

Using the systems approach to understand the causes and dynamics of urban food insecurity: a case study of Chitungwiza, Zimbabwe

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Outline of presentation



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Background to the study

- Zimbabwe was initially known as the Southern Africa Development Community's grain basket
- But from 1998 the country started plunging into food insecurity and people embarked on food riots
- High inflation rates resulted in reduced purchasing power and limited access to income
- Land seizures coincided with a period of droughts, severe economic decline and high unemployment
- Decline in maize yields- in 2005 the country produced btwn 750 000 - 1 million tonnes (< national requirement of 1,8 million tonnes)
- Parallel market increased the price of maize and other food products

Background to the study

- Lack of attention and action by urban local authorities and other key actors
- Assumption of high resilience in urban areas compared to rural counterparts
- Opportunities were limited and competition was high, creating a large number of urban poor
- Operation clean up (2005) resulted in loss of income for huge populations who depended on the informal sector
- Those affected include landlords, tuck-shop owners, vendors and lodgers
- Urban areas do not always provide the best of opportunities to everyone

People queue to collect rations from an Oxfam feeding programme in Harare



Research objectives



- Understand the local's perspective on the causes of the food crisis
- Identify the main urban livelihood activities and assets
- To understand the general capacity of households to cope and recover from shocks and stresses such as HIV/AIDS, unemployment and high food prices and their affects on food security

What is food security?

Food security can be defined as,

“food that is available at all times, to which all persons have means of access that is nutritionally adequate in terms of quantity, quality and variety, and is acceptable within the given culture.” (Rome declaration on World Food Security, 1996)

• **Food crisis** is when an emergency occurs and people for whatever reason, do not have enough food to stay healthy and active (Oxfam GB, 2006).

Methodology: Systems approach

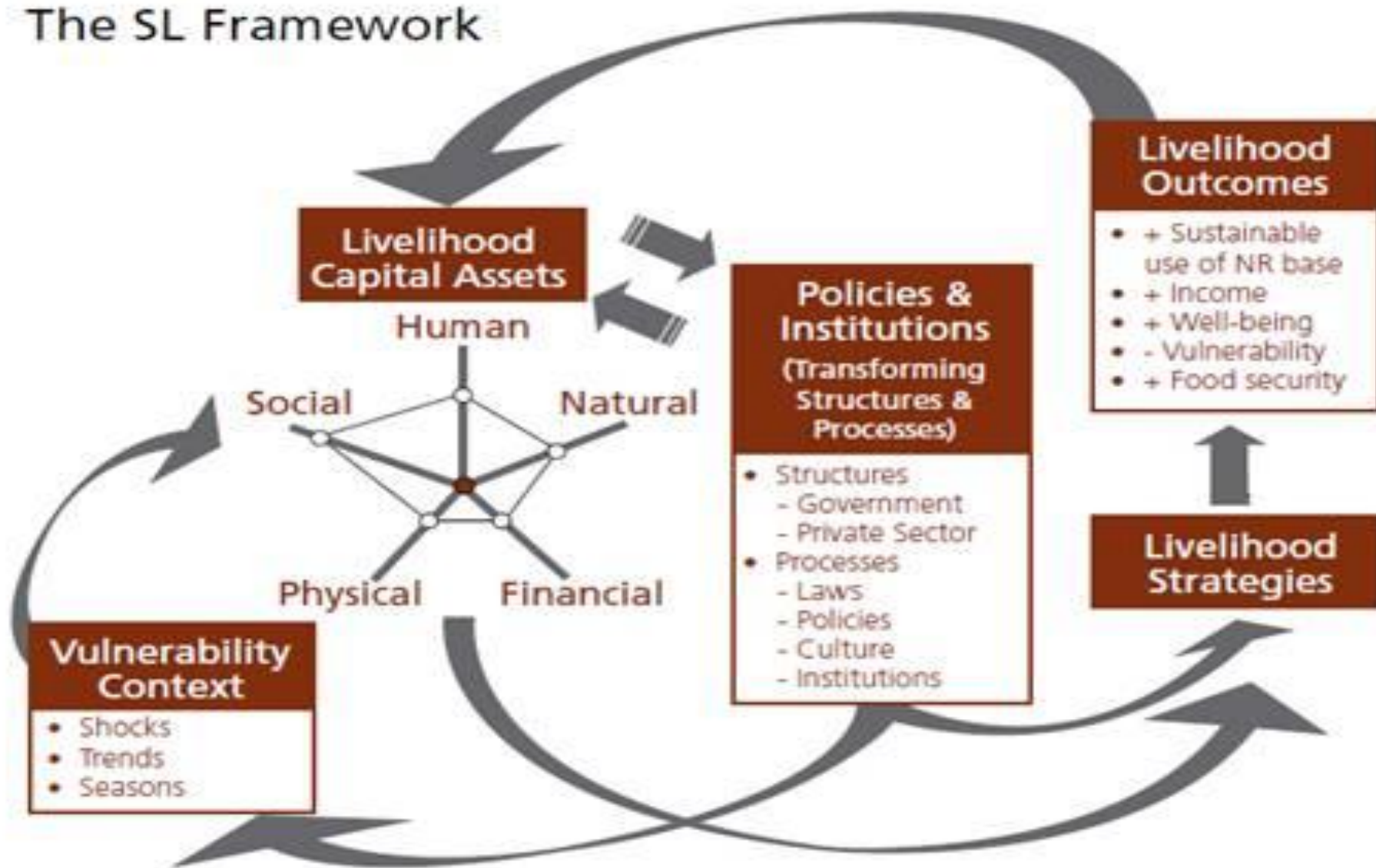
- Characteristics of complex systems
 - They consist of large number of components
 - These components interact dynamically
 - The interaction is non linear
 - Complex systems are open systems
 - They operate under conditions that are far from equilibrium
 - The history of a system is vitally important
- A community is a complex system- need to deconstruct it to household level to get a better understanding
- However the external environment exerts complex pressures that influence the household livelihood strategies
- Need to define the structural, historical and institutional factors that exist in the macro scale in order to understand the household (micro level).

Sustainable livelihoods framework

- Model used to assess the capabilities, assets (incl both material and social resources) and activities that are required for a means of living (components of the system)
- Households have sustainable livelihoods when they can cope with and recover from shocks and stresses and can maintain their capabilities and assets without undermining the natural resource base
- Framework looks at the household as a system and identifies the interactions with other components

The sustainable livelihoods framework

The SL Framework



Data collection methods

- Data collection methods used include
 - Wealth ranking exercise
 - Household interviews (80 participants)
 - Focus group discussions
 - Secondary material
 - Observation
 - Individual interviews with key stakeholders from Chitungwiza City Council department of health and social welfare and Chitungwiza General hospital, church leaders, NGO's (Red Cross and Girl Child Network) who work in Chitungwiza

Results

- Interviewees from the institutions were a bit indisposed to discuss the topic and claimed there was no food crisis in the country
- Ignored the fact that food security also entails “*access and affordability by all persons*”
- Household interviewees attributed the crisis land seizures, operation clean up and economic decline
- Households had to change funeral practices to reduce costs and time commitment
- Chitungwiza general hospital reported cases of malnutrition
- School teachers reported that some students could not bring food to eat at school such that some fainted from hunger

Results

- In June 2006 the commuter fares from Harare to Chitungwiza ranged between Z\$120 and Z\$150.
- By February 2007 the price increased to somewhere between Z\$2000-Z\$2500.
- In June 2006 a loaf of bread cost between Z\$1500 and Z\$2000 yet the recommended price is Z\$825
- Expenditure patterns of many households had changed as people stopped buying assets and clothes and spent more on food
- Whenever the public sector salaries were increased then the price of food commodities also increased

Results

- Rely on less preferred food or less expensive food
- Reduce # of meals taken daily
- Limit the portion sizes @ mealtime
- Skip entire days without eating
- Borrow food or rely on help from friends/ relatives?
- Give food preferential to sick member of HH
- Restrict consumption by adults so children can eat
- Harvest immature crops
- Food aid
- Purchase food on credit
- Restrict consumption of non working members in favour of working members

Results

- It was still too early to tell whether the livelihoods strategies adopted were sustainable.
- Some coping strategies resulted in intra-household food insecurity
- For many households basic food stuffs such as tea, bread and mealie- meal had become a luxury
- For many poor people the desire to satisfy basic social needs often overrides the basic environmental considerations
- To date about 1 .68 million people need food assistance because prices remain comparatively high for families with low incomes and little or no access to the US dollar or South African rand (UN, 2010)

Conclusions

- The food crisis was a result of many factors (complexity)
- Most livelihood activities were in the informal sector and were vulnerable to the structures and processes
- This vulnerability increased household inability to secure food resulting in the *food crisis*
- Urban local authorities and other stake holders need to pay more attention to the plight of the urban poor e.g slum dwellers
- The SA government should continue to promote pro-poor economic growth in the informal sector for the urban poor

Conclusions

- Rapid urbanization and the urbanization of poverty has produced communities that lack the ability to resist and recover easily from hazards
- One way of improving our understanding of the livelihoods of the poor is to use the sustainable livelihoods framework
- It starts off by identifying existing assets and strategies available to the poor making it possible to identify entry points for intervention
- Policy makers need to acknowledge that in order to fully understand a system they need to understand the system as well as its environment
- Using the systems approach facilitates development that has significant sustainable impacts on poverty reduction



Failure to acknowledge the complexity of a system is not just a technical error but involves an ethical problem. (Cilliers, 2010).



Grandmother of 5 has just received her food parcel from WFP, 2007

Thank You