwindling” (Tsoka and Mvula 1999:53), while individual respondents - one-third of whom had asked for help and been refused - argued that people lack the capacity to help each other as much as in the past, because of parallel declines over time in food production and real incomes. “*It is not that people are more mean but they are less able to help because nowadays nobody seems to have enough even for themselves.*” A few respondents also mentioned that the people they approached for assistance already have “so many people to look after”, which is possibly a reference not only to large family sizes but also to the growing number of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS. As Tsoka and Mvula (1999:54) conclude: “This implies that informal safety nets are on the decline.”

One in three rural respondents received food transfers during the past six months, most donors being close relatives - parents or children, in-laws, brothers or sisters - with some of these food gifts coming from friends and neighbours. Half as many respondents received informal cash transfers as received food, from roughly the same sources and mainly to purchase food. The value of these transfers was generally very small, with the largest cash gift reported being just K90 (about US\$2). Just three households were given fertiliser and the same number devolved some child care responsibilities to other households. Slightly more received clothes, all these transfers occurring between relatives. Sons and daughters were the dominant providers of cash and commodity transfers to these households. The most significant ‘help’ reported, though, was in the form of *ganyu*, which usually entailed a friend or neighbour offering work when the respondent asked for food or cash, payment being made in maize, cash or other food items.

In stark contrast to the Blantyre sample, only seven out of 104 respondents in the rural Zomba sample had taken a loan in the six months preceding the survey, and six of these were soft loans from friends and relatives - only one loan was taken from a moneylender. This pattern does not reflect an aversion to moneylenders, however. Many respondents complained that they could not borrow even from a *katapila* because these lenders do not trust their ability to repay.

Linkages between rural and urban households were less widespread and weaker when viewed from the villagers’ perspective than from the urban dwellers. Just over half the rural sample had relatives living in town, which is not surprising given Malawi’s low level of urbanisation but does imply that villagers are less able to diversify agricultural risk by drawing on remitted incomes of employed relatives in urban areas than in other African countries. Less than one-third of the rural sample reported receiving gifts of cash or commodities from urban relatives in the six months preceding the survey, though some respondents did concede that people in towns were struggling since the devaluation and were often unable to offer help. Nonetheless, most of these respondents had visited their relatives in town since August 1998 and almost all came back to the village with some cash, so these relationships and networks certainly are exploited. Flows in the opposite direction are made by fewer households and are typically in kind, the most common commodities donated to urban relatives being maize and secondary foodcrops like cassava, sweet potatoes and rice. This pattern is typical and predictable.

### 3.3 Adaptation to processes of change

Several recent studies have highlighted how rural households have sought to adapt to the livelihood strains caused by drought and gradual removal of inputs subsidies. Key studies: Pierce and Ngwira (1996); UNDP (1997); Devereux and Gladwin (1999); Peters (1995). Other adaptations noted in the literature relate to changing household demography and shifting gender roles, increased cross border trade, increased renting out of land, and changes in the operation of social networks.

#### 3.3.1 Drought adaptations (Peters: 1995, 1999: Zomba and Machinga districts; Pierce and Ngwira 1996: Salima and Mchinji districts).

##### Peters (1995, 1999)

- Diversification into drought tolerant crops (cassava, sweet potato, sorghum)
- Increased vegetable growing, particularly for sale
- Diversification into cash crops
- Diversification into off-farm activities

Brown et.al. (1996) comment on Peters' findings:

"Basically, smallholders are both protecting the level of their income and moving into cash cropping to shift dependence from own production to greater dependence on the market. They are to some extent diversifying out of subsistence production to increase the options open to them in bad years".

##### (Pierce and Ngwira 1996)

Highlighted the difficulties faced by the poor in accessing *ganyu* because of fragmented and inflexible labour markets, particularly in the aftermath of drought. It also highlighted the differential impact of drought on household food security of different wealth groups.

The study was undertaken in Salima and Mchinji districts in Central Region. These two districts are quite different agro-climatically. The main crops in Salima are maize, cotton, rice, groundnuts and cassava. Whereas the main crops in Mchinji are maize, tobacco and groundnuts. Mchinji is usually self sufficient in maize, whereas Salima normally imports maize. In Salima about 50% of households were identified as being poor, whereas in Mchinji, the figure was 30%. Despite these differences, the poor in the two districts had much in common, both in normal years and in the immediate post-drought year of 1993/94. Even in normal years many of the poorest households did not farm all the land they had available, either because of an absolute labour shortage or because they had to divert labour to *ganyu*.

One of the implications of the survey is that a key effect of drought on the poor is to increase the scale of market activities, particularly for the purchase of food. The main source of income is *ganyu*, but there is less *ganyu* available in drought years, as better off farmers are also affected. Commenting on this finding, Brown et al note that

“household food security for the poorest is very dependent on the functioning of the rural labour market. Better-off households are able to cushion themselves against the



impact of drought because they have a greater range of assets and income generating activities to call on”.

In the face of repeated shocks, however - eg the drought of 1994/95 and the effects of economic liberalisation – the resilience of such households is reduced as their asset base is eroded,

### 3.3.2 Input subsidy removal (UNDP 1997: Mchinji district), Devereux and Gladwin 1999)

#### Key Points:

- The high cost of fertiliser has prompted some farmers to change their cropping patterns away from hybrid maize and towards root crops, bananas and vegetables. It also led to increased use of manure and compost (which in some cases is combined with smaller quantities of fertiliser) (UNDP).
- There is also some evidence that farmers are adapting land and woodland husbandry practices (woodlot establishment, contour ridging, protection of customary woodland) so as to reduce soil erosion, with its consequent impact on crop yields and food production (UNDP)
- Farmers are more inclined to store their produce and sell later on in the season when prices are higher (UNDP).
- Farmers are also travelling across the border to Zambia to sell their crops as prices are higher (UNDP)
- Agricultural involution. Farmers with access to livestock are switching from chemical fertilisers to organic manure. “Some farmers indicated that they can no longer use implements like a ridger, plough and ox-cart but instead they rely on the hoe” (Mthindi *et al.* 1998:23) (Quoted in Devereux and Gladwin)

### 3.3.4 Changing household demography and shifting gender roles

**Demographic adjustments:** Poor rural households are sending household members to other households, either to reduce household consumption and or to increase production / income.

- **Consumption:** When households facing food stress find it difficult to provide adequately for all it is not uncommon for one or more household members to be sent to other households where food is more readily available, thereby reducing the number of consumers among which scarce food and other resources must be shared. Usually, but not always, these other households are wealthier relatives, but unrelated households can take advantage of distress to acquire children as servants or even future brides for their sons.<sup>8</sup>
- **Production:** Some rural Malawians are sending children as young as nine or ten years old to work as *ganyu* labourers in *dimba* gardens, or to town to work as domestic servants for wealthy urban families.

---

<sup>8</sup> In rural northern Ghana, under a traditional practice known as *pua elinga*, desperately poor families sometimes pawn their young daughters to wealthy neighbours as servants and future brides, in exchange for an advance brideprice payment in cattle or food (Devereux 1992).

**Small and large households:** There is some controversy as to whether large households are richer than small ones. Konyani (1998: 41 -43) finds that smaller is more likely to be poorer. Devereux questions this: Larger households are likely to be worse affected by a production shock (such as drought or the removal of fertiliser subsidies) than smaller households - it is easier for a single person to find *ganyu* and feed herself than to work for three or four hungry children as well.

**Urban - rural linkages:** Evidence that urban households are sending some children to live with grandparents in the villages. Some rural households are having to cope with a reverse flow of dependent relatives coming back from towns to the villages.

**Shifting gender roles:**

In recent years, in male headed households, women have started to take on more responsibility for providing, using their profits from trading, selling cooked food and other income-earning activities to purchase grain. According to focus group participants in Zomba town, this shift has partly been induced by external interventions, which are increasingly targeted at women. Micro-credit is available from NGOs for women's income-generating activities, but men are excluded from these loans.

(Devereux and Gladwin: 23)

### 3.3.5 Cross-border activities

Increasingly, rural Malawians are seeking solutions to their food insecurity and poverty beyond Malawi's borders, through economic interactions with neighbouring Mozambique, Zambia and Tanzania. These interactions involve sizeable but mostly informal (unrecorded) movements of commodities and people in both directions. The most significant interactions are between southern Malawi and northern Mozambique. Population densities, land pressures and food production deficits in Malawi are generally highest in the south. In neighbouring northern Mozambique, land is abundant and food production potential is much higher. Complex two-ways relationships exist between southern Malawi and northern Mozambique, which contribute significantly to the livelihood security of both populations (Devereux and Gladwin: 20)

Key points about cross-border trade:

- **increased market food availability** through informal imports of foodcrops (maize, beans, pigeon pea - also salt, and fertiliser) from Mozambique (8 million smallholders in Niassa, Zambezia and Tete sell mainly to Malawi);<sup>9</sup>
- **improved access to food** because prices of Mozambican maize and beans are generally lower than local prices (e.g. a 62% devaluation of the Malawian Kwacha in August 1998 resulted in a rise in ADMARC's maize price from Kw3.90 to Kw6.50/kg, which provoked riots in Blantyre and Limbe;

---

<sup>9</sup> Zambezia is a surplus maize producer in most years, and Malawi is a major market, because of limited marketing opportunities either locally (limited demand) or nationally (poor transport infrastructure) (Bowen 1998:5).

- **increased labour income** from *ganyu* in Mozambique - in some border villages “up to 75% of the households have someone doing *ganyu* in Mozambique” (Whiteside 1998:6);
- **increased incomes from trading** - 80% of consumer goods in Zambezia (bicycles, plastics, toiletries, etc.) come from thousands of small traders in Malawi; this business constitutes 30-50% of southern Malawi’s wholesale turnover (Whiteside 1998:5);
- **increased food production** through migration and temporary or semi-permanent settlement of Malawians into Zambezia Province to farm on unutilised land.

### 3.3.6 Renting out land:

In parts of southern Malawi where land is scarce but some smallholders (such as female-headed households) face labour constraints, an informal commercialisation of communal land is developing, “Some female headed households were found renting out their fields, at a paltry Kw150 a year, because they do not have the labour to cultivate them” (Whiteside 1998:27). This is a concern because, as with *ganyu*, the consequence is that a scarce resource which is essential for household food security - in this case, land, in the case of *ganyu*, labour - is being transferred from poorer to wealthier households, to the detriment of food security in the poor out-renting households.

(Devereux and Gladwin: 22)

### 3.3.7 Use of social networks:

What is clear from more recent data concerned with evaluating who is involved in a wider range of transfers, is the extent to which friends and neighbours have become the most frequent sources of help (money, credit and food). However, relatives (extended and immediate family) remain the most **reliable** sources of support (ALBEIT UNABLE TO HELP DUE TO LACK OF RESOURCES) (Tsoka and Mvula 1999). There are clearly differences in the types of transfers found in rural and urban areas, but the above trend is common to both. There is evidence to suggest that the importance of social strategies is on the decline, but that the extended family is still the most reliable form of social support. A central issue in understanding the distinction between kin based and non-kin based social support is that of reciprocity. In rural areas social networks appear to be less effective, since most people have faced the same hardships and a lack of basic resources. Devaluation has had the most impact. It is likely that the ethno-linguistic composition of communities has an effect on the extent to which kin-based (particularly extended kin) support networks are the most prevalent social support network.

#### 3.3.6.1 Empirical findings

##### *National Level aggregate data*

- Transfers’ provide less than 1% of total household income (Mataya *et al.* 1998:43).
- ‘Gifts/Relief’ as a source of food contributed no more than ‘0-5%’ of the annual food consumption of poor households. (SCF’s Risk Mapping exercise of 1996)

### ***Rural data: cash remittances***

This data also tends to indicate the low level of cash remittances.

- Between 0.4% and 6.5% of total household income, with an average of just 3.2% (Minae et al 1998:43).
- 2.2% of total household income (MASAF 1998) This latter survey found that the figure for remittances were invariant across the agricultural season implying that transfers do not increase to bridge consumption deficits in the hungry season.
- In one area in northern Malawi, however, it is also interesting to note that remittances comprised a substantial proportion to household incomes (16.8%) in STA Fukamalaza [near Mzuzu]. This was reported to be due to the prevalence of migratory work among men.
- Of those who received cash assistance within their rural locale, 21.4% received it from parents, and 35.7% received it from a brother or sister (survey conducted in rural Zomba Tsoka and Mvulu (1999)). In contrast there were no reported incidents of receiving cash remittances from friends.

### ***Gender***

There is very little data on the gender dimensions of informal safety nets. What information is available is nevertheless interesting. The following points are worth noting.

- 1.2% of the income of male-headed households came as transfers from relatives, compared to 7.1% for female-headed households (MASAF survey 1998)
- Urban survey material shows, ISN for men were predominantly through personal friendship, conversely for women, ISN were primarily through relatives (Devereux and Masoka 1999)
- ISN among women appear to be based more on reciprocity (looking after each others children and meal sharing (Devereux and Masoka 1999)
- While there are a high proportion of female headed households in Malawi they are by no means evenly distributed. This may result in higher rates for remittances, since some areas have a degree of male absenteeism for migratory work. (Mang'anya 1998:30).
- There is a likely, but as yet unquantified differences between men and women with respect to the transfer of different resources (food→women; cash/credit→men).

### ***Rural – Urban Linkages***

Tsoka and Mvula (1999 – draft)

- 55.9% of households in rural Zomba had a relative in town. 30.9% of households said they sometimes get help.
- 16.5% of rural people in Zomba sent food stuffs to town (maize, cassava, sweet potatoes)
- Following devaluation, 90.5% of respondents in rural Zomba reported going to town to seek cash. Just 9.5% went seeking food.

### **3.3.7 Rural – Urban Migration**

Although the level of urbanisation is rather low in Malawi, the rate of urbanisation is high: an estimated 100,000 people are added to Malawi's urban centres every year

(Chilowa and Chirwa 1997:45). The urban poor are an increasingly significant vulnerable group, and will become more numerous in the coming decades. Urban residents are subject to different pressures than rural dwellers, and therefore require a separate analysis, both in terms of causes of the causes of vulnerability and coping strategies adopted.

Levels of poverty in urban areas are high and rising. In 1980 the World Bank estimated that only 9% of urban Malawians were poor, but in 1990 the figure had risen to 38% and by 1993 - just after a major drought - two alternative estimates were 58% and 65% (Kalemba 1997:24). Expenditure surveys show a steadily increasing proportion of income in low income households being spent on food: in Lilongwe and Blantyre an average of 37% in 1980, rose to 48% in 1989 and 56% in 1992, while in Zomba in 1992 the figure was 63% (Roe 1992b:65-66). Part of the 1980s trend is due to falling real incomes: 14 days work at minimum wages bought a bag of maize in 1983, but by 1988, 29 days work was needed (Kalemba 1997:24). Whichever cut-off point for spending on food is taken to signify living in poverty - some analysts suggest one-third of total expenditure, the World Bank in Malawi has used 55% in the past, while Lipton has proposed 60% for the 'poor' and 80% for the 'ultra-poor' - it is clear that a substantial and increasing proportion of urban households in Malawi are subsisting below the poverty line, many in absolute poverty.

Urban unemployment and rising food prices are the two major risk factors in urban areas. "Failure to generate paid employment for the abundant labour force and a decline in the real purchasing power has created hardship for most" workers (Chilowa and Chirwa 1997:54).

Despite these adverse statistics, urbanisation remains an attractive option to rural Malawians because it offers the hope of an income that is independent of agriculture which, as is well known, is facing increasing chronic and acute stresses. Average urban incomes remain higher than rural incomes; much of the rise in urban poverty is the effect of rural migrants pulling down average urban incomes as rural poverty 'relocates' to the outskirts of Malawi's towns. One risk of rapid urbanisation is that demand for housing and basic services such as piped water and sanitation will exceed supply. "It is estimated that 70% of Zomba's, 50% of Blantyre's and 35% of Lilongwe's urban population are living in squatter settlements with almost no public services" (Chilowa and Chirwa 1997:45). These settlements are suffering from overcrowding and overuse of facilities: "in some locations the water and sanitation situation has reached a crisis point" (Roe 1992b:xii).

### **3.3.8 Adapting to HIV – AIDS**

#### **3.3.8.1 Orphans**

There are many more orphans than there used to be. They are mainly looked after by relatives of the deceased parents, but it is difficult for these relatives to cope. Sometimes step-parents are violent towards the orphans, or neglect them compared to their own children, so the orphans leave home and wander around the markets, begging. Almost half the households in one township area of Zomba have one or more orphans. One household in this community consists of eight orphans living

alone, with the oldest (teenagers) looking after their younger siblings. In urban areas orphans are often registered with the Social Welfare Department, and according to social workers the numbers of orphans in Malawi's towns are rising fast due to AIDS. The Social Welfare Department in Limbe has on its books a grandmother who is looking after nine orphaned grandchildren (GoM/UN 1998:12).

A survey of a rural village in Mchinji District enumerated 40 orphans in a population of 307, or 13% of the total population and one in five children under 21 years old. Most of the orphans' parents died of AIDS, and most are cared for by their grandparents, "who are old and lack support" (GoM/UN 1997:13).

INCOMPLETE

#### **4. Interactions between formal safety net interventions and coping and adapting.**

Formal safety nets such as supplementary feeding and free inputs packages (SIP, Starter Packs) influence and are influenced by local socio-political and economic processes including "traditional" coping and adaptive strategies. This is a sensitive area, that is not easily researched, but important to understand. DfID has commissioned evaluations of Supplementary feeding programmes and the Starter Pack intervention for 1999. Results of these evaluations indicate....

INCOMPLETE



### **III. URBAN POOR**

#### **1. Overview of Coverage of the Literature**

There has been less emphasis on the urban poor than there has on the rural poor. Four detailed studies were done by Roe (one with Chilowa) in the 1989 – 1992 period. These focussed in Blantyre, Zomba and Lilongwe. More recently there has been Mthindi et al (1998) (Blantyre, Lilongwe, Mzuzu). Rohregger and Chapasula (1998) (focussing on Area 25 in Lilongwe) and Tsoka and Mvula (1999 – draft) (focussing on Blantyre city).

As is the case in the analysis of coping in rural areas, the key unit of analysis is the household. Very little is known about urban poverty and coping behaviour in Malawi, especially in recent years, but urbanisation stands at 15% and is rising rapidly. Information on urban- rural linkages is also limited, but this is a major part of informal safety nets elsewhere.

#### **2. What proportion of urban households is particularly vulnerable to shocks and strains?**

In 1995 it was estimated that about 15% of Malawi's population lived in towns and cities (NPAN 1995). Overall, people living in urban areas are less likely to be poor than those living in rural areas (an urban household is half as likely as a rural household to be poor). In Lilongwe – the fastest growing urban centre in Malawi – however, there is twice the level of households below the 20<sup>th</sup> income percentile than in any other Malawian city (World Bank : 1996).

A 1989 study of poor urban households found that on average 68% of the monthly budget was spent on food (Chilowa and Shively 1989). Figures of this magnitude imply that the poor are close to the basic needs minimum level of income. Brown et al comment that such households are

“..not wealthy, and those at the bottom of the distribution would be on a level with poorer rural households, but it is difficult to quantify what percentage overall of urban households would be in that position”. (Op. cit. page c-7)

A 1991 survey (Roe: 1992) indicates that almost 70% of poor households in Lilongwe and Blantyre had a garden back at their village. However, this represented a survival mechanism which in many cases failed to provide food when required (Roe 1992: 132). A minority of households grew food at or near their urban plot. The extent to which this could meaningfully support the food needs of the poor appeared to vary with the nature of the settlement in which the poor were residing. Those living in Traditional Housing Areas (THAs) such as Kawale I in Lilongwe appeared to be considerably more likely to be able to meet food needs for some months from an urban plot than those living in unplanned areas such as Chinsapo, also in Lilongwe.

Urban livelihood systems differ markedly from rural strategies, and urban livelihood strategies (which are dominated by informal and formal sector employment, plus own food production) and urban coping strategies both reflect a greater degree of integration into the market (and not only for food purchases) than in rural areas.

### 3. Survival, Coping and Adaptive strategies in Urban Malawi

Strategy	Coping	Adaptive
Nutritional strategies	Yes	Yes
Increase in reliance in informal sector income generation	Yes	Yes
Borrowing	Yes	
Relocation to lower cost areas	Yes	Yes
Child labour	Yes	Yes
Informal safety nets	Yes	Yes
Urban – rural linkages	Yes	Yes
Theft	Yes	Yes
Sex work	Yes	Yes

#### 3.1 Coping with economic shocks: evidence from Devereux and Gladwin (1999)

Respondents in Blantyre were first asked about the impact of the most recent livelihood shock to affect urban Malawians, namely the 62% kwacha devaluation of August 1998. Every single respondent stated that the price of food and basic grocery items (maize, sugar, soap) had risen following the devaluation, as had the cost of travelling (bus fares).<sup>10</sup> Most respondents also said that fertiliser prices, the cost of water, and the cost of attending hospitals or clinics had risen since August. As a rule of thumb, most prices seem to have doubled (e.g. salt increased from MK5 to MK10 per plate, and a small cup of paraffin from 20 to 40 tambala), though the range reported across a dozen items for which prices were elicited varied from 40% for local soap (but 114% for imported soap) to 150% for firewood. A 50kg bag of maize cost MK190 before the devaluation and MK425 afterwards, though some of this increase might have been 'normal' seasonality. At the same time, profits from small business and the availability of *ganyu* had fallen, so the devaluation constituted a 'double income shock' by simultaneously raising living costs and reducing earned incomes for the poor. Clearly, the August 1998 devaluation was the latest in a series of livelihood shocks that have caused a general economic contraction in urban areas or at least increased stratification between richer and poorer strata in Malawi's towns.

In terms of informal safety nets, more people were asking friends and relatives for help than normal and the number of people begging had also increased, but most people were less able to provide help than before because they themselves were badly affected by rising prices and falling incomes. The fact that these respondents (who

<sup>10</sup> For most of the survey data discussed, tables of actual frequencies and cross-tabulations will be annexed rather than included in the main body of text.



were drawn from poor urban settlements) were approached for assistance supports evidence from other sources which suggests that informal safety nets in Malawi are dominated by horizontal rather than vertical redistribution - informal transfers occur more between poor households than from rich to poor. Theft had also increased, according to almost all respondents, not only by the desperately poor but (allegedly) by immigrants from Mozambique who have smuggled weapons into Malawi illegally, causing levels of crime and especially violent crime to escalate.

**Coping strategies in “a poor area” in urban Blantyre by sex of household head, February 1999: Purposive sampling biased towards female headed households. (Households coping with seasonal strain plus devaluation shock).**

Coping strategy	Adoption rate (%)	
	Female HH	Male HH
<b>Nutritional strategies</b>		
• Shifted to cheap relish like vegetables instead of meat	73.2	71.9
• Ate smaller portions to make food last longer	46.3	50.0
• Reduced number of meals per day	46.3	43.8
• Ate different staple like cassava to save money	43.9	34.4
<b>Economic / income strategies</b>		
• Bought less firewood or paraffin to save money	63.4	62.5
• Used income from business to buy food (informal sector)		
• Shifted to unprotected water source	39.0	34.4
• Bought less fertiliser to save money or buy food	31.7	31.3
• Borrowed money to buy food	41.5	15.6
• Used savings to buy food	35.4	37.5
• Went for food or cash ganyu	36.6	25.0
• Sold livestock or poultry to buy food	22.0	12.5
• Sold household assets to buy food	11.0	12.5
• Sent children to look for money	9.8	12.5
• Took children out of school	9.8	9.4
• Took children out of school	4.9	18.8
• Sold cash crops to buy food	11.0	100.0
• Rented out land to get cash for food	6.1	9.4
<b>Social strategies / Informal safety nets</b>		
• Asked relatives or friends for help	41.5	53.1
• Sent household members to relatives to eat there	13.4	12.5

### 3.2 Households coping and adapting to chronic poverty.

Livelihood and coping strategies in low income urban households in Blantyre and Lilongwe (1991)

Strategies	% adopting this strategy
Informal sector work	87%
Own food production	69%
Formal sector job	62%
Borrow from friend/relative	61%
Crop sales	26%
Remittances	11%
Borrow from moneylender	10%
Sell household assets	4%
Use savings	3%
Receive gifts	2%
Take children out of school	1%
Use unprotected water	1%

Source: Compiled from Roe (1992b)

### 3.3 Key coping and adaptive strategies:

- Dietary changes
- Increase in reliance on informal sector income generation (these activities often draw on or build on existing social capital)
- Borrowing (as above)
- Relocation to lower cost areas
- Child labour
- Social strategies
- Urban – rural linkages
- Theft
- Sex work

#### 3.3.1 Dietary changes:

“Food price increases have forced the urban poor ... who spend a large part of their budget on food ... to reduce their consumption or switch to lower quality foods. ... The result of reduced food consumption or the substitution of lower quality foods as a consequence of food price increases is to further reduce nutritional intake” (Chilowa and Chirwa 1997:40, 59).

#### Key points:

- Number and composition of meals is more a function of income shortages than lack of food (in contrast to rural areas: food reserves running out). Policy conclusions:

- \* timing: Monthly income shortages rather than seasonal food shortages
- \* support to income generation (contrast with food production support for rural areas)
- However, urban poor are affected by seasonal food price rises also
- Urban poor more affected by devaluation shocks than rural poor. (Mataya and Chulu (1997) conclude that structural adjustment has had more of a negative impact on the urban poor than the rural poor

### 3.3.2 Increase in reliance on informal sector income generation

**Key points:** "In urban areas the numbers of people engaging in standard and illicit income-generating activities has visibly increased. Street vendors are everywhere: *"Everybody is trying to sell something."* Prostitution is increasing". (Devereux and Gladwin: 28)

MORE NEEDED...

### 3.3.3 Borrowing

**Key points:** Borrowing is very prevalent in urban areas (friends, employers, money lenders). These sources are particularly important as they provide consumption loans which banks very rarely offer. Borrowing from friend or relative at low or no interest rates can be considered non-erosive, whereas borrowing from *Kapitala* at high rates is an erosive coping strategy. Roe (1992): 80% of loans from friends, 10% from relatives, 7% from employers, 2% from money lenders. It appears that the demand for borrowing has increased in urban areas (Roe 1992, Devereux 1999) and that it is more difficult to get loans now than in the past. As maize prices rise faster than incomes, urban dwellers are forced to take out consumption loans.

### 3.3.4 Squatting and relocation to lower cost areas

**Key points:** In urban areas the incidence of squatting has increased, as people displaced from rural areas by land pressure move to the low cost areas around towns, and urban residents squeezed by rising costs of living move out of rate-paying areas into lower cost informal accommodation. These squatter areas are known as 'Multi-Party areas', because they have sprung up since the UDF came to power in 1994: *"Since 1994 you can do anything."*

### 3.3.5 Child labour

**Key points:** "For the low income urban dweller the young child is an important link in the survival mechanism chain. Very young children vending all kinds of goods are a common sight both within the traditional housing areas and in towns. Because of this, it could also be the parent in some cases who discourages the child from

attending school” (Roe 1992b:13). Increasing numbers of these children are probably AIDS orphans and other homeless street children, but the consequence is the same: even with primary education being free (at least in terms of fees) since 1994, these children are not attending school and they face a life of poverty.

### 3.3.6 Social strategies

#### *Cash remittances (gifts)*

Roe (1992)

- 11% of households surveyed in Lilongwe and Blantyre and 14% in Zomba, were “receiving some form of remittances each year” (Roe 1992b:58);
- In Zomba, 85% of income remitters were relatives, 6% were friends and 9% were past employers.
- For recipients, remittances made a useful proportion to total household income (MK 21 out of MK 132, or 16%), though across the entire sample the contribution was small (just MK 3 out of MK 132, or 2%) (Roe 1992:58).

Msoka and Mvula (1999)

Inter-household help “no prevalent” in Blantyre low income area. Reasons:

- Things are expensive nowadays
- People do not have enough resources for themselves
- In the current economic climate, is the *moral economy* shrinking, thus forcing more Malawians to borrow from Kapitala at high interest rates?

#### *Urban – Rural linkages*

- Remittances: Dominant direction of flows:

Urban→Urban

Urban→Rural

Rural →Urban

Roe (1992) Blantyre, Lilongwe, Zomba

- Urban to urban transfers accounted for 72% of all transfers of cash
- Rural to urban accounted for 24% of all transfers

Tsoka and Mvula (1999)

- 95% of respondents in Blantyre low income area had relatives in rural areas
- 38% said they get food (mainly shelled maize)
- 65% of respondents send cash or commodities home

Devereux and Gladwin (1999)

- Evidence that urban households are sending children to live with grandparents in the villages. Some rural households are having to cope with a reverse flow of dependent relatives coming back from towns to the villages.

### **3.3.7 Theft**

TO BE ADDED.....

### **3.3.8 Sex Work**

TO BE ADDED....

#### IV. SUMMARY: WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT HOW THE POOR IN MALAWI COPE WITH POVERTY? DO WE KNOW ENOUGH TO DESIGN EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT POVERTY REDUCTION PROGRAMMES, AND IF NOT WHY NOT?

##### 1. Rural – Urban comparisons

We know that urban livelihood systems differ markedly from rural strategies, and urban livelihood strategies (which are dominated by informal and formal sector employment, plus own food production) and urban coping strategies both reflect a greater degree of integration into the market (and not only for food purchases) than in rural areas.

Type of strategy	Similarities	Differences
Nutritional	Both employ similar nutritional strategies using the same or similar sequencing	The degree of meal reduction and ingredient switching is greater in rural areas
Economic	Both employ a mixture of expenditure reduction and income generation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ganyu is (much?) more important in rural areas, although ganyu is still practised in urban areas</li> <li>In urban areas, the poor are much more likely to shift into informal sector activity</li> </ul>
Social	<u>Friends and neighbours</u> have become the most <u>frequent</u> sources of help (money, credit and food). In contrast, <u>relatives</u> (extended and immediate family) remain the most <u>consistent</u> sources of support.	Employers and workmates are only of any significance in urban areas.

##### 2. Coverage of literature

- We have plenty of household level analysis: Smallholder **households**, urban **households** particularly in central and southern region.
- Considerable household level information on: Nutritional and economic responses to shocks and seasonality. (Proportion of households, sequencing of strategies, differences across household types (wealth))
- Consequences of strategies: eg Nutritional outcomes, impact of ganyu, impact of rural urban migration.
- Considerable information on extent and manifestations of (mainly economic) adaptations to drought, removal of input subsidy and market liberalisation.
- Limited information on how social networks operate in light of shocks and trends.
- This information can give SOME guidance to interventions such as when to give consumption support (eg food aid) and production support (eg free inputs) (rural households) how much to give, and whom to target. The information can also give some guidance to the design of longer term poverty reduction strategies which seek to improve access to resources and the “assets” controlled by the poor.

- In addition to this, there is on-going research into impact of starter packs and supplementary feeding. This will give further insights into the interface between formal safety nets and “informal” mechanisms of coping and adapting.

### **3. Weaknesses: Less well understood and not understood areas**

#### **3.1 Gender**

- men and women living in the same household;
- male-headed and female-headed households;
- patrilineal and matrilineal kinship systems in Malawi.

Of these only the second is addressed in any depth in the Malawian literature at present.

#### **3.2 Ganyu**

- availability and returns (cross-sectionally or over time),
- variation in rates of pay and methods of payment (seasonally, for men, women, children),
- influence of social relations including the “moral economy” on access to ganyu,
- effects of urban areas and estates,
- effects of formal safety net programmes on ganyu.

#### **3.3 Under-researched population groups**

- Permanent estate workers and tenant farmers (amount to about 10 –15% of the rural population: Brown et. al. 1995: 7)
- The landless?

#### **3.4 Under-researched issues**

- Theft and other illegal activities
- Sex work

#### **3.5 Geographical coverage and contextualisation**

- Coverage: The Northern Region.
- Contextualisation: Individual case studies tend to be focused on their localities, detail needed on (eg) areas with strong government support programmes and those without.

#### **3.6 Methodological issues**

- Trends over time
- Balanced use of subjective and "Objective" measures
- Understanding underlying social relations and institutions

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allen, P., July 1993, **Report on Risk-Mapping Project Phase II Field Inquiries: Malawi**. London: Save the Children Fund (UK)
- Bolnick, B., 1992, 'Moneylenders and the Informal Financial Markets in Malawi', in **World Development** Vol. 20. No. 1 pp 57-68.
- Bosworth, J. November 1998, **Recent Studies in Land Utilisation in Malawi: Implications for Land Policy, a Desk Review**, Harare:DFIDCA
- Bowen, N., October 1998, **Trade, Traders and Trading: Malawi and Zambezia Province, Mozambique**. Lilongwe: Oxfam Malawi
- CARE International in Malawi, July 1998, **Malawi Participatory Livelihoods Assessment Exercise (Process Report)**
- CARE International in Malawi, February 1999, **Central Region Infrastructural Maintenance Programme**
- Cammack, D. April 1996, **Food Security and Gender Disparities in Malawi: A Profile Paper for Gender Targeting by WFR-Malawi, WFP-Malawi**
- Chilowa, W. and Shively, G., December 1989, **Expenditure Patterns and Nutritional Status of Malawi's Urban Poor**. Ithaca: Cornell University Food and Nutrition Policy Programme
- Chilowa, W., Kandoole, B., and Msukwa, L., 1990, **Small Holder Maize Production and Household Food Security in Malawi: Interim Findings From The Baseline Survey**, Centre for Social Research, Zomba. Paper presented at the National Workshop on 'Food Security', "Socio-Economic Status and Nutrition for the Rural Population in Malawi", December 13-14, 1990, Chancellor College, Zomba
- Chilowa, W. 1991, **Food Insecurity and Coping Strategies among the low Income Urban Households in Malawi**, August 1991, Norway: CHR Michelsen Institute, Dept. Social Science and Development
- Chilowa, W. 1995, **Report of the Proceedings of the Regional Seminar on the Integration of Poverty Alleviation Strategies into Economic Policies**, Zomba: Centre for Social Research
- Chilowa, W., and Chirwa, E., 1997, 'The impact of SAPs on social and human development in Malawi, in Chilowa, W. (ed.), **Bwalo: A Forum for Social Development**, Issue 1. Zomba: Centre for Social Research
- Chirwa, W. C., Poeschke, R., May 1998, **The Challenge of Democracy In Malawi: Socio-Anthropological Conditions, Study Report and Recommendations**, Deutsche Gesellschaft f r Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH
- Corbett, J., September 1988, 'Famine and Household Coping Strategies', **World Development** 16(9): 1099-1112
- Davies, S., 1996, **Adaptable Livelihoods: Coping with Food Insecurity in the Malian Sahel**. London: Macmillan
- Dershem, L. and Gzirishvili, D., October 1998, '**Informal Social Support Networks and Household Vulnerability: Empirical Findings from Georgia**', **World Development** 26(10): 1827-1838
- De Waal, A., 1989, **Famine that Kills: Darfur, Sudan, 1984-1985**. Oxford: Clarendon Press
- Devereux, S., (nd) **Prevention is More Cost-Effective than Cure: The Case for Productivity-Enhancing Safety Nets in Malawi: A discussion Note**
- Devereux, S., (nd) **Experiences with Targeting Transfers in Malawi: A discussion note**
- Devereux, S., (nd) **Informal Safety Nets in Malawi: A discussion note**
- Devereux, S., 1992, 'Household Responses to Food Insecurity in Northeastern Ghana', **DPhil Dissertation in Economics**. Oxford: University of Oxford



- Devereux, S., March 1999, **Coping Strategies In Southern Malawi: Findings from a Field Survey, March 1999** (typed manuscript)
- Dil, L., May 1996, **Rural Appraisal: Primary Schools, Vulnerable Group Feeding, and Food for Work as Channels of Maize Distribution**. Lilongwe: World Food Programme
- Earl, J. and Moseley, W., 1996, **Risk Map Report - Malawi: Preliminary Results**, London: Save the Children Fund (UK)
- Ettema W. 1984, **The Informal Sector In Malawi**, Paper presented at the Seminar on the Analysis of the 1997 Census and its Utilisation in Development Planning (29<sup>th</sup> October – 2<sup>nd</sup> November, 1994, at Kwacha Conference Centre), Zomba: Centre for Social Research
- Evans, J., June 1997, **Growth Prospects Study: Rapid Assessment of the Impact of Policy Changes on Rural Livelihoods in Malawi**. Lilongwe: World Bank in Malawi
- Geier, G., 1995, **Food Security Policy in Africa Between Disaster Relief and Structural Adjustment: Reflections on the Conception and Effectiveness of Policies: The Case of Tanzania**. London: Frank Cass
- Gomonda, N., Kamanga, C., Chiwaka, E. and Pain, C., 1997, **Qualitative Impact Monitoring (QUIM) as part of the Poverty Monitoring System (PMS): Mundangu Village Site Report, Mhujira EPA, Rumphi District**. Lilongwe: National Economic Council
- Government of Malawi and the United Nations in Malawi (GoM/UN), 1997, **Participatory Assessment and Planning for Sustainable Livelihoods (PAPSL) Report: Gandali Village, Mchinji District**. Lilongwe: Government of Malawi and United Nations
- Government of Malawi and the United Nations in Malawi (GoM/UN), 1998, **Participatory Assessment and Planning for Sustainable Livelihoods (PAPSL) Report: BCA, Blantyre**. Lilongwe: Government of Malawi and United Nations
- Government of Malawi, National Economic Council, September 1998, **Factors Explaining Rural Household Incomes with Recommendations for Aiding the Transition Out of Poverty**, Malawi: NEC
- Government of Malawi, National Economic Council, 1998 **Socio-Economic Effects of Structural Adjustment Policies on Malawi's Rural and Urban Households**, Malawi: NEC
- Government of Malawi, National Economic Council, October 1998, **Smallholder output Response to Agricultural Policy Changes in Malawi**, Malawi: NEC
- Government of Malawi, National Economic Council, September 1998, **A Study to Develop Research Policy and Operational Definition of Poverty in Malawi**, Malawi: NEC
- Haddard. L., Zeller, M. July 1996, **How Can Safety Nets do More with Less? General Issues with some evidence from Southern Africa**, Food Consumption and Nutrition Division, International Food Policy Research Institute, Washington D.C.
- Kalembe, E., 1997, 'Anti-poverty policies in Malawi: A critique', in Chilowa, W. (ed.), **Bwalo: A Forum for Social Development**, Issue 1. Zomba: Centre for Social Research
- Kandawire, J. K. (nd) **Some African Responses to the Practice of Social Anthropology in Africa** (typed manuscript)
- Kandawire, J. K. 1997, 'Sociological Research for Development in Malawi', in **Malawi Journal of Social Science**, Volume 16, 1993-94 pp69-85
- Kishindo, P., 1997, 'Malawi's social development policies: A historical review', in Chilowa, W. (ed.), **Bwalo: A Forum for Social Development**, Issue 1. Zomba: Centre for Social Research

- Konyani, S., June 1998, 'Factors Explaining Rural Household Incomes with Recommendations for Aiding the Transition Out of Poverty', **Research Findings of a Small Policy Study Under the Poverty Monitoring System (PMS)**. Zomba: Centre for Social Research
- Kutengule, M., 1997, 'Resource mobilisation for basic education and health care', in Chilowa, W. (ed.), **Bwalo: A Forum for Social Development**, Issue 1. Zomba: Centre for Social Research
- Malawi Institute of Management, April 1997, **Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF): Beneficiary Assessment, 1997**. Lilongwe: Malawi Institute of Management
- Mang'anya, M., September 1998, **Socio-Economic Study to Identify Target Areas for a Labour Intensive Rural Feeder Roads Programme in Malawi**. Lilongwe: Ministry of Local Government
- Marsland, N., 1996, **Farmers' Needs and The SIP: Implications for Food Security Strategies**. Report prepared for ActionAid Malawi, Lilongwe.
- Marsland, N., 1998, **The Incidence of Food Insecurity in Malawi and the Range of Coping and Adaptive Strategies Utilised by Households to Achieve Food Security**. Report prepared for UNDP Malawi.
- Mataya, C., Chulu, O. and Chilima, E., 1998, **Socio-Economic Effects of Structural Adjustment Policies on Malawi's Rural and Urban Households**. Lilongwe: National Economic Council
- Minae, S., Malfense, O. and Mdyetseni, H., March 1998, **Socio-Economic Study to Identify Target Areas for a Labour Intensive Rural Feeder Roads Programme in Malawi: Final Report**. Lilongwe: Ministry of Local Government and Delegation of European Commission in Malawi
- Minde, I. J. and T. O. Nakhumwa, October 1997 **Unrecorded Cross-Border Trade Between Malawi and Neighbouring Countries**, Final Report for TechnoServe, Inc., Nairobi, Kenya October 1997, USAID, Regional Economic Development Support Office for East and Southern Africa (REDSO/ESA), Agricultural Policy Research Unit, (ARPU) Bunda College of Agriculture, University of Malawi.
- Minde, I. J. and T. O. Nakhumwa, March 1997, **Informal Cross-Border Trade Between Malawi and Her Neighbouring Countries**, Report for TechnoServe, Inc., Nairobi, Kenya March 1997, USAID, Regional Economic Development Support Office for East and Southern Africa (REDSO/ESA), Agricultural Policy Research Unit, (ARPU) Bunda College of Agriculture, University of Malawi.
- Ministry of Economic Planning and Development (MEPD), World Food Programme (WFP) and the Famine Early Warning System (FEWS), January 1996, **Rapid Food Security Assessment (RAFSA): November-December 1995**. Lilongwe: MEPD, WFP, FEWS
- Morinière, L., Chimwaza, S. and Weiss, E., December 1996, **Malawi Vulnerability Assessment and Mapping (VAM) Baseline 1996: A Quest for Causality**. World Food Programme (WFP) and Ministry of Economic Planning and Development (MEPD)
- Moser, C., January 1998, 'The Asset Vulnerability Framework: Reassessing Urban Poverty Reduction Strategies', **World Development** 26(1): 1-19
- Mthindi, G., Chilowa, W., Milner, J. and Ntata, P., May 1998, **Social Policy in the Context of Economic Reforms in Malawi: The Survival and Adaptive Strategies of Vulnerable Groups: Monitoring Survey Draft Report**. Zomba: Southern African Regional Institute for Policy Studies
- Mvula, P., and Kakhongwa, P., 1997, **Beyond Inequalities: Women in Malawi: A Profile of Women in Malawi**, University of Malawi, Centre for Social Research, and Women In Development Southern African Awareness (WIDSAA) programme of the Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC)

- Mwale, J. K. 1980, **The Probable Origins of the Reserve: A Synthesis from Oral Traditions** (typed manuscript), The History Seminar, 1980/81 – Paper no 6, Zomba: University of Malawi
- Næraa, T., Devereux, S., Frayne, B. and Harnett, P., 1993, 'Coping with Drought in Namibia: Informal Social Security Systems in Caprivi and Erongo, 1992', **NISER Research Report 12**. Windhoek: University of Namibia
- Ngwira, N. A. and Msukwa, L. A. H., 1986, **Socio-Economic Research in Malawi**, Paper presented at the Seminar for Policy Makers on the Role of Scientific Research and Technology in National Development, held at Kwacha International Conference Centre, Blantyre, 29<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> August 1986.
- Ngwira, N. and T. Nakhumwa, September 1995, **Unofficial Cross-Border Trade Study** (mid-term Report) Centre for Agricultural Research and Development (Agriculture Policy Research Unit (APRU)), University of Malawi.
- Pearce, J., Ngwira, A. and Chimseu, G., March 1996, **Living on the Edge: A Study of the Rural Food Economy in the Mchinji and Salima Districts of Malawi**, Lilongwe: Save the Children-UK
- Putnam, R., 1993, 'The Prosperous Community: Social Capital and Public Life', **American Prospect**, 13: 35-42
- Qualitative Impact Monitoring (QUIM) Team, August 1998, **Qualitative Impact Monitoring of Poverty Alleviation Policies and Programmes in Malawi: Volume 1 - Research Findings**. Lilongwe: National Economic Council (NEC) and German Technical Co-operation (GTZ)
- Reichenbach, G. June 1989, **Socio-Anthropological Approach to Income Generating Activities in Machinga District** Action Research Report: Rural Development Section, Liwonde ADD
- Roe, E., 1998, **Taking Complexity Seriously**. Boston: Kluwer
- Roe, G. and Chilowa, W. 1989, **A Profile of Low Income Urban Households in Malawi: A Report of the First Stage of a study on the effects of Macro-Economic Adjustment Policies on Urban Poor Households**. Working Paper (No. 1) Zomba: Centre for Social Research, University of Malawi
- Roe, G., and Chilowa, W. 1990, **Low Income Urban Households in Malawi – Are They Food Secure? Results from Research Findings**. Centre for Social Research Zomba, Malawi, Paper Presented at Workshop on Issues in household food insecurity at Livingstonia Beach Hotel - 28<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> June 1990 Wycliffe
- Roe, G., February 1992a, **The Plight of the Urban Poor in Malawi: Results from a Baseline Survey**. Zomba: Centre for Social Research
- Roe, G., February 1992b, **Low Income Urban Households in Zomba: A Profile**. Zomba: Centre for Social Research
- Roe, G., June 1992c, **The Current Food Crisis and the Urban Poor: Results from a Rapid Survey**, Zomba: Centre for Social Research
- Semu, L., and Chande-Binauli, L., 1997, 'Women's status in Malawi: A case for gendered development', in Chilowa, W. (ed.), **Bwalo: A Forum for Social Development**, Issue 1. Zomba: Centre for Social Research
- Smallholder Agribusiness Development Project (SADP), December 1997, **Past, Present and Future Performance of the Smallholder Tobacco Farmer in Malawi: 1994-2000**. Washington DC: Agricultural Cooperative Development International
- Tsoka, M. 1998, **Conditions for Social Security in Malawi**, Zomba, Malawi: Centre for Social Research.
- Tsoka, M and Mvula, P. March 1999, **Malawi Coping Strategies Survey**, Draft report for National Economic Council and United Nations Development Program, World Bank. Zomba, Malawi: Centre for Social Research.

- Vaughan, M., 1984, 'Poverty and famine in Nyasaland, 1949', **University of Malawi Journal of Social Science**, 11: 46-72
- von Benda-Beckmann, F., Kirsch, R., Frieberg-Strauss, J. 1995, **The Capacity of Social Security Systems in Southern Africa: Conditions, Constellations and Socio-Political Relevance Volume 1**, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH
- White, P., Rook, J. March 1999, **Safety Nets in Malawi: Preliminary notes of the In-Kind Transfer Study**, Resal/European Commission
- Whiteside, M., November 1998, **When the Whole is More than the Sum of the Parts: The effect of cross-border interactions on livelihood security in southern Malawi and northern Mozambique**. Oxford: Oxfam-UK
- World Bank, September 1997, **Accelerating Malawi's Growth: Long-term Prospects and Transitional Problems**. Washington DC: World Bank, Southern Africa Department
- World Food Programme (WFP), May 1998a, **Country Programme for Malawi (1998-2001)**. Rome: World Food Programme
- World Food Programme (WFP), November 1998b, **Malawi - Targeted Safety Net Emergency Operation: Project Memorandum**. Rome: World Food Programme
- World Food Programme, Malawi (WFP-Malawi), October 1998, **Evaluation of the Targeted Safety Net Emergency Operation - 5997**. Lilongwe: World Food Programme
- Zgovu, E., Mvula, P., Kunkwenzu, E. and Potani, M., February 1998, **A Review and Evaluation of MASAF Safety Net Programme and Assessment of its Impact: Final Report**. Zomba: Wadonda Consult
- Zgovu, E. and Mvula, P., September 1998, **Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF) Safety Net Baseline Study: Final Report**. Zomba: Wadonda Consult

**(ii) Coping with Poverty in Malawi: Conceptual Underpinnings and Methodological Biases**

**Presentation for UK workshop: Livelihood Strategies and Poverty in Malawi**

**S. Andrew Long (NRI)**

**(Draft: Not for citation, for workshop reference only)**

***Objectives:***

- **To situate what we know and don't know about how people cope with poverty in Malawi within a broader methodological context**
- **To draw attention to the methodological and conceptual issues and biases that have shaped the collection and analysis of data on poverty coping strategies in Malawi**
- **To discuss in more detail methodological issues central to understanding poverty coping strategies in Malawi, including:**
  - **Longitudinal or historical analysis (trends)**
  - **Social relations and institutions (social capital)**
  - **The notion of the 'household'**

## **Introduction**

In this presentation, I want to argue that while we have a good understanding of the pervasive nature of poverty and the factors that lead to such adversity, we do not have a full picture of how people actually cope with such adversity. The information we do have is essentially 'patchy'. In short, much of the data we have has been derived from socio-economic questionnaire survey based research or PRA based livelihood and poverty assessment exercises carried out. While this information allows to analyse the frequency and spread of particular coping strategies, such data is less able to illuminate the actual social processes involved in operationalising coping strategies. To develop a more holistic understanding of how people cope with poverty, the strategies they employ, what trade offs are involved and what factors shape their decision making processes we need to develop more synthesis or synergy between various studies and approaches. Only then can we begin to make informed decisions about what short term interventions and long term poverty alleviation strategies are most appropriate and likely to succeed.

### ***The link between methodology, concepts and research findings***

We have identified a number of areas (both empirically and methodologically) that have received relatively little attention in attempts to understand how people cope with poverty. Some of these relate to conceptual and methodological biases while others are simply due to underreporting. These are in effect related, however, since the way we frame what we believe to be critical for understanding how people cope (methodology) informs what kinds of concepts we use to get at the information. The methodological issues are perhaps the most significant since they provide not only a framework for research and analysis, but also inform the ways in which we tackle the problem and find solutions. The relationship between the three points on the triangle, is essentially a reflexive one. Although this has not always been readily acknowledged, and in cases the problem and its solutions have been assumed.

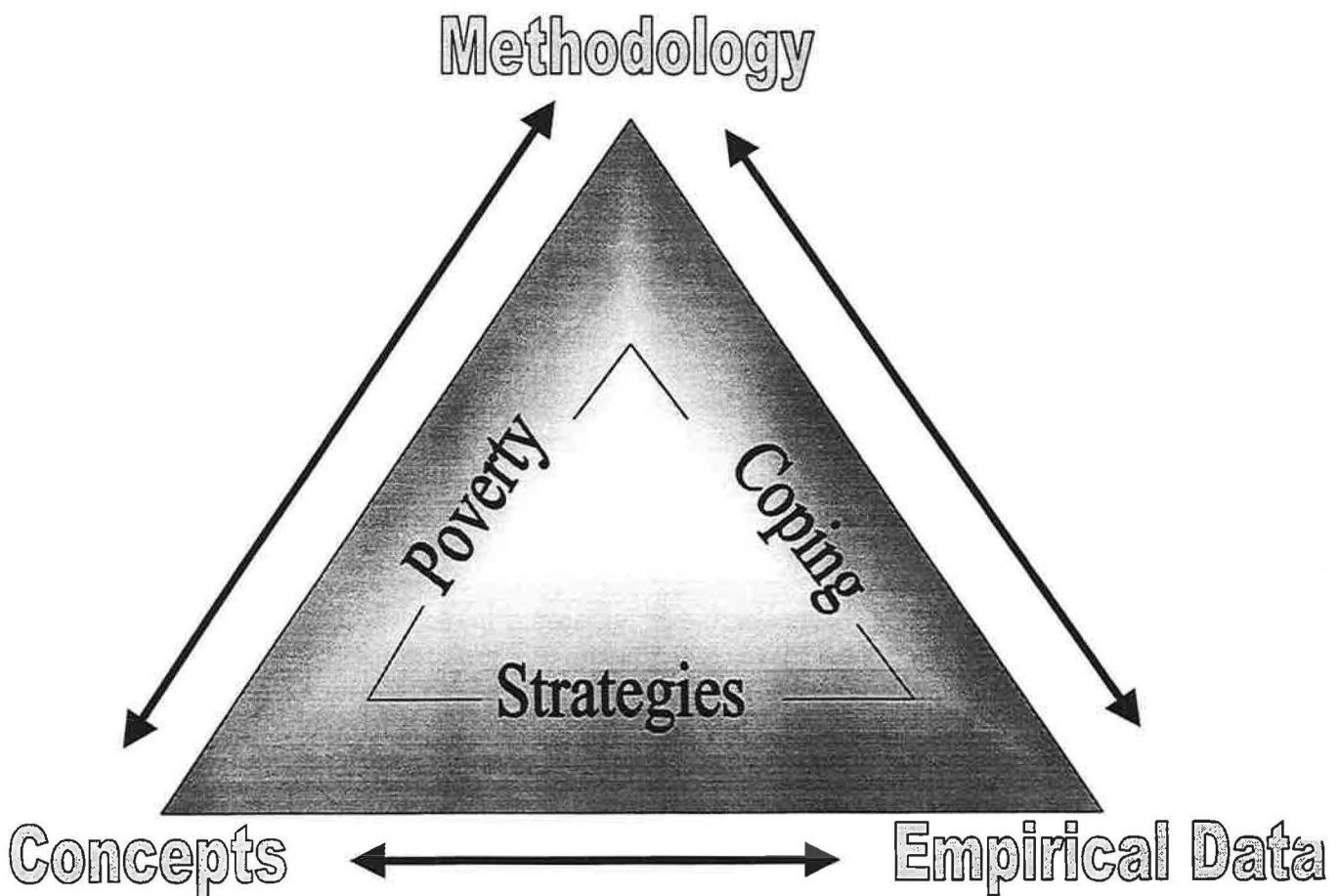
To represent the relationship between the methodological, conceptual and empirical in such a way is a useful heuristic device since we can illustrate that a specific methodological focus, for example, the sample survey questionnaire, with a concomitant application of particular concepts (eg. the household) leads to the generation of specific kinds of research data. This in turn leads to the formulation of specific interventions strategies and agendas. The study we conducted has basically highlighted that there are number of limitations in terms of how we understand poverty coping. These we have divided up into methodological, conceptual and empirical issues. In reality some of the areas that we know rather less about are actually related, while others are simply the result of underreporting. We argue therefore that we need to pay particular attention to the methodology we employ and to the development of our conceptual and 'tool box'.

The first two methodological issues discussed here (longitudinal analysis or trends and the analysis of social relations) are perhaps the most significant since they are issues that relate to the other areas we wish to highlight as under investigated. The extent to which we must take an historical and longitudinal perspective is clear since livelihoods and the strategies employed specifically for coping with poverty are not simply invented, but are employed since experience very often proves that strategy A



as opposed to strategy B is most appropriate given social, economic and nutritional contingencies. Similarly, that social relations and institutions provide an important framework within which people make livelihood decisions, and that social relationships themselves provide opportunities and constraints this issue cross cuts many of the others. Indeed the extent to which we prioritise social relations (kin and non-kin) in our investigations of livelihood strategies and poverty informs both the concepts we employ and hence the data we gather. Since livelihood strategies and particularly poverty coping very often involve dealings with others, there is a fundamental and processual social dynamic to the ways these strategies are manifest in practice. Due to the methodological significance of longitudinal analysis and the analysis of social relations they receive rather more attention in the remainder of this presentation than do other concerns.

**Fig. 1. Conceptual, Empirical and Methodological Links**



## 1. METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

### Trends over time

Most community-level case studies provide a snapshot of household behaviour or community composition and organisation at a point in time. Trend analysis is limited in quantity and anecdotal in quality. How livelihood systems are evolving over time is crucial for understanding processes and for designing safety nets and related interventions that build on positive trends at the local level. Since livelihoods and poverty coping strategies are processual, they build on existing knowledge, capacity and experience and that they are carried out in the context of often volatile market, political and economic climates and environmental factors, they are best assessed over the longer term.

### Trends: Continuity and Discontinuity

PRA livelihood assessments give us a snap shot of these through the use of historical time lines and identifying the major events that have impacted on livelihoods (eg. CARE). See OV.

More qualitative material on this issues enables us to identify livelihood patterns and outcomes among different income and status groups. Perhaps the best longitudinal work to date has been that of Pauline Peters. Her USAID sponsored work on agricultural commercialisation , rural economy and household livelihoods among small-holders in rural Zomba 1986/87-97 identifies a number of important continuities and discontinuities. Her work provides an important baseline for analysis and it would certainly be useful to have such work for those areas of Malawi which are underreported.

In summary, her work shows the most important continuity has been the maintenance of a pattern of diversification that characterises both cropping practices and income strategies. This diversification is by no means evenly spread. Over the decade, a clear trend has emerged: a shift in the relative weights of different income sources for different categories of household. Households in the top income quartile have increased the proportion of their income earned from agricultural sales relative to "off-farm" sources, while those in the bottom quartile have made a reverse shift: less from marketed agricultural production and more from wage labour. Peters interprets this shift as follows: the overwhelming source of cash income from agriculture for the top quartile households is burley tobacco, with important contributions of cash sales of vegetables, maize and legumes, and the value of consumed home-produced maize. The poorest quartile, in contrast, have found it more difficult to obtain all the maize they need for consumption because of the increased volatility in maize supplies and prices in the deficit season, and have therefore reduced even further the (small) proportion of their own harvest sold and replaced it mainly with intensified wage labour, most of it temporary agricultural work for local farmers.

The main changes seen include the spread of burley tobacco growing, an influx of traders at harvest times, an increase in the scale and intensity of crop trading among local traders and farmers, and a perceptible growth in trading centres and local



markets. Arguably these trends are positive for economic growth, but since 1997 no further studies have been conducted.

If we look at agricultural production (which cannot by default be viewed as a snapshot – but rather a longer process of adaptation, innovation and change) longitudinal analysis gives a much clearer picture of the significance of various crops and the role of the market in shaping the productive strategies of farmers. This assists with identifying where interventions aimed at productivity enhancement may be best located. The fact that changes in marketing and price conditions tend to cause farmers to shift among crops, for example, rather than towards an aggregate rise in output is due to constraints of land and access to inputs as well as peak labour shortages. A longitudinal analysis points towards the suggestion perhaps that it might be appropriate to develop small scale private sector / village or small holder group partnerships to expand production of a range of specific high value crops. This is especially the case since analysis of trends in agricultural production illustrates that increased output cannot be achieved solely through national level price and related market manipulations.

Longitudinal analysis also draws attention to the significance of various crops in terms of the livelihoods of different small holder groups. A nuanced understanding of this kind is important (can only come from longer term analysis) since it may make sense to develop a diversified approach in support of the different cropping strategies of various small-holder groups.

If we look at maize, for example, the common conception that local varieties are for food and hybrids for sale begins to dissolve when we take a more dynamic and time sequential perspective. The preference for local maize common among small holders throughout Malawi, is not simply a question of taste, or preference, but relates directly to its qualities for storage. The view that hybrid maize is predominantly used for sale stems from the amounts sold, which relates to the storage problem. The storage qualities of local maize has implications for consumption and commercial sale and for the use as payment for labour across the season. Some of the storage constraints with hybrid maize stem from the labour needed for shelling, its relative low shelf life, the need for pesticides and evidence that weevils have developed some resistance to them. Deciding on the relative mix of producing hybrid maize and local varieties is determined in part by the resources a household commands, but also on a range of other livelihood factors. Making such decisions may indeed be seen as a part of the decision making process that includes annually a concern for how to cope with shortage. A more dynamic approach enables us to link these agricultural livelihood strategies to decisions making processes concerned with coping.

Peters' research over the past decade has shown no decrease in the effort made by virtually all households to produce as much of their own maize and other food crops as is possible. The shortage of land and other resources do not make the goal of self-sufficiency a reality except for a very small minority – perhaps about a quarter of sample families can produce most of the maize they need in an average year of reasonable conditions. This would probably be about one in ten in the general population of the area. In a year of exceptionally good conditions when harvests are large, such as in 1996/7, this might increase to about one in five in the general population. In poor to bad years, only a handful are able to rely on their own supplies.

The volatility in maize supplies and maize prices over the past decade resulting from a combination of climatic and policy shifts has only reinforced the attempt by people to retain as much of their staple crops as they can. The overall drop in the number of people selling maize is one reflection of this.

### **The balance between ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ measures**

Research methods used to collect information on poverty and coping rely heavily on participants views (whether in questionnaire or PRA guise). There is need to triangulate the ‘subjective’ responses with more ‘objective’ data that is locally available such as school enrolment data, health centre records, agricultural production data, agricultural input and output price data, employment data etc. In essence the balance between subjective and objective here is a kin to reaching a balance between employing quantitative and qualitative methods and analytical procedures.

### **Understanding underlying social relations, processes and institutions**

- Social context as organising principles with moral and practical dimensions
- Resource Redistribution within context of networks and institutions

*In the previous presentation a good deal of data was presented concerned with Informal Safety Nets. This material illustrated the extent to which social relations (kin and non-kin) function to provide support through the redistribution of goods and services in the face of adversity. While we know quite a lot about the nature of these transfers we know rather less about the significance of social relations and local institutions vis-à-vis livelihoods and coping: How have these changed over time in response to vulnerability contexts? How resilient or fragile are they?*

The social relations resource nexus is an important one, since it refers to those aspects of peoples’ coping strategies which involve the transfer of services and resources between individuals and groups who are linked to each other in a variety of culturally and socially specific ways. It is undoubtedly the case that resources are often accessed through networks of social relations and yet social relations while providing opportunities also present constraints. This suggests that social relations networks and institutions (‘social capital’) are far more than resources: they provide the organisational, practical and moral contexts within which resources become meaningful for livelihoods.

In Malawi, these social networks include matrilineal, patrilineal and bilineal systems of kinship, various traditional associations or institutions and other kinds of alliances and functioning social networks based on gender, friendship, common interest and neighbourhood. We actually know most about matriliney for the contemporary period, since this is dominant in the central and southern region among small holders. We know virtually nothing about patriliney in contrast. Kinship has been an under-researched area and yet it is clearly important for understanding the ways in which coping strategies and more broadly livelihoods are contextualised socially, and politically. Different systems of descent and inheritance give rise to different social institutions and practices, which in turn help to structure men’s and women’s lives in

different ways. This has implications for the ways in which women and men access and control resources, perhaps most significantly land, but also labour, food and cash.

*Understanding the transfers of goods and services between different social actors requires an understanding of what regulates or legitimises, access to particular services and resources, but what factors impact upon these regulatory factors (entitlements). In short, while there is a degree of regularity, order and continuity to transfers between various social actors, there is also discontinuity and sometimes discord. Together such continuity and discontinuity lead to adaptation and transformation.*

*Such processes are influenced by a variety of exogenous, endogenous and idiosyncratic factors. In Malawi these include, environmental factors such as drought, changes in the organisation and importance of traditional social institutions at the local level, changing access to resource endowments and to macro-economic factors such as the impact of devaluation.*

### **Problems of Method**

The difficulty is that the role that social institutions play in coping strategies and as informal safety nets are extremely difficult to assess using standard survey methodology techniques. While it is possible to assess the character of these institutions and the role they play in the redistribution of resources at the local level, it is much more difficult to quantify such transfers. This is, in part, a problem of the time it takes to map informal transfers between and within particular social networks. It requires long periods of participant observation, as it is not possible to get accurate data on transfers simply on the basis of informants ability to recall. The types of transfers often involve, transfers in kind or are of such small amounts that they are difficult to quantify. While this kind of social research needs considerably longer periods of time to conduct than survey questionnaire or PRA methodology, it is necessary to have at least a working understanding of contemporary social and institutional contexts. This can be accessed more easily – based on FGD or PRA tools to assess the importance of particular relationships and their functions in different social contexts.

### **Lack of research**

The reasons that research into social relations, networks and institutions has been overlooked relate firstly to a ‘post colonial antipathy’ towards the discipline from African politicians and scholars in the period of African Nationalism but later to financial constraints and the lack of institutional capacity within the University of Malawi. Finally, in the last 15 years, anthropological studies have been possible, but they are very few and mostly conducted by non-Malawian scholars. The majority of social science research carried out during the last 15 years has focuses on socio-economic research since funding has come from international organisations pursuing their own development oriented research agendas.

## CONCEPTUAL FOCI

### **Bias to using households as a standard unit of analysis**

Most work in Malawi has been done using the household as the unit of analysis. Less work has sought to:

- go inside the household (to focus on gendered coping strategies, for example)

This is important since the individuals who belong to 'households' are differentiated in terms of age, gender, economic statuses and their relative positions of power vis-à-vis access to and control over crucial resources (material and social). It is after all, misleading to assume that members of a 'household' have a single shared or collaborative productive agenda to the exclusion of individual activities and projects. It is also misleading to assume that any collective strategy (whether this be oriented towards consumption or the markets) is devised and presided over entirely by its senior male member/s

- go outside of the household (to focus on social capital and issues of resource redistribution within and between networks of kin and non-kin).

It is worth providing a brief summary of a number of important criteria to include when considering the concept of 'household'.

The notion of an agrarian 'household' as a discrete or bounded unit of analysis remains problematic and at best refers simply to the temporal and spatial aspects of particular residential sites of human occupancy (Moore 1994). Any attempt to conceptualise households universally by reference to the production, consumption, and reproductive activities that are carried out by people who would claim to 'belong' to the house are fraught with difficulties. These difficulties are, in essence, due to the great variety of forms that are found at the level commonly known as 'the household'. In addition, a bounded or unitary notion of the household is problematic because the reproductive and productive activities usually associated with the household are diffused amongst a multiplicity of different groups which endure over different time scales, which people will contribute to or derive assistance from in different circumstances (Leach 1991). Essentially households are multi-spatial, but varyingly so over time, such variability is dependent on specific needs and resource endowments, and nature of family links and proximity. The respective bargaining power of different members depends on their position outside as well as within their own groups. So, production and reproduction activities, resources and relationships are embedded in a variety of wider socio-political relations.

A range of other issues help us to rethink the notion of the 'household', these include:

- to the significance of resource redistribution in defining particular social groupings that may be considered (in temporal, spatial and social terms) as more or less discrete units, albeit flexible.
- the related issues of co-operation and conflict

- the notions of entitlements (rights and needs and legitimating claims to these)
- positions of power and powerlessness of individuals within particular social groups
- issue of social identities as these are negotiated by actors in different contexts of practice (particularly important in terms of gender)
- Significance of wider arenas of decision and action (political and economic policy changes, shifting expectations through education and work opportunities, globalisation?) as these impact on family relations at inter and intra household

### **Bias to rural small-holder households**

This is understandable since about 70% of the population live in smallholder households. There has been much less work done on estate tenants, permanent estate workers, and the landless or near landless rural poor (albeit these latter are difficult categories in themselves, since some people without sufficient labour may rent out land – effectively making them landless with incomes).

There has also been less focus on the urban poor.

### **Food bias in defining poverty**

It appears that most of the work done on the smallholder population in Malawi has tended to **either**

- view poverty in terms of household food insecurity
- and / or**
- view poverty coping and adapting strategies as synonymous with household food insecurity coping and adaptive strategies.

### **How does it relate to rural people's own understanding of poverty?**

The QUIM study<sup>11</sup> : found that in the twelve poor villages spread across the country village residents:

".. think of poverty in terms of agriculture that determines their food security...Only then are alternative opportunities of income generation considered" (QUIM: 39).

### **How does it relate to government and donor developmental objectives?**

With the sustainable livelihoods definition of poverty, then six types of assets are important:

- Natural capital
- Financial capital
- Human capital
- Physical capital

---

<sup>11</sup> Qualitative Impact Monitoring of Poverty Alleviation Policies and Programmes in Malawi: Volume 1: Research Findings" : NEC 1998.

- Social capital
- Political capital

## **2. Limited Coverage (Empirical Data)**

### **Limited gender analysis**

The extent to which there is limited gender analysis is strongly related to a conceptual bias towards the household as a unit of analysis.

There are at least three dimensions to a gendered understanding of coping strategies, including informal safety nets:

- men and women living in the same household;
- male-headed and female-headed households;
- patrilineal and matrilineal kinship systems in Malawi.

There is relatively little detailed data available on gender relations, although there has been an interesting dialogue about the nature of gender relations with matrilineal households.

This work re-evaluates from an historical perspective the relative position of women in matrilineal households. In some of the contemporary ‘grey’ literature there is a suggestion that matrilineal post marital residence patterns have been transformed because of the prevalence of patrilineal marriage practices and pressure on land. In Malawi colonial agricultural policy was influenced by the conviction that matrilineal inheritance and uxori-local residence was antithetical to the development of progressive modern agriculture. The expected demise of matriliney, and its replacement with the much more favourable patriarchal and patrilineal forms of family organisation has not in fact taken place.

There have been a number of changes in post marital residence patterns, but this is by no means evidence of the demise of matriliney. In fact, some have argued that Matriliney also positively influenced the construction of female gender identity. Uxorilocal marriage meant that women retained their identities, rights and relationships as sisters, simply adding new roles and ties as wife and mother. Economic rights were maintained, for example, rights to independent control over land. This has persisted, but there has been little work that explores the implications of population pressure on land for men and women.

### **Limited analysis of Ganyu**

Not enough is known about ganyu in terms of:

- availability and returns (cross-sectionally or over time),
- variation in rates of pay and methods of payment (seasonally, for men, women, children),
- influence of social relations on access to ganyu,
- effects of urban areas and estates,



- effects of formal safety net programmes on *ganyu*,
- moral dimension and influence,

Further research would assist in the design of appropriate and efficient short and longer term interventions. What little qualitative data we do have suggests that *ganyu* work is a key coping strategies, but it is not without problems. It pushes the lower income groups into further reliance on off-farm incomes since the timing of *ganyu* conflicts with householders own production needs. Furthermore, there are some reports that suggest that many people are carrying out *ganyu* for nothing more than a plate of maize bran (CARE 1998). When *ganyu* is carried out within kin networks there may be both an exploitative dimension to it, since paying with maize bran is clearly ‘underpaying’. For *ganyu* labour there is also the suggestion that sometimes farmers will employ labourers to do meaningless weeding task simply as an incentive to do further work when it is vitally needed, but when it may conflict with the agricultural interests of the *ganyu* workers themselves. This obviously favours the needs of the employers over and above the labourers, despite the short term gains made by workers (in the longer term they are drawn into dependent and sometimes exploitative relations).

Identifying *ganyu* as an increasing livelihood trend and analysing it in this context is important since it is much more than simply a coping strategy to meet shocks. Clearly a better understanding of the links between on- and off-farm income generation and the role of rural labour markets in provisioning for livelihoods, must be an important focus of further poverty coping assessment and analysis. The importance of non-farm income for rural populations varies across rural areas in Malawi, being more crucial in areas such as that of Peter’s sample, where land density rates are high and proximity to towns provide a wider range of opportunities for work and services. Nevertheless, given the trajectory of population growth and the decreasing land available, the importance of non-farm income is in a contemporary context vital.

This is clearly an area that needs further substantive investigation.

### **Limited geographical coverage and contextualisation**

Individual case studies tend to be focused on their localities; very few are geographically contextualised in the sense of identifying what makes the locality different or similar to neighbouring localities or different regions within the country. Geographical areas and related issues that have been relatively neglected to date include:

- the Northern Region;
- internal migration as a seasonal coping strategy or permanent livelihood adaptation;
- cross-border movements of people and commodities especially movements between Malawi and Zambia, Tanzania;
- areas with strong government support programmes and those without.



## **Local management of formal safety nets**

Formal safety nets have been designed in one way, and in the process of implementation have been modified by local socio-political processes. This is a sensitive area, that is not easily researched, but important to understand.

## **Informal Sector and Black economy**

To some extent stands alone since the reasons it has been poorly covered is due to serious methodological problems of capturing the exact nature and extent of transactions in informal and black economy sectors. In the 'black' economy there are similar problems with enumerating its status as a coping strategy since activities will go unreported, and obviously people will not readily admit to being involved in illegal activity. Most of the information we do have is dated (collected in early 1990's) or is anecdotal. Here we must include a range of strategies, the relative contributions to coping we know little about. The informal sector one would suspect is extremely significant, especially in urban areas. That many people have reported an increase in their fears for security of person and property is testament to the increases in theft and other criminal activity that is taking place in Malawi. The security issue is directly relevant to our concern with poverty, since security risks are also indicators of well being.

There is a reported increase in the number of casual sex workers in urban areas in Malawi. This has wide ranging implications since it contributes to the spread of HIV/AIDS, which contributes to poverty, leaves behind orphans, and has an impact on labour in rural areas.

## **Conclusions**

This presentation has sought to present what we know about poverty coping in Malawi in a broader methodological context. It has been wide ranging, since there are many areas relating to poverty coping that are under-researched. This does not mean that we should take issue with them all but rather seek to identify generic weaknesses in the methodologies we employ. The presentation has also sought to present some further information on poverty coping not covered in the first presentation. I aimed to use this to illustrate the significance of some kinds of data and understanding over others and to illustrate the complexity of the problem we encounter when trying to ask the question 'how do people cope with poverty in Malawi?'

To end I would like to make a few comments about the link we see between the need to understand how people cope with poverty in the broader context of their livelihoods.

## **Poverty coping within broader in context of livelihoods**

- coping and adaptation behaviours are rarely analysed in reference to the livelihood systems and social processes in question, neither are the crucial differences *between* different livelihood components or their linkages accounted for.

While coping and adaptation behaviours have been incorporated into models of food insecurity and vulnerability, they have rarely been analysed in reference to the livelihood system in question, neither are the crucial differences *between* for. For example, the popular notion in Malawi embodies a view of the 'typical' Malawian household as a rural smallholder family. Different smallholder families (with different levels of status and income), urban households, tenants on estates and other groups are not treated as distinct categories, each facing their own set of vulnerabilities and invoking distinctive responses. Similarly, differences in coping within households - specifically, between the coping behaviours of men and women, or between male - and female-headed households - are glossed over in discussions of how 'Malawian households' cope with drought or restricted access to agricultural inputs. Nor are specific social, institutional and organisational factors associated with coping taken into account (for example, the significance of matriliney and patriliney). These latter provide an organisational, moral and practical context within which coping strategy decisions are made by men and women. They provide both opportunities and constraints vis-à-vis access to resources, they involve processes of interaction, negotiation and accommodation between different actors and agents and are therefore dynamic and processual. People cope with poverty, then, by being able (with varying degrees of success) to 'manage' the specific social, institutional and practical processes in such a way as to give them the best opportunity to secure access to the livelihood resources they need.

Coping and adaptive strategies in the context of livelihoods requires a more detailed and nuanced understanding of:

- actors involved
- social processes and contexts
- longitudinal historical dimensions (livelihood trends)
- the interface with other agents (local and wider institutions)
- the linkages between different livelihood components
- decision making processes

# **IV. POVERTY COPING STRATEGIES AND THE SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS APPROACH.**

**Notes on the contribution of Sustainable (Rural) Livelihoods concepts to understanding poverty coping strategies in Malawi.**

**Presentation to Workshop on Livelihood Strategies and Poverty in Malawi, Holiday Inn, Victoria, London. 5-6<sup>th</sup> May 1999.**

**Alistair Sutherland (Natural Resources Institute, UK)**

**Objectives:**

- a. To introduce the SRL framework – as a conceptual framework for thinking about development and poverty coping strategies
- b. To explore how the SRL framework might improve our understanding of coping strategies in Malawi.

**Overview of presentation:**

- A. Historical origins,
- B. Components of the framework
- C. Uses of the framework:
- D. SRL framework and the gaps identified,
- E. Some key questions raised by the SRL framework

## **A. HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF SRL**

SRL is not a completely new concept. The concept of SRL has been used for some time by academic institutions, and also by some development agencies, notably UNDP, CARE International and Oxfam. However, it is new in terms of its adoption by DFID as a framework for thinking about and planning interventions to tackle poverty in developing countries. The SRL framework as developed by IDS and further shaped by DFID builds upon existing approaches, particularly holistic and participatory ones, including:

- Integrated rural development
- Agroecosystem analysis
- Farming systems research
- Entitlements theory
- PRA

## **B. COMPONENTS OF THE SRL FRAMEWORK**

As a diagram (see next page), the SRL framework is presented as being overarching and inclusive. It captures nearly all the broad dimensions of rural life, including impinging external influences and historical processes, but does not elaborate the components in detail. Conceptual framework. Central to the diagram are the assets, what people have already. This contrasts with other approaches to poverty and development, that start with what people do not have. Assets are influenced by, and influence, “transforming structures and processes”. They are transforming because they have an important influence on how people manage their assets, and the kind of “livelihood strategies” that poor people develop over time. Some of these structures and processes are particularly important to poverty, because they increase people’s vulnerability. This is represented by the vulnerability context box of “shocks, trends and seasonality”.

“Livelihood outcomes” are (positive) changes in the asset base, implying a reduction in poverty and vulnerability.

Components of the SRL framework include:

- Livelihood Assets
- Structures and processes that influence these,
- Vulnerability context, especially negative forces arising from S&P,
- Livelihood strategies - HOW (poor) people make a living,
- Livelihood outcomes - positive outcomes of strategies = those that improve the asset base

## **1. Livelihood Assets – the asset pentagon (or hexagon)**

The asset pentagon provides a means of visualising the asset base in broad terms, and also plotting changes over time.

- ❑ Natural capital (natural resource base available),
- ❑ Human capital (physical health, education, skills and knowledge),
- ❑ Financial capital (cash and credit available)
- ❑ Physical capital ( – transport, shelter, water, energy, communications),
- ❑ Social capital (social resources – mainly stock of claims and expectations) – interwoven with the local culture and institutions (local, national and international).
- ❑ Political capital (to be elaborated – could include patron-client ties and linkages of local communities to national leadership)

An inclusive classification of assets. When application is tried out, categories tend to overlap and sub-categories may need to be plotted separately.

## **2. Structures and processes (that influence the asset base)**

These are often not well documented in development literature, partly for the methodological and conceptual raised in the previous presentation. They might include the following:-

- ❑ Central government, its agencies and the behaviour of its agents,
- ❑ Economic forces – the “private sector”; international and local,
- ❑ Political processes (parties, elections, coups), including conflict situations
- ❑ “Third sector” development agencies (which often cushion and broker the effects of the above structures and processes),
- ❑ “Natural” processes; climate, soil-water-plant interactions, pollution, evolution of diseases, population change/growth,
- ❑ Local politics and power relations,
- ❑ Local social structures, institutions and normative codes within which actions are embedded.

## **3. Vulnerability context.**

The structures and processes that have a marked negative effect on people’s vulnerability comprise the vulnerability context including “shocks, trends and seasonality”.

- ❑ Shocks – examples include changes in political systems, devaluation, new diseases, war, floods and droughts
- ❑ Negative trends – environmental degradation, population increase, moral decline, falling educational and health-care standards, inflation, rising unemployment, declining farm sizes, changing normative standards

- Seasonality – dry seasons limit food production, wet seasons more disease and difficult rural transport.

#### 4. Livelihood strategies

These are often complex, and vary from individual to individual, household to household, village to village etc. Whose strategies? Which unit should be the focus when using the SRL framework for analysis (individual, household, community, administrative area, watershed, settlement type etc.)? The recent ODI discussion paper on poverty argues for the relevance of poverty analysis at the level of the individual (Maxwell, 1999).

Understanding the normative framework within which strategies are formulated is also important for good analysis. The SRL framework does not place livelihood strategies within an explicit normative framework. However, an underlying assumption of rational maximising behaviour may be implied. This assumes that people will adopt strategies that will preserve and improve their asset base if at all possible. *The possibility for anti-social, “irrational”, extravagant or “short-sighted” behaviour does not appear in the model.*

Some attempts have been made to classify differences in livelihood strategies.

- NR-based (e.g. agriculture, pastoralist, fishing, forestry including intensification and extensification),
- Non NR based (not clear what this means),
- Migration (this could be NR oriented, e.g. in search of better land or fishing grounds),

While livelihood strategies are complex in reality, the above classifications may be helpful as a starting point, when trying to understand livelihood trends and how these relate to possible interventions.

#### 5. Livelihood Outcomes

These are positive outcomes of strategies; that improve the asset base of poor people. Examples might include; better health, less drudgery, improved diet, better education, reduced risk in production, more regular cash income, more investment options, improved soil productivity etc.

At this point it is tempting for the analyst or the development advisor to make value judgements about what positive outcomes might look like. PPA approaches advocate more of a listening role. Participation in defining positive outcomes does beg the question, “to what extent are poor people both equipped and willing to think in a longer time-frame – one that is oriented to building up and preserving assets?” A related question is “what is the effect of age and cultural values on the time-frame people use to think about these outcomes?”



## **C. USE OF THE FRAMEWORK**

The SRL framework has been mainly developed as an analytical tool for thinking about development and poverty. Experiences of applying it more directly to the development process are relatively limited, particularly DFID experiences. So far uses of the framework include:

- Providing the analytic basis for livelihood analysis – to improve understandings of poverty (including at this workshop),
- To promote inter-sectoral linkages and dialogue within development organisations (UNDP, CARE, DFID),
- During project appraisal, as a screening aid or filter for proposed interventions (DFID in India and Zambia),
- Framework for project scoping missions (DFID in Pakistan and Kenya),
- Framework for co-ordinating and linking an existing broad-based development programmes with a natural resource management component (e.g. UNDP Malawi country programme and CARE Kenya country programme, wildlife management projects in Namibia, Kenya)

## **D. SRL FRAMEWORK AND THE GAPS IDENTIFIED**

### **1. Conceptualisation of poverty**

The SRL framework provides a more holistic definition of wealth (viewed as a range of assets), and by inference of poverty also. The food security focus of previous PRAs and poverty assessments in Malawi is challenged by the asset pentagon/hexagon. Health, education, alternative employment opportunities and investment in social support networks (e.g. merry-go-round savings clubs and secret societies) are aspects that may well prove to be more important if they are probed further. Is the food security focus in part a product of the methodology used to discuss poverty? On the other hand, do poor people operate within an implicit “hierarchy of needs” (such as that proposed by Maslow), in which food comes higher up than other needs? Does the SRL framework impose a conceptualisation of poverty that is out of line with what poor people see?

### **2. Household as the unit of analysis**

The SRL framework is not specific about which social or economic unit an SRL analysis can be applied to. In principle this gives it greater flexibility than the household economics or peasant household models. However, in the absence of guidelines and clear examples of how to apply SRL analysis at various levels (individuals, households, communities, EPAs etc.), it remains to be seen how much more (or less) an SRL analysis would inform an understanding of poverty in Malawi. Related to this, the issue of conflicts of interest – within a household, between households and between communities is not explicitly raised in the framework, except in terms of trade-offs when deciding which assets to invest in.

### **3. Analysis of trends**

Understanding trends is crucial to an SRL analysis. The framework provides a means of incorporating available data on trends into a development oriented analysis of poverty. Quite good data and analysis on seasonality effects and shocks is available, particularly as these have affected people's ability to cope economically and with food security. Trend data and analysis is more patchy, and probably does not cover all of the important trends, particularly changes in social institutions and normative frameworks that influence decision making and perceptions of poverty.

### **4. Social relations, institutions and their processes**

The SRL framework does provide a good opportunity for incorporating institutional analysis into understanding poverty. Guidelines about how to do this need to be developed. In the Malawi context, there is limited current information on rural social structures, social capital, and the way that these influence decision making about other types of capital.

## **E. SOME KEY QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE SRL FRAMEWORK**

Applying the SRL framework to better understand poverty in Malawi can be done by asking some key questions. These are set out below with some tentative answers. The answers provided are intended more to provoke further discussion and clarification, rather than to be taken as definitive. They are presented largely in the context of the literature on poverty that focuses on households in Southern and Central Malawi.

### **Question 1. What assets do poor people have and not have to sustain their livelihoods?**

#### Tentative answers:

They have:

- Some land for cultivation,
- Communal grazing, gathering and water collection points
- Very basic services of health, primary education, roads and transport
- Their own labour and acquired technical, economic and social knowledge (both local and exotic),
- Social networks based on kinship, friendship, religious and other groupings,
- Political patronage (through headmen, TAs, councillors and MPs),

They do not have:

- Abundance of fertile land for cultivation and grazing and gathering activities,
- Access to higher quality education and health facilities,
- Abundant labour during the peak labour period for agriculture,
- Easy access to new information and agricultural inputs,
- Cash to finance productive investments, or credit on easy terms,
- Skills, perspective and a local social structure to support longer term planning,
- A wide range of alternative livelihood options

### **Question 2. What makes rural people poor vulnerable (vulnerability context)?**

#### Tentative answers:

There are few livelihood alternatives to subsistence agriculture,  
Household food insecurity forces people to work for low wages rather than improve their own farms,  
Small land size and declining soil fertility limit production from land that poor people have rights to cultivate,  
Indebtedness may be an aspect related to ganyu obligations and influencing control over labour or even land?  
Disease, particularly Aids, is a risk to all, but probably a higher risk for the poorest.  
Limited resources for agriculture (productive land, labour, seed, fertiliser, marketing skills) prevents more productive use of land holdings which are not always so small,

Climatic extremes (drought, floods, prolonged heavy rainfall) increase risk and may be a de-motivating factor for some households,

**Question 3: Which structures and processes are most important to poor peoples' livelihoods?**

Tentative answers:

- Population growth >> declining land size and NR base for households,
- Economic stagnation and related policies and processes >> limited employment opportunities and limited markets for agricultural produce,
- Political patronage structures (including government and donor programmes) >> provide uncertain but useful short-term support and possibly longer term assistance,
- Educational opportunities >> provide a potential avenue to more secure and lucrative livelihoods,
- Social networks and associated claims and obligations >> provide a social security support and normative framework for living, including assistance in times of need, along with obligation in times of plenty/capability.
- Health facilities >> provide a means of sustaining life, and social capital required for household reproduction and productive activities.

**Question 4: What are the poor doing to alleviate their poverty?**

Tentative answers:

Diversifying their agricultural base,  
Reducing consumption,  
Get involved in micro-enterprise and petty trading,  
Selective use of education and health services?  
Use social networks,  
“anti-social enterprises” (theft, prostitution, illicit brewing),

**Question 5: What outcomes are important to them?**

Tentative answers:

Do we really know? It could be some of the following:

Food security,  
Education for the children,  
Regular income,  
Maintaining social structures that provide support.  
Protection from negative forces (including witchcraft).

**Question 6: What have we learned from addressing these questions about:-**

- a. Relevance of the SL model,
- b. Gaps in information,
- c. Short and longer term programmes to support poor people's livelihoods

It is hope that this sub-set of questions will be answered through discussions at the workshop.

## **IV. GROUPWORK**

**(i) Prioritising under-researched areas for poverty coping strategies in Malawi**

Participants were asked to prioritise areas where more information was needed. This was done in a two stage process. The first stage looked at poverty coping strategies in general, drawing on the presentations: “Poverty Coping Strategies in Malawi: How much do we know?” and “Coping with Poverty in Malawi: Conceptual Underpinnings and Methodological Biases”. From this first group work session, the following areas were prioritised:

Information area	Remarks
1. Better understanding of processes conditioning livelihood trajectories, choices and options over time.	This is a key area, as understanding the processes which lead livelihood systems (of individuals, households, communities, areas) to change over time is important in determining policy responses to livelihood stress. Very few studies have analysed relevant trend information. Peters’ work is an exception. Some PRA studies have used recall data to understand processes.
2. Better understanding of labour markets	Improved understanding will assist in the design of self-targeting public works programmes and could improve the quality of a wide variety of longer term development programmes and projects. Key aspects to be investigated would include: seasonality; rural-urban differences and linkages; gender; social relations and labour provision.
3. The political –economy of poverty related research	A considerable body of research relating to poverty in Malawi already exists, why is the connection between research and interventions not as good as it should be? It appears that there are poor systems of information exchange between different institutions in Malawi (donors, NGOs, government, academics), why is this?; in addition, do we know enough about the other factors which determine the extent to which good research is translated into policy?

Following this, working groups focussed on two different population groups: the urban poor and the landless or near landless (less than 0.25 hectares) living in rural areas. An attempt was made to assess the adequacy of existing information for these two groups using a Sustainable Livelihoods (SL) “lens”. This was something of an experiment, to see the extent to which using a SL framework actually improved the assessment of the adequacy of existing information and the priorities for further research. The outputs of the group exercises are presented below:



## Group 1: The Urban Poor

This group took a very structured approach to the exercise of applying the S(R)L framework to their population group. Presentation highlighted the adequacy and importance of information on specific asset categories and structures and processes. Relatively little was said about livelihood strategies or livelihood outcomes.

### (a) Assets

Asset types	Adequacy of current knowledge	Importance attached to adequate understanding	
		Short-term relief and welfare	Longer term development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Financial</li> </ul>			
Informal sector credit	Some knowledge of situation in Lilongwe, Blantyre, Mzuzu	M	H
Income and expenditure data	Dated, but more recent data will come out of the IHS survey (REVIEW)	H	H
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Human</li> </ul>			
Education studies	Information is inadequate for urban poor	L	H
Health and nutrition studies	Good	H	H
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Natural</li> </ul>			
Availability of land and soil fertility	Question mark over the adequacy of existing information	?	H
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical</li> </ul>			
Housing, water and sanitation, roads and transport	The IHS, housing studies and the census mean that the information is adequate	H	H
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social</li> </ul>			
Social relations, including rural-urban links	Inadequate	H	H?
Community based organisations	Some literature	H	H?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Political</li> </ul>			
Ability of the poor to influence structures and processes of government (traditional, local, national)	Emerging literature	L	H

**(b) Institutions and Processes**

Institution / Process	Adequacy of current knowledge	Importance attached to adequate understanding	
		Short-term relief and welfare	Longer term development
• Institutions			
Central Government	Adequate	H	H
Donors	Adequate	H	H
Churches	Adequate?	H	?
CBOs (eg burial societies)	Emerging literature	H	H
Local government	UNICEF commissioned studies are adequate for short term programmes	M	M
Private sector • Informal labour and product markets	Limited and dated information. USAID/Min. of commerce study provides some up to date information.	H	H
Kin networks and the extended family	Some information, but not adequate for deep understanding. The preoccupation with the household as unit of analysis is a factor here.	H	H
Structure of traditional authority in urban areas	Not documented	H	M
• Processes			
HIV/AIDS	Plenty of information on prevalence of HIV, limited information on impact	H	HH
Devaluation	Adequate information is forthcoming	H	H
Crime	Police and courts could make data available	H	H
Employment growth	NSO estimates: questionable accuracy?	M	H
Public sector reform	Adequate?	M	H
Trade and black economy	Very little information on “anti-social” activities (theft, prostitution etc)	M	H
Urban growth	?	M	H
Political – democratisation?	Good information on processes is not available	H	H

*Policies:* The policies are well known, but their impact on the urban poor, and the effect on their livelihood outcomes is not documented adequately.

**(c) Livelihood strategies**

Most information on this is dated (early 90's). Devereux (1999) provides more recent information, but this has limited coverage.

**Questions arising from discussion of group work:**

Where do transfers of resources fit in the SL framework? It appears that there is no obvious place to put informal and public transfers. This may represent a shortcoming of the model.

We know that 70% of the urban poor are producing food, but we know very little about the options and constraints for these people in relation to food production.

**Group 2: The near landless (less than 0.25 hectares) and the landless living in rural areas.**

This group took a less structured approach than group 1. The group focussed on the *options and constraints* for the landless and near landless in relation to different *livelihood strategies*. Key issues raised by group 2:

1. Information on the number and location of the landless and near-landless exists but is dated. Are there more up-to-date sources of information?
2. Using the S(R)L framework, the livelihood options for the landless and near landless can be classified into:
  - Migration (eg to urban areas or estates on a permanent or temporary basis)
  - Intensification (eg planting kitchen gardens)
  - Diversification (into a range of livelihood sources, eg trading, fishing, craft making etc).
3. There are several questions relating to these different strategies. the effectiveness of interventions would be improved if these were answered. Do we have the information that would allow us to answer these questions?
  - How does the functioning of social capital determine the choice of livelihood strategy and the constraints and opportunities within each strategy?
  - How do social cleavages such as gender, religion, ethnicity determine choices? Do they represent barriers to entry for particular livelihood strategies. What barriers are caused by illness or disability?
  - How do the operation of different labour markets determine livelihood strategy choices and outcomes?
  - What have been the processes which have resulted in individuals, households, communities becoming landless?
  - How does the shape of asset pentagons determine livelihood options and intervention priorities?

- What are the intra-household dynamics which condition livelihood strategies and outcomes?
- How should permanent estate workers (a landless / near-landless group) be treated?

4. There is some information on aspects of livelihoods for the landless and near landless in various PRA studies (eg CARE study in Lilongwe district, UNDP studies in Mchinji district). The Vulnerability Assessment Mapping exercise has also produced information on livelihood categories and strategies. Pauline Peters has identified important processes at work in rural Zomba driving the land scarce into increased off-farm diversification. It would appear however, that there are several aspects of the key questions that remain unanswered. An understanding of the process of change in livelihood systems is limited to a few good studies (such as the work of Peters) which do not give a broad geographical coverage. Information on labour markets and ganyu lacks depth - although one or two good studies exist eg Whiteside (1998) relating to Southern Malawi and the cross-border relationships with Mozambique. There is plenty more to be discovered about the role of different social cleavages and issues such as illness and disability in determining livelihood options.

**(ii) Observations on the contribution of the SL approach to assessing adequacy of current information on poverty coping strategies in Malawi**

During the groupwork, some participants questioned the utility of the SL approach, arguing that using it did not bring anything new to our understanding of poverty coping strategies. Others took a contrary view. In the context of the workshop, it was possible only to go a relatively little way in using the framework to identify important knowledge areas. Moreover it should be noted that the framework itself is in the process of refinement, and this limits its contribution to understanding research issues. Having said this, after reviewing the outputs of the group work and discussions it is possible to discern three areas where use of the SL approach has “added value” in relation to identifying issues which are important for understanding poverty coping strategies in Malawi.

1. *Broadening the understanding of poverty and thus widening the issues to be considered when looking at poverty coping strategies.* A food-centric view of poverty was identified as a possible weakness in the current literature on coping strategies in Malawi. The approach of group 1 (urban poor) was to start with the assets of the poor – what the poor have. This focus led to consideration of different facets of poverty and livelihood including political voice. The next step would be to see what strategies were associated with different asset endowments, and how much information we have on such strategies.

2. *Encouraging explicit consideration of the institutions (structures) which act as an intermediary set of influences between vulnerability context and livelihood strategies.* Arguably, existing literature on coping and adaptive behaviour has tended to focus on the impact of shocks and stresses on strategies without exploring the mediating influence of different institutions. Use of the SL approach can encourage us to think about these more explicitly and thus can improve understanding and widen the scope of issues that we need to explore to understand poverty coping behaviour. Amongst other things, discussion of institutions can take focus away from the household as the unit of analysis and towards consideration of the role of the extended family and kin networks as these are institutions too.

3. *The conception of livelihood strategies complements and enriches the categories of “coping” and “adaptive” strategies.* Group 2 started-off by focussing on livelihood strategy options for the landless and near landless: agricultural intensification, livelihood diversification and migration. This encouraged the group to think in terms of the options and constraints for the landless in relation to different strategy types. Clearly, in order to understand coping strategies we need to understand the operation of these different enabling and constraining factors. The SL idea of strategy types thus encourages us to ask relevant questions. It would appear that the available literature on Malawi can give answers to some but not all of these questions.

**(iii) Comparison of priorities derived from the group work sessions at the Lilongwe and London Workshops.**

Comparing the outputs of working group sessions from the workshop held in Lilongwe in March and the London workshop, a number of common areas are apparent, as is clear in the following table.

**Poverty coping strategies in Malawi: Areas where further understanding is desirable for efficient and effective interventions: Overlap between London and Lilongwe workshops.**

Key areas identified in the Lilongwe workshop	Comments from London workshop
Knowledge of rural labour markets: especially important in the context of plans to introduce self targeting public works programmes which require decisions about appropriate intervention wage rates.	Improved understanding will assist in the design of self-targeting public works programmes and could improve the quality of a wide variety of longer term development programmes and projects. Key aspects to be investigated would include: seasonality; rural-urban differences and linkages; gender; social relations and labour provision.
Social networks (kin and non-kin) determining the distribution of resources (cash, food, inputs, employment – thus links with labour markets).	How does the functioning of social capital determine the choice of livelihood strategy and the constraints and opportunities within each strategy? <sup>12</sup>
Process data, to give an indication of livelihood trajectories of social units (individuals, households, communities) in the “vulnerability context” of exogenous shocks, seasonality and long term trends such as HIV AIDS	This is a key area, as understanding the processes which lead livelihood systems (of individuals, households, communities, areas) to change over time is important in determining policy responses to livelihood stress. Very few studies have analysed relevant trend information. Peters’ work is an exception. Some PRA studies have used recall data to understand processes.

Certain cross-cutting themes came up repeatedly in both the London and Lilongwe workshops. The importance of getting a better understanding of the role of *social capital* in coping and adaptive strategies was a common theme, as was the importance of improved information on *gendered coping*.

**Other key areas highlighted:**

*Lilongwe workshop:*

Improved understanding of poverty: A food-centric household level conceptualisation of poverty was evident in the literature. This understanding had shaped understanding of coping strategies. Thus other non-food aspects of poverty (poor health, education, shelter, physical security, lack of political power) and how people cope with these were probably under – reported.

*London workshop:*

Improved understanding of the political-economy of poverty related research: A considerable body of research relating to poverty in Malawi already exists, why are

<sup>12</sup> In the London workshop this was raised specifically in relation to the rural landless and near landless, however, it has an application to all poor groups in Malawi.

research findings often not reflected in the design and implementation of interventions? It appears that there are poor systems of information exchange between different institutions in Malawi (donors, NGOs, government, academics), why is this?; in addition, do we know enough about the other factors which determine the extent to which good research is translated into policy?



## **V. INFORMATION EXCHANGE ON POVERTY IN MALAWI**

**(i) Introduction and Summary**

The final session of the workshop was dedicated to discussing options for electronic dialogue and communication. DFID had requested the Poverty Coping Strategy consultants to produce some proposals for a web site / e-mail dialogue on coping strategies (see next sub-section for an edited version of the paper).

The rationale behind setting up an electronic forum for discussion is to generate fruitful debate on issues which are important for DFIDCA programming in Malawi. Through consultations with experts, DFIDCA hopes that interventions can be designed, implemented and monitored in a more effective and efficient manner. This is a particularly pressing need given the size of the programme in Malawi.

The following key points emerged out of the discussion:

- It transpired that GoM are initiating a poverty website. It may therefore be sensible for DFIDCA to support the development of this website, possibly with NRI technical expertise.
- In terms of an e-mail dialogue, the most appropriate option in the short term might be to widen the circle of correspondents already included on the World Bank safety nets dialogue.
- DFIDCA and GoM to liaise on the development of the website. NRI to be involved in providing technical advice. The question of where to site web server hardware and the future involvement of NRI staff in the website to be decided by DFIDCA and GOM. DfidCA and GoM to liaise with the World Bank re. widening the circle of e-mail safety net participants.

**(ii) Malawi Coping Strategies: E-mail dialogue and / or website?  
Preliminary observations and proposals**

I. Objectives

The first issue that DFID needs to decide on is the balance between having a forum for ideas and discussions amongst selected “experts” and presenting a resource of information on coping strategies in Malawi. If the primary objective is the former than an e-mail dialogue would be a good way to start this off. Depending on the success of this, one could then consider a web site. If presenting an information resource is felt to be an important objective at an early stage, then this points to the immediate development of a web site. One issue to bear in mind in the e-mail / web site discussion is that users in less developed countries will have more difficulties accessing the web site than accessing e-mail.

II. Technical options

There are a number of technical options with different costs. Three options that DFID might like to consider are:

*(i) UNIX web-server plus website set-up plus list-server (for e-mail and / or www discussion).*

This would only be a sensible option if DFIDCA envisages expanding a website significantly beyond Poverty Coping Strategies in Malawi eg to other countries in the region and /or significantly expanding the list of topics covered on the site. With this option, the Malawi web site would have its own internet domain name.

*(ii) Make use of existing web server (eg equipment at DFID or NRI); set-up website plus list server.*

This option has the advantage of providing web site facilities without the initial cost of UNIX hardware. The web site would not have its own domain name. It would be something like [www.NRI / Malawi Coping Strategies...](http://www.NRI/MalawiCopingStrategies...) or [www.DFID / Malawi Coping Strategies...](http://www.DFID/MalawiCopingStrategies...)

NOTE: As an addition for both options (i) and (ii) above, one could consider a database. This would be useful in categorising information sources, such as users of the website (who could then be put on a mailing list), and documents which could be accessed through the web site. The cost of setting up and maintaining a database depends entirely on the complexity of the application.

*(iii) Set-up list-server plus File Transfer Protocol (FTP) facility (run from NRI / DFID).*

This would be an option for an e-mail based system. In the absence of a specific Malawi Coping Strategies web site, an “anonymous FTP” site would allow users to have access to documents and other files without the need to email large attachments to multiple users.

### III. Management and editorial control

An entirely separate category of cost is **management** in terms of actual content ie managerial or editorial costs. The level of management and who does the managing are issues that DFID will need to discuss. We have, therefore, not included such costs in the calculations. Whatever technical specifications are decided upon, however, it seems to us sensible that editorial / managerial control of content should be exercised to some degree at least. Clearly, this will need to be done by persons who are up to speed on the key issues.

### IV. Possible themes for discussion

A useful starting point would be the gaps identified the Poverty Coping Strategies literature review and the Malawi workshop. We would expect further themes to arise out of the UK workshop, and from ongoing research and inputs into the e-mail dialogue. One useful distinction might be that between conceptual and empirical themes. The former would include debates over the meaning of poverty and coping, and would link with the evolving SL / SRL literature. The latter would focus more squarely on filling gaps such as coverage of the Northern Region, intra-household resource allocation etc.

In all of this, it will be important to establish links with other relevant fora, such as the safety nets e-mail discussion group being orchestrated by Jim Smith plus the University of New Hampshire and Harvard web sites.

Neil Marsland  
NRI  
April 1999

# **VI. APPENDICES**

## **Appendix 1**

### **Poverty Coping Strategies in Malawi: Workshop Draft Programme.**

**Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> May**

**Morning session: (8.45 am – 1.00 pm)**

**8.45 – 9.15** Registration and coffee.

**9.15 – 9.30** Outline of DFIDCA priorities – coping strategies and poverty.  
(Eric Hanley – Social Development Adviser: DFIDCA)

**9.30 – 10.30** Information gathered on coping strategies and information shortages:  
Findings of recent fieldwork and literature reviews in Malawi. (Neil Marsland NRI /  
Stephen Devereux IDS Sussex)

**Coffee (10.30 – 11.00)**

**11.00 – 12.00** Conceptual strengths and weaknesses of available literature in terms of  
understanding coping strategies.  
(Andrew Long NRI)

**12.00 – 1.00** Group work:

Group 1: Implications of what we know for understanding and interventions

Group 2: Prioritising under-researched areas

**1.00 – 2.30** Lunch

**Afternoon session: (2.30pm – 5.00pm)**

**2.30 – 3.30** The contribution of Sustainable Livelihood concepts to understanding  
poverty coping strategies. (Alistair Sutherland NRI).

**3.30 – 5.00** Group work: Application of SRL framework to coping strategies in  
Malawi. (To include tea).

**5.30 – 7.00** Drinks

**Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> May**

**Morning session: (9.00 am – 1.00 pm)**

**9.00 – 11.00** Presentation and discussion of group work (to include revisiting of conclusions from Wednesday morning group work)

**11.00 – 11.30** Coffee

**11.30 – 1.00** Proposals and discussion for a web site on poverty coping strategies in Malawi  
(Andrew Long / Neil Marsland NRI)

**1.00** Lunch

Depart

## Appendix 2: List of Workshop Participants

Name	Organisation	E-mail address
Milton Kutengule	University of East Anglia	m.kutengule@uea.ac.uk
Lawrence Kachikopa	National Economic Council, Government of Malawi	pspd@malawi.net
Richard Mwanza	Concern Universal, Malawi	Conuniv@malawi.net
Christy Gladwin	University of Florida	gladwin@Fred.ifas.ufl.edu
Ann Whitehead	University of Sussex	awhitehead@juniper.u-net.com
Sabine Mastwijk	University of Wageningen	Sabine.Mastwijk@STUD.ASNW.NAU.NL
Steven Fuller	University of Kent	<a href="mailto:scf@archsqu.demon.co.uk">scf@archsqu.demon.co.uk</a>
Andrew Long	Natural Resources Institute	s.a.long@gre.ac.uk
Neil Marsland	Natural Resources Institute	n.k.marsland@gre.ac.uk
Alistair Sutherland	Natural Resources Institute	a.j.sutherland@gre.ac.uk
Stephen Devereux	I.D.S Sussex	s.g.devereux@susx.ac.uk
Clare Ansell	ActionAid	ClareA@actionaid.org.uk
Eric Hanley	DfID (Harare)	e-hanley@dfid.gov.uk
Gillian Peace	Christian Aid	GPeace@christian-aid.org
Kate Longley	ODI	k.longley@odi.org.uk
Cate Turton	ODI	c.turton@odi.org.uk
Grace Carswell	University of Sussex	g.carswell@ids.ac.uk
Martin Hebblethwaite	Natural Resources Institute	<a href="mailto:m.j.hebblethwaite@gre.ac.uk">m.j.hebblethwaite@gre.ac.uk</a>
Clare Coote	Natural Resources Institute	<a href="mailto:h.c.coote@gre.ac.uk">h.c.coote@gre.ac.uk</a>
Arjan de Haan	DfID (London)	<a href="mailto:a-dehaan@dfid.gov.uk">a-dehaan@dfid.gov.uk</a>
Pauline Rose	IDS	p.m.rose@ids.ac.uk
John Coulter	Independent consultant	cowdenfarm@aol.com



### **Appendix 3: Relevant documents circulated at the workshop**

“Adaptive Strategies in Malawi” – Christina Gladwin (University of Florida).

“Starter Pack Monitoring and Impact Assessment Project: Malawi: Progress Report” – Kate Longley (ODI).

“Making Less last Longer: Informal Safety Nets in Malawi” – Steven Devereux (IDS).

“Insecurity is our only security: A case study into the situations of insecurity and their cultural understandings of the Tumbuka in Kabenga, Malawi” – Sabine Mastwijk (University of Wageningen).