

10. Points to note

10.1. Crimes of Need

The analysis presented above has indicated that Malawi is affected by relatively high rates of crime – 43.5% of the survey sample experienced one or more crimes over the 12 months between 1 May 2002 and 1 May 2003. However, the most prevalent crimes in Malawi, crop theft and theft of live-stock are crimes of need – poor people, lacking the means to cope, particularly in times of food shortages, steal for subsistence from people who may be as poor or even poorer than themselves.

The impact of crop and livestock theft on affected households is likely to be severe, as these assets are being stolen from some of the most vulnerable households in Malawi. As a South African analyst has noted:

“...poverty is characterised not only by a lack of assets and inability to accumulate them, but also by an inability to devise an appropriate coping or management strategy in the face of shocks and crises”⁴⁵

Thus, given the high percentages of Malawians who rely on their own produce for subsistence, theft of these crops and livestock can threaten the ability of victimised households to sustain themselves.

This presents the danger of increasing and cyclical victimisation, in which poor and vulnerable households, having had their means of subsistence stolen from them, are required to steal their subsistence from other poor and vulnerable households, who, in turn, then also need to do this and so on.

Therefore, a sustained food relief programme implemented as preventive action before a major food crisis and in the areas of most need, may well impact positively on reducing the rate of crop and stock theft, and therefore reduce the vulnerability of poor households.⁴⁶

45 See May, J. *Poverty and inequality in South Africa*, report prepared for the Office of the Executive Deputy President and the Inter-ministerial Committee for Poverty and Inequality, 13 May 1998.

46 This would be a self-evident and obvious point, but for the fact that due to political and bureaucratic obstacles food relief during the food shortages of 2002 was dispensed very late, in the middle of the crisis. See Potter, H. *The Malawi Experience 2001-3*. Internal DFID Presentation.

On the same note, and importantly for Malawi's development partners, household vulnerability to crop and stock theft is also likely to be reduced by a detailed consideration of the security implications of local level development programmes that aim to enhance sustainable livelihoods for the poor in particular places. For instance, a programme that targets particular villages for development activities, which includes amongst other things improved crop production and / or the breeding and keeping of livestock,⁴⁷ would do well to consider the impact of this programme on non-participating neighbouring villages.

However, given the clear correlation between the times in which crop and livestock theft are most prevalent and the times of food shortages, it is very likely that the successful implementation of programmes aimed at improving and sustaining food supply, like the Starter Pack and Targeted Inputs Programme and others like it, will reduce the occurrence of these crimes of need.

10.2 Corruption

The fact that corruption constitutes the third most common experience of crime in Malawi is clearly cause for concern.

That 384 respondents (5.6% of the sample) reported that they had experienced a corrupt act in the 12-month survey period is itself significant as respondents are, for reasons outlined earlier in this report, likely to be reluctant to report this. Also, it should be remembered here that this household survey excluded responses from businesses, non-government organisations and donor agencies. This means that the actual incidence of corruption in Malawi is likely to be far greater than is reported here.

At the time of writing, the issue of corruption loomed large in Malawi as the Malawi Government and its development partners engaged on the most appropriate strategies to address it. For the sake of the poor, who appear to be most affected by corruption at precisely the places that affect

47 See, for instance, *The Shire Highlands Sustainable Livelihoods Programme*, DFID and OXFAM project document, undated.

their ability to sustain themselves – that is, when seeking employment opportunities in the public service and at food supply depots – it can only be hoped that this issues is taken up seriously in an effective manner.

10.3 Violence against women

The analysis in this report has indicated that Malawi is fortunate in that the violent crime that is a feature of some of the countries nearby, does not appear to be common at all.

However, a note of caution is appropriate here. As indicated in the section on the limitations of the methodology (Section 2.3 above), a household survey is not the most appropriate research tool for acquiring data on certain crimes, especially crimes like domestic violence, sexual assault or rape. The limitations of the methodology in acquiring data on these crimes are compounded in societies in which such crimes are prevalent to the extent that they have been “normalised” in everyday interaction. As indicated in the section on assault (Section 3.3.3 above) there is some evidence that this may be true for Malawi.

Therefore, the data presented in this report related to crimes against women, should be regarded with caution and should not be extrapolated.

10.4 Reporting of crime to the police

The rate of reporting crime to the police in Malawi is low. This is likely to have two important impacts – firstly, it is likely to impede accurate recording of crime by the police in Malawi, and secondly, and more importantly, it is likely to inhibit the preventive and detective functions of the police.

The common public perception that a particular crime is not important enough to report to the police as well as the perception that the victims themselves need sufficient evidence before reporting a crime to the police needs to be addressed.

As more crime is reported to the traditional authorities, developing a closer working relationship between the police and these authorities may prove advantageous. This could be done as part of the implementation of the community policing programme.