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***Political Incumbency and Drought  
Relief in Africa***

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## **Abstract**

Since gaining independence, a number of African governments have responded to protect citizens from drought-induced threats of famine. Government relief has either involved limited disbursements of food aid and large income restoring labour-intensive public works programme for the able bodied (labour-based relief), or the universal distribution of free food aid (free food aid). This paper examines why some African governments select policies of universal food relief, while others adopt food-for-work or work-for-cash programmes. Through the use of the concept of the vulnerability of political incumbency, I explore the factors that shape policy selection by political leaderships. This idea is then tested in Botswana, Kenya and Zimbabwe. I find that that the political status of incumbents determines whether government relief comes in the form of universal aid or labour-based relief.

**Keywords:** Botswana, food aid, drought, relief policies, political incumbency

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## Introduction

For many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), droughts are frequent and often severe. The variability of rainfall in the arid and semi-arid regions of the continent together with the poor capacity of most soils in Africa to retain moisture has left many parts of the continent food-insecure. Furthermore, in almost all countries prone to recurrent rainfall shortages, the common rural household coping strategies of selling productive assets to smooth consumption and income in the short term not only impedes recovery but has been shown to increase inequality.

Deepening inequality has not been the worst outcome of drought in Africa. In a number of drought-prone countries, the curse of geography quickly turned into widespread starvation. Because countries in which droughts progressed into famine have captured much of the policy and academic attention over the years, 'it is widely believed that most African countries lack the political structure (perhaps even the commitment) for successful pursuit of comprehensive strategies of entitlement protection' (Dreze 1990: 127). However, as Dreze himself notes, it would be inaccurate to take this characterisation to be truly representative of the situation across SSA.

Since independence, a number of governments have responded to protect their populations from the threat of famine. In these countries, government-initiated responses to drought-induced threats of starvation have included the free distribution of food and large income-restoring workfare-intensive public works programme for able-bodied adults. Thus, despite similarities in the proximate cause of threats to household food security, both universal food aid and workfare programmes have been used to protect citizens from the 'co-variant risks associated with climatic and systemic shocks' (Subbarao 2003: 1).

Variation has not just been prominent across countries, but has also been notable within countries over time. What accounts for the variation in how African governments have typically responded to drought? Why have some governments chosen relief policies that are heavily reliant on free food aid, while other governments opted for workfare-based relief? Finding answers to these questions is the main focus of this paper.

By conceptualising the choice of one form of drought relief policy over another; as involving non-trivial trade-offs between long-run economic benefits, but immediate political costs for workfare-based relief on the one hand; and immediate political gains with long-run economic costs for universal food aid, on the other, I argue that variation in the form taken by drought relief programmes results from the relative fragility of political incumbents. My contention is that incumbents who are vulnerable to the loss of power have a preference for policy measures associated with immediate benefits, such as universal food aid. However, when political incumbents are secure in their position and power, the lower discount rates and longer time horizon this produces creates a policy environment in which workfare-based relief is chosen.

The rest of the paper proceeds as follows. The first section briefly describes the key components of drought relief in Botswana, Kenya and Zimbabwe. The second assesses the debate on the efficacy of universal food aid and workfare-based relief. In the third section I sketch a political incumbency based framework that guides my analysis of government behaviour. The fourth section examines how the vulnerability of political incumbency shaped the form taken by drought relief in Botswana, Kenya and Zimbabwe. I end with a brief conclusion.

## **Drought relief responses in Botswana, Kenya and Zimbabwe**

Since gaining independence, a number of governments in Africa have sought to protect their populations from the threat of famine. Government responses either involved universal food relief, or took the form of workfare-based relief. At different points in their history, governments in Botswana, Kenya and Zimbabwe opted to smooth consumption shocks due to drought through the universal distribution of food relief. Additionally, workfare programmes have also figured in national drought relief programmes in Botswana and Zimbabwe.

### **Botswana: from food aid to the institutionalisation of workfare relief<sup>1</sup>**

Following drought in 1978-79 which cut total cereal production to 10.22 Mt per 1,000 capita, Botswana adopted its first post-independence drought relief programme (Botswana, Government of, 1979). As laid out in President Khama's address, the government's drought relief programme was to involve 'relief in the form of supplementary food...using the existing distribution points such as clinics, health-posts and primary schools and the village authorities in the districts,' the intensification of rations to vulnerable groups, the distribution of seeds at subsidised prices through the outlets of the Agricultural Marketing Board, co-operatives and extension services 'to enable the recovery of the arable economy,' the scaling up of operations at BMC abattoirs and the distribution of free Botulism and Vitamin A vaccines to reduce the risks 'to cattle which will not be marketed' (Khama quoted in Botswana *Daily News*, May 29, 1979: 3).

Between 1981 and 1987, Botswana was once again struck by a serious drought. In response to the crisis the government adopted a relief programme in which the main component was participation in rural public works programmes (Amis 1990; Boers 1990; Botswana, Government of, 1982). Following another drought in 1991-93, the government's approach focused again on workfare projects organised by Village Development Committees and administered by District Councils. As in 1982-90<sup>2</sup>, individuals *self-selected* to work on the public works projects chosen by the community. Another feature of the 1992-94 response is that it signaled an attempt by the government to institutionalise workfare projects. Specifically, the government's economic blueprint for 1991-97 (National Development Plan 7) built a 3-4 percent increase in annual expenditure to fund drought relief programmes (Botswana, Government of, 1991: 59). All subsequent drought relief programmes in Botswana have involved workfare relief.

### **Kenya 1984-85: success with universal food aid<sup>3</sup>**

In response to what was then the worst drought in 100 years over the 1983-84 season, President Moi announced the establishment of the National Famine Relief Fund (NFRF). The NFRF was to be the main conduit through which private contributions to the relief effort were mobilised and channelled for affected communities (Borton 1989). More substantively, Kenya's 1984-85 drought relief programme had two key components. First, the Kenyan government used the existing 'commercial distribution channels as the primary means of getting food to people' (Cohen & Lewis 1987: 281) in the urban areas and those outside the hard hit eastern and northern areas of the country. For those not able to buy food on the market, the second component of the government's relief involved the distribution of free food rations (Downing et al., 1989). Under this element of the relief programme, 'District Commissioners were authorised to make free food available wherever needed to prevent hunger' (Cohen & Lewis 1987: 281). The allocation of resources was the responsibility of the Provisional Administration, which relied

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 2 of the author's dissertation for a comprehensive account of drought in Botswana.

<sup>2</sup> Although the majority of the country was declared drought free in 1988, the agricultural recovery component of the relief lasted until 1990.

<sup>3</sup> Chapter 4 of the author's dissertation specifically deals with the form taken by drought in Kenya.

on 'famine relief committees and local chiefs to identify those in need of support' (Dreze 1990: 139).<sup>4</sup>

### **Zimbabwe 1980-2004: From universal food aid to workfare relief and back<sup>5</sup>**

As in Botswana and Kenya, food aid programmes featured prominently in Zimbabwe's drought relief programmes of 1982-84 and 2002-2004. The main elements of the government of Zimbabwe's 1982-84 response involved the large-scale distribution of take-home food rations to the adult population in the rural areas, plus supplementary feeding for children under five and lactating mothers.<sup>6</sup> The distribution of food aid was the responsibility of Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) party cadres at the village and district levels (Munro 2001; Dreze 1990; Leys 1986). Party cadres at the branch and district level were the ones who 'identified drought-stricken areas and households and forwarded this information to the DSW [Department of Social Welfare]' (Munro 2001: 167).

Like its neighbour to the southwest, Zimbabwe also switched to workfare-based relief in its second drought relief programme in 1987-88. However, whereas workfare-based relief programmes in Botswana transferred income to beneficiaries, in Zimbabwe workfare programmes paid workers in food rations. The new relief policy adopted by the Government of Zimbabwe had two components: free food distribution (FFD) for households that did not have an able-bodied adult and food-for-work (FFW) for households with an able-bodied adult (see Zimbabwe, Government of, 1986a, 1986b). Under the FFD component of the relief programme, ZANU cadres who had been responsible for the identification of beneficiaries and distribution of food aid during the 1982-84 relief, were replaced by *elected officials*, local politicians and *line-staff* in the Department of Social Welfare (DSW).<sup>7</sup> Selection into the FFW component of the government's workfare-based programme was largely left to individuals.<sup>8</sup>

In its third drought relief programme in 1992-93, the government continued with a workfare-based relief programme. The 1992-93 drought relief programme had three key components. First, the government sought to maintain enough grain for the urban food market. Second, the relief effort called for the supplementary feeding of children under 5 and primary school children designated as most vulnerable. Adults in need of drought relief had to register to work on public works programmes through their local DSW offices. Thus, the third component of the 1992/93 relief was the provision of aid to able-bodied adults through self-selection into food-for-work programmes (Zimbabwe, Government of, 1993).

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<sup>4</sup> Available data indicates that close to 114,000 Mt of food was distributed by the Office of the President between October 1984 and November 1985. In August 1984, nearly 1.4 million (7 percent of the population) were estimated to be recipients of free food rations. This figure rose to 1.575 million the following month.

<sup>5</sup> For a more complete account of drought relief in Zimbabwe see Chapter 3 of the author's dissertation.

<sup>6</sup> In 1982-83 about 850,000 people received a ration of 10.34 kgs each month. The following year, in 1983-84, 1,462,226 people received a ration of 9.9 kgs each month.

<sup>7</sup> Under the new system, local elected officials assisted DSW staff in identifying households who qualified for FFD. As is well documented by Munro (2001, 175), in making decisions about FFD, DSW staff and local officials were to limit themselves to adults 'over 65 years of age and destitute, or chronically ill or mentally or physically disabled to the extent that they [could not] support themselves, and [had] no family members ... capable of supporting them.'

<sup>8</sup> Projects for FFW were drawn from existing projects under Provincial and District Development Plans, with some invention of projects on the spot in some places.

## Efficacy of responses

Over the years, the efficacy of each of these response strategies has been the subject of much debate among scholars. Arguments by Dreze and Sen (1989), as well as other accounts by Dreze (1990), Sen (1999) and von Braun et al (1999), suggest that, although free food aid can be commended for its immediate observable benefits by directly transferring food to beneficiaries, overall the policy proves to be *costly and unsustainable*. Specifically, they stress that the distribution of free food aid is intrinsically vulnerable to major administrative and logistic failures, could potentially lead to the spread of infectious diseases<sup>9</sup>, and tends to be wasteful given its universal coverage. For example, Zimbabwe's 1982-84 relief was characterized by numerous complaints by recipients about delays, uncertainties and frauds (see Leys 1986; Bratton 1987a; Saunders & Davies 1988). The government-operated Central Motor Engine Department (CMED), which had been given the responsibility to move food around to distribution centers, lacked the experience or the capacity to do so. In the end, food delivery was sub-contracted to the private sector in an attempt to unlock some of the logistic constraints in the relief programme.

Because of all these limitations with universal food aid, Dreze and Sen (1989) contend that the most *effective* way for governments to prevent famine is through workfare-based programmes.<sup>10</sup> In support of workfare-based relief, they stressed that the self-selection involved in workfare relief tends to eliminate the indiscriminate distribution of government aid (also see van Braun et al., 1999). Dreze & Sen (1989) note that if workfare relief pays in cash, as in Botswana, rebuilding lost incomes enables affected groups to compete for food at the same time that it encourages trade and commerce. In so doing, wage-based protections tend to avoid the social disruption associated with direct food aid.<sup>11</sup> Elsewhere, Subbarao (2003) suggests that another advantage of workfare programmes may include the construction of much-needed infrastructure if programmes are well designed. According to Subbarao (2003), the construction of infrastructure minimises the trade-offs between 'public spending on income versus public spending on development' by generating downstream benefits in the form of employment opportunities for the maintenance of the infrastructure.

### The limits of instrumental assessments of efficacy

If it is well understood that workfare relief is more effective in poor countries, why have some governments in Africa repeatedly adopted universal food aid? In response to this question some scholars impute irrationality, sometimes even pathology on the part of the African governments for continuing with universal food aid. For instance, Benson and Clay (1998: 2), argue that reliance on food aid in Africa '...partly reflects a widespread failure to perceive droughts as a serious and potentially long-term economic problem.'

There are a number of reasons we might not want to place too much weight on explanations of drought relief policy that are wont to attribute 'irrationality' or 'lack of knowledge' on the part of African governments. To begin with, the scholars discussed above offer assessments of relief

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<sup>9</sup> On this point see de Waal (1989, 1990, 1997) for a discussion of the relationship between infectious diseases and mortality during a famine.

<sup>10</sup> Effectiveness here is understood to mean both sufficient coverage to prevent famine (which free food aid does) and cost-effectiveness and sustainability (which free food aid does not).

<sup>11</sup> According to Sen, 'The employment route also happens to encourage the processes of trade and commerce, and does not disrupt economic, social and family lives. The people helped can mostly stay in their own homes, close to their economic activities (like farming), so that these economic operations are not disrupted. The family life too can continue in a normal way, rather than people being herded into emergency camps' (Sen 1999, 177-8).

programmes from a very narrow technocratic and economic perspective. However, as is stressed by Bratton (1987b: 175), 'the insistence that policy be formed only by considerations of economic rationality' fails to appreciate the perspective of political incumbents for whom 'the resources at [their] disposal are the largesse by which political leaders maintain themselves in power.' Thus, policy is not just an economically shaped response but often times a product of political considerations.

**Table 1. Trade-offs between relief responses and vulnerability of incumbents**

		<b>Benefit/cost to responding incumbents</b>	
		<b>Short-run</b>	<b>Long-run</b>
<b>Form Taken by Relief</b>	<b>Food Aid</b>	<u>Benefit (political):</u> Government immediately seen to be doing something; Strategy has wide coverage; Allows for credit-claiming by incumbents	<u>Cost (economic):</u> Administrative problems, spread of diseases, social disruption and 'wasteful' by providing aid to everyone
	<b>Workfare</b>	<u>Cost (political):</u> Takes time to establish; Selective coverage cuts out wealthier segments of the population	<u>Benefit (economic):</u> Eliminates indiscriminate aid; Addresses income shocks of drought; May build physical infrastructure

My own research into drought relief in Sub-Saharan Africa suggests the need to take into consideration two additional factors: a) the political gains of each response type, and b) the time frame in which incumbents anticipate benefits to accrue. Whereas most assessments, as discussed above, are interested in the economic benefits (that is, a response's appropriateness, cost effectiveness and sustainability) of the two responses I argue that each response is also associated with a political benefit or cost to responding incumbents. As the number of people who can be a beneficiary of government policy increases, as with universal food aid, so too does the *potential political benefit* to political incumbents. Conversely, a relief programme that is predicated on targeting, as is the case with workfare-based aid, is likely to be associated with a *political cost* as incumbents have to deal with core support groups who find themselves defined-out of the potential beneficiary category.

The second factor that was apparent in researching drought relief policy selection in SSA was the timeframe under which incumbents imagined costs had to be 'paid' or benefits obtained. To simplify, I dichotomise this timeframe into the short-run and the long-run. Combining the economic assessments provided by Dreze & Sen (1989) and others and with my own assessments of the political benefit/cost of each relief type I can construct a simple 2x2 table that summarises the trade-offs incumbents are faced with in deciding on a form of relief.<sup>12</sup> Principally, as Table 1 illustrates, there are non-trivial trade-offs between the long-run economic benefits associated with workfare-based relief, on the one hand, and the short-run political

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter 5 of the author's dissertation for a less cursory discussion of the short-run long-run comparison noted above.

benefits produced by the credit-claiming and coalition-building of universal food aid, on the other hand.

Under circumstances in which free food distribution is associated with immediate identifiable political rewards for incumbents and workfare relief linked with wider, more diffuse economic benefits, there is good reason to expect drought relief policy choices to be the outcomes of political calculation, rather than simply being instrumental weighing of costs and benefits. The politics sensitive view of drought relief suggested here is consistent with scholars who have shown that 'political expediency plays a formative role in policy choice, with leaders using the distribution of resources as a device to attract political support, nullify opposition, and remain in control' (Bratton 1987b: 175). There is good reason, then, to eschew policy accounts that necessarily presume irrationality or lack of knowledge on the part of decision-makers in favour of a framework that takes seriously the interplay between the imperatives of political survival and 'sound' economic reasoning in policy making. In what follows below, I propose a framework for examining this interaction and subsequently use it to explain variation in the drought relief policies of Botswana, Kenya and Zimbabwe.

### **Political incumbency and government behavior: a brief sketch**

Over the years, political scientists have come to take for granted that individuals (and the parties they represent) who enter formal politics are united in being motivated by the desire to win and maintain political office. If rational economic man seeks to maximise utility, his political twin is motivated by the explicit desire to acquire and maintain political office. However, after winning political office the strength of this political incumbency may vary. Even across Africa where dominant perspectives based on neopatrimonialism tend to suggest equally weak political incumbency (see van de Walle 2001 ; Callaghy 1984; Zolberg 1966)<sup>13</sup>, variation in the probability that those in power today will remain in power tomorrow can be imagined.

Variation in the probability of losing power may be institutionally embedded in the type of political system incumbents find themselves operating in. For instance, incumbents in countries with elections are at risk each time an election is held.<sup>14</sup> The strength of political incumbency might also reflect a given country's history with violent challenges by the military, subversive activities or ethnic conflict. Less dramatic and violent, but still signalling the possibility of losing power, declining electoral support may embolden challengers, economic crisis may lead to the defection of political allies, or an unhappy population may take to the streets in protest.<sup>15</sup>

An awareness of the micro-political conditions faced by political leadership is important because of its impact on government decision-making (Geddes 1994; Ames 1987). This is because how incumbents view their prospects of being in power in the future in turn effects the policies they are willing to propose and adopt today. For instance, the increased attention given to the relationship between governance and economic policy making in recent years has demonstrated that there is a powerful connection between a government's micro-political condition and the sorts of decisions it is likely to make (see, van de Walle 2001).

Also, as noted by Alence (2004 the 'new institutional economics' paradigm places significant

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<sup>13</sup> A more complete list of references to this literature is provided in Chapter 5 of the author's dissertation.

<sup>14</sup> Generally, of course, elections may pose more of a real threat to incumbents in a democracy than incumbents in non-democracies who may resort to a host of tactics (ballot-stuffing, voter intimidation, harassment of the opposition, etc) to insulate themselves from the insecurity of the polls.

<sup>15</sup> Of course, not all of these factors will necessarily result in the fall of incumbents. In the face of challenges some incumbents hold on to power for extended periods of time, while others last only a few days in office (see Bienen & van de Walle 1989).



weight on the effect of politics in accounting for differences in growth patterns across states. As he puts it,

‘Governments facing imminent threats to their hold on power often have shorter time horizons and are more preoccupied with placating the specific groups most pivotal to their survival. They are thus likely to give high priority to the short-term interests of narrow constituencies, at the expense of longer-term social welfare. Such tendencies can lead to myopically self-interested political interventions into policy-making and public administration, with economically damaging consequences’.

Accepting the argument that in unstable political environments ‘rational politicians in office [are forced] to concentrate on activities that lead to quick results and immediate rewards’ (Geddes 1994: 13), the political incumbency framework offered here suggests that vulnerability also affects how governments are likely to respond to threats of famine. Specifically, when incumbents are vulnerable to the loss of position and power, the short time horizons produced by this insecurity leads them to favour free food aid—a policy measure associated with immediate political benefits (see Table 1 above). However, when incumbents are reasonably secure, their longer time horizons create a policy environment in which workfare-based relief and its economic justifications are politically palatable.

### **Explaining variation in relief policy: political incumbency in practice**

In practice, previous research offers two possible explanations of the form taken by drought relief across SSA. Drawing on arguments suggesting a democratic advantage in the choice of socially optimal policy, the first explanation suggests that democracies are more likely to adopt workfare-based relief than non-democracies (Sen 1999, 1981; Thompson 1993; Dreze 1990; Hay 1988; Holm & Morgan 1985).<sup>16</sup>

My own research suggests that there are number of problems with arguments linking the choice of relief with regime type (see Munemo, 2007). One of the limitations of arguments along these lines is that they are based on the comparison of Botswana’s 1982-90 response with Zimbabwe’s 1982-84 relief programme. However, when all responses in these two countries are taken into consideration, along with drought relief responses in other SSA countries it is quickly apparent that democracy is neither necessary (democratic Botswana has not always adopted workfare relief) nor sufficient (Cape Verde 1976-86, Zimbabwe 1986-99, among other non-democracies adopted workfare relief) for the adoption of workfare-based relief. Thus, regime type fails to explain the trajectory of drought relief not only in Botswana (the *crucial* case), but also in all the other countries.

Similarly sceptical about the explanatory power of regime type, de Waal (1997) argues that differences in drought relief between Botswana and Zimbabwe reflect differences in the domestic availability of food stocks in the two countries. Specifically, de Waal contends that countries that are normally surplus producers of food (such as Zimbabwe) opt to remove the variability in food supply through aid, while countries that are typically net importers of food (like Botswana) prefer to maintain rural incomes through workfare relief that pays in cash.

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<sup>16</sup> See Chapter 2 of the author’s dissertation for discussion of this literature. The chapter also explicitly tests whether a regime theory of policy choice accounts for the form taken by relief in Botswana, and other countries in SSA.

As with regime type arguments, my dissertation reveals that there is no relationship between food stocks held by the government and the form of relief it is likely to adopt.<sup>17</sup> As highlighted in 14.2, the holding of large stocks of food (Zimbabwe in 1986-99) did not result in the adoption of universal food aid. Similarly, a number of governments with no food stocks (Botswana 1979-80 & Zimbabwe 2002-04) adopted universal food aid.

What then accounts for the variation in the form taken by relief? Why did democratic Botswana in 1979-80 adopt universal food aid instead of workfare relief as suggested by both the regime theory of policy adoption and de Waal's agricultural sector argument? Similarly, why did non-democratic and surplus food producing Zimbabwe switch its relief to workfare relief between 1986-1999?

**Table 2. First-Order Matching of Dependent and Independent Variables**

Country-Cases	Workfare-based Relief	Universal Food Aid	Regime Type	Structure of the Agricultural Sector
			<i>Freedom House Country Status in the year relief adopted<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>Size of Food Stocks (+) or Deficits (-) in the Year Relief Adopted (kgs per capita)<sup>3</sup></i>
Botswana 82-90	4	–	5 (Free)	-132.78
Botswana 92-94	4	–	3 (Free)	-135.06
Botswana 96-98	4	--	4 (Free)	-121.90
Botswana 02-05	4	--	4 (Free)	-136.34
Zambia 92/93	4	--	5 (Free)	-7.91
Cape Verde 76-86	4	--	12 (Not Free)	-132.10
Zimbabwe 87/88	4	--	11 (Partly Free)	201.91
Zimbabwe 92/93	4	–	9 (Partly Free)	100.68
Zimbabwe 97-99	4	--	10 (Partly Free)	102.95
Botswana 79/80	–	4	5 (Free)	-140.38
Kenya 84/85	–	4	11 (Not Free)	28.13
Tanzania 75/76	--	4	12 (Not Free)	-61.30
Zimbabwe 82-84	–	4	9 (Partly Free)	129.69
Zimbabwe 02-04	–	4	12 (Not Free)	-85.47

<sup>1</sup> Includes public works for food or cash and grain loan programme.

<sup>17</sup> In Chapter 3 of my dissertation I systematically test whether the structure of the agricultural sector affects the form taken by relief. As noted above, when all drought relief interventions in Botswana and Zimbabwe are considered, no observable relationship emerges between the size of stocks a government has and its choice of drought relief. In my fuller analysis, it appears the relationship de Waal (1997) points to is an artifact of his limited comparison (Zimbabwe 1982-84 with Botswana 1982-90).

<sup>2</sup> Status based on combining a country's Political Rights and Civil Liberties Score for that year. Countries with a combined score of 2 – 5 = Free; 6 – 11 = Partly Free and 12 – 14 Not Free

<sup>3</sup> According to WFP and UNICEF the average yearly requirement to sustain life is about 150-200 kgs per capita.

Source: WDI Online <http://devdata.worldbank.org.arugula.cc.columbia.edu:2048/dataonline/>

The theoretical discussion above suggested that there is good reason to expect that the choice of relief is associated with the vulnerability of political incumbents. Specifically, I argued that political vulnerability produces short time horizons, which lead incumbents to favour policy responses associated with immediate benefits. I contend that universal food aid provides immediate benefits to incumbents in that it provides highly visible transfers, through local elites, to a large group of people. In so doing, universal food aid enables incumbents to benefit by strengthening old coalitions or fashioning new ones. Thus for insecure incumbents, 'crises of provisioning create opportunities to build national political regimes' (Bates 1989: 138). Conversely, I hypothesised that political security supports longer time horizons, with future benefits not heavily discounted. Under these conditions, I argue that workfare relief was more likely because technocratic arguments predicated on the sustainability and cost-effectiveness of targeted aid are politically palatable.

### **Commonalities across food aid governments**

To test the relationship between the vulnerability of political incumbents and the form taken by relief I examined the micro-political environment in all cases of universal food aid with cases where workfare based relief. As hypothesised, all governments that adopted universal food aid (that is, Botswana 1979-80, Kenya 1984-85 and Zimbabwe 1982-84 & 2002-2004) had commonalities in the political *milieu* faced by incumbents. Although most accounts of politics in Botswana tend to paint a picture of well-established rules of the political game and an otherwise uncontested Botswana Democratic Party hegemony (du Toit 1999, 1995), my analysis for the period 1976-79 revealed a fairly uncertain political incumbency for Khama and his Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) (see chapter 5 of Munemo, 2007). For instance, in April 1977 the government accused the Botswana National Front (BNF) of training its youth in 'coup tactics' (The *Botswana Daily News*, April 1, 1977). The following year, President Khama withdrew the passports of 17 BNF members headed for a conference in Havana, Cuba on grounds that the members were really attempting to leave the country to get military training (The *Botswana Daily News*, June 21, 1978).

In addition to the perceived threat from the BNF, the period was also characterised by significant popular protest. For instance, between 1975-78, my primary research revealed that there were over 56 individual strikes and protests directed at the government compared with only 14 between 1980-82.<sup>18</sup> Protest directed at the government came from communities affected by the expansion of the mining sector and also, significantly, from university students. The rise in protest across Botswana forced President Khama to warn 'political agitators' that he would take action if necessary (The *Botswana Daily News*, August 26, 1976).

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<sup>18</sup> Protest counts are based on events that were reported in the local newspapers in Botswana. This, of course, raises the potential problem of missing events that were not covered by the press in Botswana. This potentiality notwithstanding, relying on the reported protests, does allow us to focus on those that were political salient.

Like Botswana, my analysis of the political environment in which universal relief was adopted in Kenya revealed that three factors made Moi politically vulnerable (chapter 4 Munemo, 2007). First, Moi was a 'second' generation leader who lacked the nationalist appeal of a Kenyatta (de Waal 1997) and more significantly, as a Kalenjin, Moi was not a member of the Gikuyu, Embu, and Meru Association (GEMA) - the largest 'faction' in Kenyan African National Union (Widner 1992). Thus, having only ascended to the position of president after Kenyatta's death in August 1978, Moi's position was very tenuous and internally contested.<sup>19</sup>

Second, the fragility of Moi's incumbency was most vividly demonstrated by the coup attempt on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 1982. Although the junior Kenya Air Force officers staging the coup were eventually defeated by loyalist members of the Kenyan Army, the significant public support of the coup by university students (Currie & Ray 1984; *ViVa* 1982), the urban poor and large segments of the Lou (Widner 1992; Currie & Ray 1984) revealed that Moi faced a much wider crisis that belied his characterisation of the situation as the result of a 'few hooligans and misguided youth' (President Moi, *Standard* (Nairobi), August 6, 1982). As is well summarised by Waruhiu (1994: 81), 'the attempted coup served to point out the shortcomings in the personal status of the new President...'

Finally, the deeper crisis of support that Moi faced in Kenya was evident in the election of 1983. What is significant about these elections is that a majority of registered voters chose not to participate. Turnout in the 1983 elections was only 45.9 percent. This figure represented a fall in turnout of 21.5 percent compared with the 1979 elections, which saw 67.3 percent of registered voters participate (Hornsby & Throup 1992). While it is quite likely that the precipitous fall in voter turnout in the 1983 elections was caused by the adoption of *de jure* single-party rule in Kenya, I conjecture that decision to stay away also signaled popular dissatisfaction with Moi.

When incumbents in Zimbabwe adopted universal food aid (1982-84 & 2002-04), they too faced a political milieu in which they were vulnerable to the loss of power. When Zimbabweans lowered the Union Jack on April 18, 1980 and raised their own flag in its place, the sense of achievement that that moment marked however concealed an uneasy unity government between Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and Joshua Nkomo's Patriotic Front-Zimbabwe African People's Union (PF-ZAPU). That the relationship between these two camps was wrought with suspicion was, to an extent, to be expected given the history between the two parties (see Sithole 1999) and their conduct during the historic elections of March 1980 (see Kriger 2005, Sithole 1987).

The acrimonious nature of the independence election meant, in my view, that despite a public face of unity, deep resentment and suspicion still remained between the major players in Zimbabwe. As it was, the discovery of caches of arms around the country, the numerous clashes between former members of ZANLA and ZIPRA in army camps, the beginning of the 'dissident' problem, and the accidental admission by retired L-General Walls (former Commander of the Joint High Command) that the Rhodesian Forces had considered staging a coup to reverse the outcome of elections all heightened Mugabe's sense of vulnerability.

In addition to the coup fears, dissident and alliance problems that Mugabe's new government faced, the period between 1980-82 also saw widespread protest and strike action. Just to summarise some of the findings during this period, in examining primary materials I counted 49 separate protest or strike actions in 1980 and 31 the following year. While the high incidence of protest and strikes could be attributable to the political space produced by independence, this

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<sup>19</sup> See Waruhiu (1994), Widner (1992), Currie & Ray (1984), Karimi & Ochieng (1980), among others, on the Change-the-Constitution-Movement and other challenges to Moi in Kenya prior to 1984.

urban 'militancy' was invariably troublesome for political incumbents who now had to secure their position in both the rural and the urban areas.

As with other longstanding authoritarian incumbents in SSA in the post-1989 period, the growth of a strong pro-democracy movement (the Movement for Democratic Change-MDC) threatened to unseat the ZANU government at the turn of the century (see LeBas 2005). The strength of the MDC and the vulnerability of incumbents in Zimbabwe were evident in two key votes: the referendum in February 2000 and the parliamentary elections in July of 2000. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of April, 1999 the ZANU government finally buckled to pressure from civil society and 'appointed a 400-member Constitutional Commission charged with setting in motion a process that would produce a draft constitution to be submitted to a national referendum' (Sithole 2001). Incumbents got a rude awakening when the MDCs no-vote on the new constitution position carried the day as 54 percent of the electorate voted 'NO' and 44 percent supported ZANU's yes position. In discussing the implications of the referendum result, Sithole (2001) quite correctly stresses that 'the defeat of the February referendum on the draft constitution marked a turning point in Zimbabwean electoral politics.' It marked ZANU's first-ever electoral defeat in its twenty years in power.

With parliamentary elections due later in the year, the governments' defeat in the referendum signalled a real possibility of losing power. I argue that the governments' first response to this political vulnerability was to turn to the highly emotive land-issue in hopes of immediately solidifying its rural electoral base in the lead-up to the elections. By using land reform and repression, the ZANU government managed to retain its parliamentary majority, but the days of 99 percent of the seats were over. Of the 120 seats that were openly contested in the 2000 elections, ZANU retained 63 seats and the MDC won 57 seats.

### **Workfare-adopting Governments**

As expected from my theoretical sketch of the relationship between political incumbency and government behavior, when governments in Botswana (1982-onwards) and Zimbabwe (between 1986-99) chose workfare relief there was a noticeable change in the political milieu faced by political incumbents. In both Botswana (1982-onwards) and Zimbabwe (1986-99) under these conditions of political security, technocratic arguments on the virtues of targeting aid through workfare relief won out in the policy debate.

Although space does not permit a fuller account of these changes, my examination of the micro-political conditions faced in these two countries when they adopted workfare-based relief revealed that incumbents faced no threats from subversive groups, political protests was minimal and incumbents boasted of super-majorities in parliament. For example, in Zimbabwe between 1986-99 the switch to workfare relief coincided with the end of the ZAPU challenge to ZANU hegemony. In December 1987, ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU signed a Unity Accord, which effectively ended open hostilities between the two nationalist parties. The merger gave the new party, ZANU, 99 of the 100 seats in the lower House. A general amnesty was declared for all involved in the violence in Matabeleland and the Midlands provinces of the country. A number of senior ZAPU members were given prominent Cabinet posts, including Joshua Nkomo who became Zimbabwe's second Vice-President.

During this same period, the opposition that emerged was quite ineffectual. The thinning of opposition in the country was reflected in the fact that ZANU stood unopposed in 55 of the 120 constituencies in the 1995 elections. The 1995 poll prompted Sylvester (1995: 403), to tease that 'on 8 and 9 April 1995, Zimbabweans turned out for an election that mostly was not.' It is easy to see why Sylvester found humour in the 1995 elections, the 55 unopposed seats plus the 30 seats Mugabe could appoint, gave ZANU a majority in parliament even before the polls opened on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April, 1995. As discussed earlier, the referendum defeat in early 2000

ended 15 years of political security for ZANU incumbents and resulted in the government reverting back to food aid-based drought relief.

## **Conclusion**

The basic argument suggested here is that to explain how governments respond to droughts in Africa we need to take seriously the micro-political conditions faced by incumbents. This paper shows that variation in relief policy is not determined by macro-variables such as regime type, nor is it accounted for by mid-range variables such as a country's level of bureaucratic capacity or the structure of the agricultural sector. Rather, it contends that it is micro-political conditions, specifically, incumbent vulnerability to loss of power and position, that explain the form taken by drought relief programmes.

Thus, broadly, the main contribution of this paper is to extend the famine studies literature beyond the concern with the factors leading to famine in some countries and not others; the working of rural markets during famine; the effects of famine on different groups; and on peasant hunger and coping strategies, by addressing the determinants of social protection. Specific to the argument suggested here, the paper goes beyond the all too blunt macro-level arguments commonly used in trying to explain government responsiveness. In place of such macro-level explanations I offer a micro-level argument that takes seriously the political conditions on the ground to explain the form of anti-famine protections in Africa.

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