1. Introduction and Objectives

In the 2002-2003 period, Southern Africa experienced the worst food crises seen in the region since 1992. Most assessments of this period of acute food insecurity and vulnerability have understood this phenomenon to be as much a crisis of livelihoods, or of development in general, as a simple food shock. This has resulted from a range of "entangling crises" such as rainfall failure, widespread disruptions in food availability, failures of governance, extreme levels of prevailing poverty and the continuing erosion of livelihood strategies through HIV and AIDS.

A number of studies focusing on this prevailing situation have highlighted the role of HIV and AIDS in undermining livelihoods and food security. However, as noted by ActionAid, there has been inadequate attention given to interventions that mitigate some of the impacts of the epidemic despite widespread recognition of the compounding impact that HIV and AIDS is having on prevailing poverty levels and food security. While the current debates around the ongoing livelihoods crisis in the region and the consequent responses have provided a focus on some of the key issues, a specific understanding of the role of the pandemic is imperative if effective long-term responses to the crisis are to be found. In pursuit of its mission to fight poverty by working with poor people to eliminate the injustices and inequities that undermine livelihoods, ActionAid is currently seeking 'a more robust interrogation of these issues in the search for lasting solutions to the food crisis'.

Building on its experience of working at local level to strengthen livelihoods, ActionAid has endeavoured to raise the awareness of, and adoption and institutionalisation of, 'best' practice in supporting communities affected by HIV and AIDS in ensuring food security. While models and estimates have been made of the overall impact of HIV and AIDS on economies, limited programmatic attention has been given to the impact of the pandemic on the ability of households and communities to meet their own food requirements and sustain themselves. Cognisant of the scale of the epidemic in the sub-region, as well as the long-term duration of the support needs, ActionAid has set out to build a coherent strategy based on experiences of promising initiatives from around the Southern African region, where communities affected by HIV and AIDS have been supported to meet their food requirements and other livelihood needs.

This paper was commissioned to document a small selection of 'best' practices, including a selection from ActionAid itself, and to provide an analysis of linkages between HIV and AIDS and food security policies. These case studies are intended to provide an introduction to issues around HIV and AIDS and food security and to provide examples of how a few organisations have responded to this complex situation. In order to do so, the authors worked with different organisations across the region, which were engaging with these issues in order to provide perspectives of their experiences, document 'best' practice and identify policy recommendations on food security interventions in countries in the sub-region.