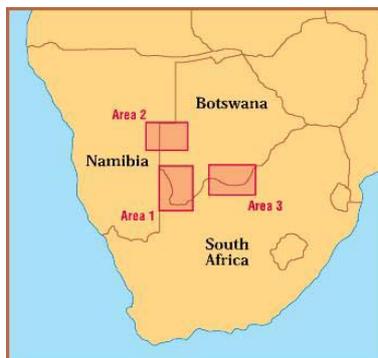


Policy, Poverty and the Role of Safety Nets

Key Points

- Government livelihood protection programmes are important sources of both direct and indirect support in the region.
- There is a growing dependency on welfare support by the rural poor
- Safety net policies may mitigate short-term crises but may also inhibit productive capacity and increase long-term livelihood insecurity.



Research areas:

1. **Arid southwest:**
 - a) Mier, South Africa
 - b) SW Kgalagadi, Botswana
2. **Semiarid northwest:**
 - a) Ghanzi Dist, Botswana
 - b) Omaheke, Namibia
3. **Dry sub-humid southeast:**
 - a) NW Province South Africa,
 - b) Barolongs, Botswana

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PANRUSA Briefing Notes

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This briefing examines the role of policy in the creation of safety nets to alleviate poverty in the borderland regions of Botswana, Namibia and South Africa where rural livelihoods are vulnerable to environmental change, market fluctuations and demographic forces.

Livelihood Vulnerability and Safety Nets

For rural livelihoods to be sustainable they must be able to withstand short-term stresses such as drought and market fluctuations and be resilient to longer-term shocks effected by economic, social and environmental change. Some livelihoods are more vulnerable to such shocks than others for example, due to their lack of diversification and limited access to social or natural capital. For these vulnerable rural populations, such shocks can result in poverty and subsistence crises prompting governments to intervene with support packages known as safety net policies which prevent the livelihoods of the most vulnerable from going into free-fall. This briefing note identifies the significance of such policies to rural livelihoods drawing on examples from the PANRUSA study areas.

Safety Net Policies

PANRUSA found that the livelihoods of the most vulnerable were supported by government policies both directly and indirectly. Direct policies provide both long-term blanket welfare support to groups identified as vulnerable and therefore permanently at risk, for example destitutes. They also take the form of short-term interventions that provide relief (work, cash and food) particularly during times of drought. The livelihoods of the most vulnerable were also found to be heavily reliant on government payments that indirectly acted as safety nets providing support for extended households beyond the individuals targeted by the policy. Within the South African and Namibian PANRUSA study areas livelihood support mainly took this indirect form while in Botswana, direct intervention was more significant and more comprehensively funded through its mineral revenues.

Safety net policies in Botswana

Within each of the Botswana study areas, vulnerable households were found to receive government support in the form of orphans rations and destitute relief. In the SW in

particular (Study Area 1b), such payments have constituted an ever increasing component of livelihoods since the 1980s (see BN8a). Outside designated villages some smaller settlements were designated as Remote Area Dweller (RAD) Service Centres to provide centralised government service support and relief for those whose livelihoods have been displaced by policy changes (e.g. TGLP BN10a). RADs are provided with rations, free schooling, wildlife quotas and income generating schemes. In addition, pensions and under-5s child feeding programmes provide a regular source of livelihood support. To mitigate against the effects of drought, labour-based drought relief projects and feeding programmes are also activated during drought years.

Safety net policies in Namibia and South Africa.

As in Botswana, Namibia operates a feeding programme for the needy (e.g. elderly, disabled, children) in times of drought. Otherwise policy interventions have been of a more indirect nature. In Namibia and South Africa pensions now constitute important sources of household income within each of the study areas. Indeed in the Mier area of South Africa (1a) nearly half of those surveyed by PANRUSA were now reliant on pensions and other forms of welfare support.

Safety nets and sustainable

Livelihoods

- Safety nets (e.g. drought relief) mitigate poverty in the short-term but increase dependency in the long-term. In the Botswana Study Areas 1b, and 2a, such dependency has inhibited the development of productive capacity and livelihood activities that are sustainable in the long-term. In short, people have nothing else to do but wait for their benefits.
- Welfare benefits which are targeted at certain individuals (elderly, orphans, under-5s) are often shared among many thus reducing their efficacy. Benefits are not always reaching those who need them most.
- Safety-net policies are inconsistent with each other. In SW Botswana (Study Area 1b) destitute and RADP policies operate in close proximity. While recipients of each are equally vulnerable, beneficiaries of the RADP receive much greater support. As a result destitutes are moving to RADP settlements to take advantage of the greater benefits on offer. This has placed pressure on the services at these settlements and on the surrounding NR base (grazing, fuelwood).
- The selection of those deemed to be needy of support is not always conducted on the basis of rigorous guidelines and criteria and may vary between regions.

- Welfare dependency is so endemic in some places that the withdrawal of benefits such as drought relief would have damaging consequences for local populations. In Botswana, the Drought Relief policy was intended to provide safety-net support to rural populations during short-term drought-induced crises. In reality the presidential declaration of drought heralding the onset of relief has become an annual event – one which often owes more to such dependency than the vagaries of climate.

Outcomes

- **Safety-net policies in the region are not currently contributing to sustainable livelihoods.**
- **The creation of employment opportunities, income generation and livelihood diversification schemes would offset risk and reduce long-term dependency on safety nets.**
- **Safety-net dependency affects well-being and self-esteem. As non-stakeholders such dependency may also engender indifference to sustainable NR practises.**

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