

### Box 6.3 Drought relief in Africa: food interventions in Botswana

Like many other African countries, Botswana had to cope with episodes of severe drought in the 1980s. Unlike some other countries (for example, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Sudan), it has succeeded, through appropriate policies, in avoiding the worst effects of famine.

During the 1979-80 drought, relief in Botswana relied almost entirely on transporting food aid into famine-affected areas and distributing it to the destitute. Because of logistic difficulties, this approach was unsuccessful. Beginning in 1980 Botswana implemented a broad, integrated program for drought relief and recovery that combines food supply management, employment generation, and agricultural assistance.

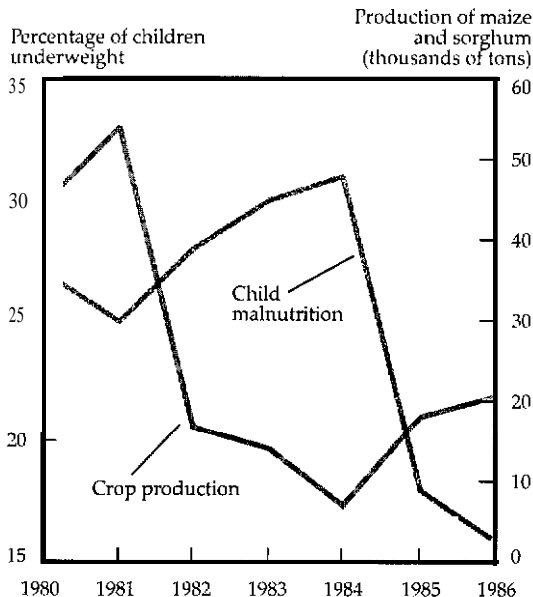
Effective food supply management lies at the core of the program. Botswana received large amounts of food aid in 1982-87, but its relief efforts did not depend on the timely arrival of these supplies. Large-scale imports of food from South Africa were combined with support for rural incomes through public works and grants. Private traders and retailers were used to distribute food. Food prices remained broadly uniform across the country during the drought period.

"Take-home" rations were distributed to all households that contained children under 10, pregnant and lactating women, and destitutes. The government set up a special trucking operation to supply maize to remote areas. Between one-third and two-thirds of the population received free rations during the drought. Intensive feeding was provided for malnourished children at health facilities, and a feeding program for primary school children was maintained throughout. Health measures, including efforts to provide a clean and dependable supply of water, were also important.

Despite large decreases in domestic food production, the program was effective: the percentage of children who were undernourished had fallen by 1986 to less

than predrought levels (see Box figure 6.3). There were no deaths from starvation.

Box figure 6.3 Child malnutrition and crop production in Botswana, 1980 to 1986



Note: The percentage of children underweight, defined here as the percentage of children age 0-59 months below 80 percent of expected weight-for-age, is used as an indicator of malnutrition.

The reporting system for underweight children changed at the end of 1984. As a result, the subsequent drop in malnutrition may be slightly overaccentuated.

Source: Morgan forthcoming.

## **Box 6.5 Drought relief in Africa: public employment in Botswana**

The food interventions under the Drought Relief Programme in Botswana that were discussed in Box 6.3 were complemented by the Labor-Based Relief Programme (LBRP), which provided the rural poor in drought-stricken areas with opportunities for earning cash income on village-improvement projects. Although the program fell short of offering guaranteed employment, it did provide employment for between 60,000 and 90,000 persons each year during the drought period. Wages were set high enough to provide a meaningful return yet low enough so as not to attract the relatively well-off. Village committees identified projects and selected participants, more than 80 percent of whom were women. It has been estimated that LBRP projects replaced almost one-third of the losses in rural incomes caused by crop failures between 1983 and 1985.

In addition to stabilizing incomes and generating purchasing power, the program protected rural assets: the poor did not have to sell cattle or other assets to survive. Furthermore, people who might have been forced to migrate were able to stay. The percentage of traditional household farms with arable land fell by less

than 17 percent, and the total number of households engaged in farming declined by less than 5 percent. The productive value of the works created was considerable. Other measures, including distribution of free seed and grants for destumping, clearing, and plowing arable land, facilitated the transition from relief to recovery.

Taken as a whole, the Drought Relief Programme has been successful in preventing human suffering and preserving the productive potential of the rural economy in the midst of a severe and protracted crisis. Although Botswana is rich in comparison with other Saharan African countries, the critical element in the program's success was the government's commitment to protecting the poor. The Drought Relief Programme has become part of the election platform for the ruling party, whose constituency is found mainly in rural areas. Components of the drought program—food distribution, for instance—have become permanent features of the benefits entitlement system. This means that the institutions and infrastructure will already be in place when drought threatens again.