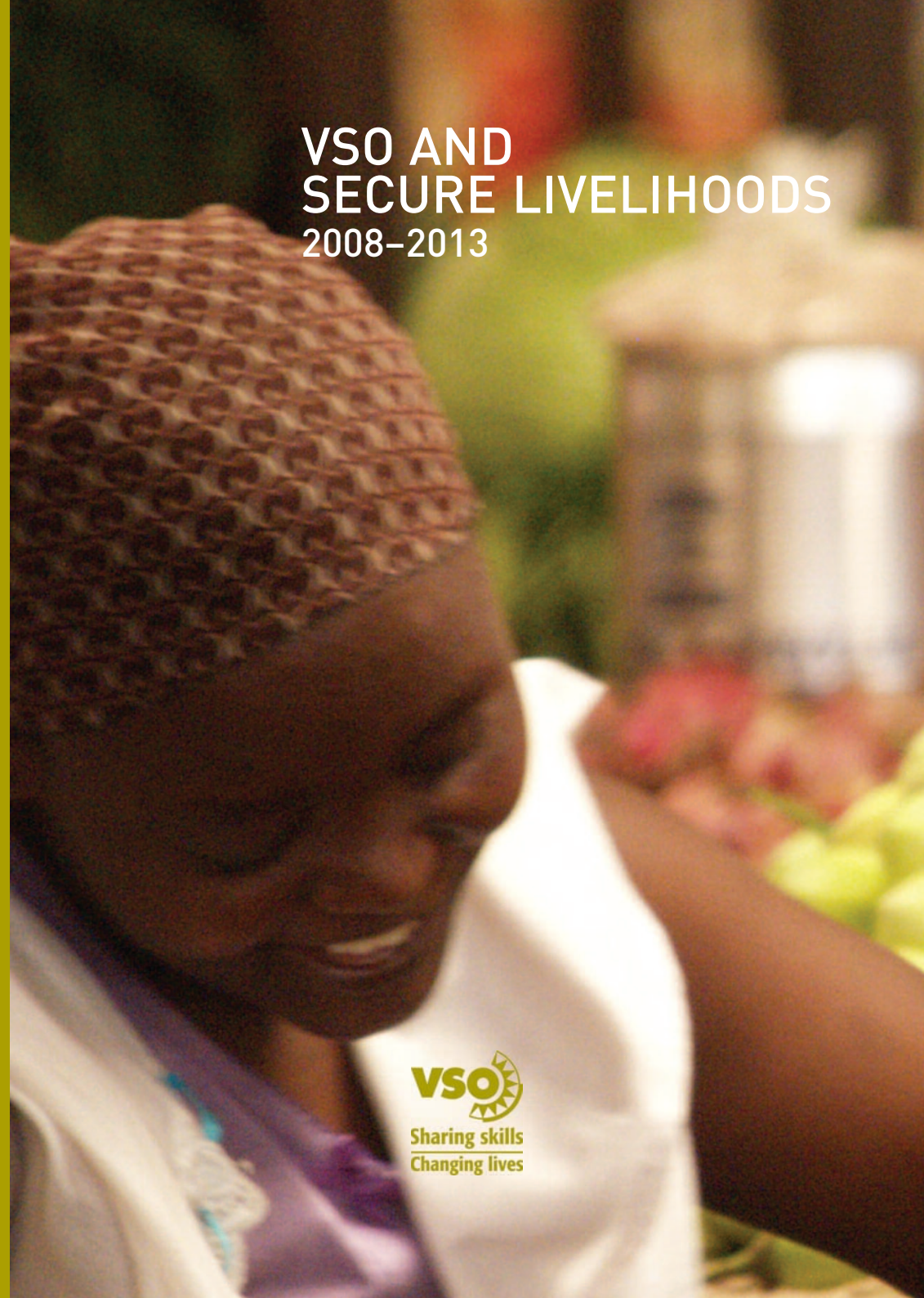


VSO AND  
SECURE LIVELIHOODS  
2008-2013



# CONTENTS

<b>VSO AND SECURE LIVELIHOODS</b>	<b>4</b>
More food, more income and more control for disadvantaged people	6
VSO's objectives	7
Market chains and value chains	11
Learning centres on market chain approaches	12
Key issues	14
<b>WHO VSO WORKS WITH</b>	<b>15</b>
People	15
Partners	15
The private sector	15
<b>HOW VSO WORKS FOR CHANGE</b>	<b>17</b>
Focusing on poor and marginalised groups	17
Improving access to services	18
Improving the institutional environment	19
<b>GLOSSARY OF LIVELIHOODS TERMS USED IN THIS DOCUMENT</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>23</b>

## PHOTOGRAPHERS' CREDITS

Page 1/9/10/13 ©VSO/Ben Langdon, page 5/14 ©VSO/Simon Rawles  
page 16 ©VSO/Annie Bungeroth E&OE

# INTRODUCTION

*VSO and Secure Livelihoods: 2008–2013* is one of a series of position papers outlining the principles and vision underpinning VSO's work in each of our six development goals: HIV and AIDS, Disability, Health, Education, Secure Livelihoods and Participation and Governance.

The document aims to provide a clear framework and rationale for our Secure Livelihoods work with programme partners and other organisations to ensure poor and marginalised women, men and young people get more food, more income and more control over the way they make a living.

*VSO and Secure Livelihoods: 2008–2013* is presented in three main sections. The first section gives an outline of current development challenges we address within our Secure Livelihoods work and an overview of our approach. The second section describes the people and organisations VSO works with and the third section outlines the strategies we use to bring about change and examples of our work in practice. In addition, we have included a glossary to explain terms relating to livelihoods that are used in the document.

VSO is committed to learning from our experience and using that learning to improve our practice. We hope to continue to refine and improve our approach as our experience grows during the lifetime of this paper.

# VSO AND SECURE LIVELIHOODS

*Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.*

**Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25, 1948**

VSO aims to ensure poor and marginalised people are able to access their fundamental human right to a livelihood. Nearly one billion people worldwide live in poverty on less than one dollar a day and over three billion people struggle to meet basic needs on incomes of less than two dollars a day. There is still widespread and persistent inequality which has the worst impact upon disadvantaged groups such as women, young people, people with disabilities, older people, ethnic minorities and people living with HIV and AIDS.

It is now widely recognised that poverty reduction requires the kind of economic growth that enhances the ability of poor people to participate in economic activity and benefit from it. For poor people to benefit, they need access to land, productive assets, jobs, markets and infrastructural support. Poverty is dynamic – people move in and out of poverty. Those living on low incomes are highly susceptible to shocks, such as a poor harvest, illness in the family or price rises, that would mean they could no longer meet basic needs for survival.

VSO works in long-term partnerships with local organisations to build their capacity and promote skill-sharing through national and international volunteering. Our work in Secure Livelihoods brings together a broad portfolio of experience in food security and production, enterprise development and natural resource management, developed during VSO's 50 years of working with volunteers in developing countries. Through the integration of CUSO<sup>1</sup> and VSO programmes in 2008, VSO has gained a wealth of expertise in environmental governance, management of natural resources and employment opportunities for young people.

---

<sup>1</sup> Formerly known as Canadian University Service Overseas, the acronym CUSO was subsequently used to represent the wider variety of skills and experience of the volunteers. The new organisation formed by the merger of CUSO and VSO Canada is known as CUSO-VSO.



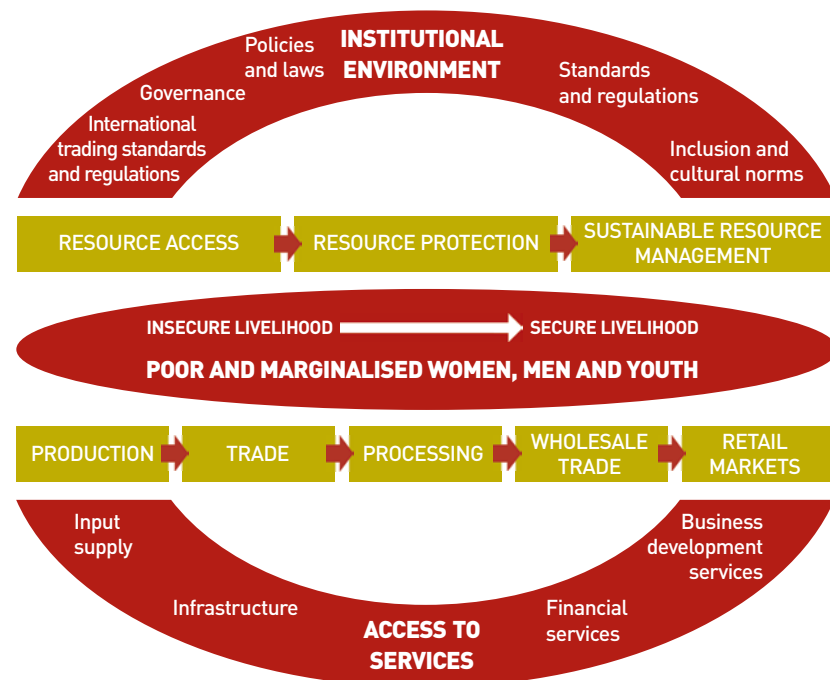
## MORE FOOD, MORE INCOME AND MORE CONTROL FOR DISADVANTAGED PEOPLE

*A Secure Livelihood means having access to the income and resources necessary to meet basic needs and survive shocks. It also means having more control over how the living is made.*

**VSO definition, 2007**

Using participatory analysis of the current livelihoods of poor and marginalised groups, VSO builds upon their strengths to identify opportunities and remove barriers to improving their ways of making a living. This includes looking at their ability to access natural resources, to protect them and to manage them sustainably to improve food security and incomes, as well as looking at the markets to which they are linked.

In addition to working at the community level, we seek to ensure challenges in the wider environment are addressed in a holistic and coordinated way. This includes access to services, such as financial services and technical advice, and the institutional environment, which governs the situations within which poor people earn a living. Our approach is summarised in the diagram below.



## VSO'S OBJECTIVES

In our Secure Livelihoods work, we have two objectives:

- improving food and income security through sustainable natural resource management
- increasing poor people's access to and participation in markets.

Opportunities to engage in markets frequently depend upon access to and availability of natural resources, particularly in rural communities. So in countries where our programmes focus on rural areas, there are overlaps and linkages between our work on sustainable natural resource management for food and income security, and access to and participation in markets for disadvantaged people.

### Improving food and income security for poor and marginalised women, men and young people through sustainable natural resource management

Rising food prices and threats posed by climate change are adding to pressures affecting poor people's livelihoods. Those who are dependent upon access to land and natural resources such as water, forests and fisheries now face increased competition for those resources. These people suffer most from unsustainable natural resource management practices, such as deforestation, pollution and over-fishing. Very often, they lack information on policies and plans affecting their livelihoods and are unable to participate effectively in decision-making that affects their access to land and natural resources, as well as their right to make a living. When traditional livelihoods strategies are no longer viable, there is often little support for poor people to diversify and find new sources of income.

VSO will work for change by:

- building understanding of the environmental and social impact of livelihoods that are dependent upon natural resources
- developing partnerships with organisations that support poor and marginalised women, men and young people to improve their food and income security so that these organisations can improve their technical and organisational capacity
- supporting partner organisations to ensure poor and marginalised women, men and young people have access to land and natural resources, to protect those natural resources, and to raise community awareness of policy and planning information for natural resource management

- ensuring organisations we work with support the empowerment of poor and marginalised women, men and young people and are responsive to their concerns in relation to governance of natural resources and can represent them effectively in decision-making
- building capacity of partners to develop sustainable alternative livelihoods opportunities where existing livelihoods strategies are no longer viable due to environmental degradation
- working with civil society organisations, private sector organisations, research institutes and governments on improving policies and practices on sustainable natural resource management for food and income security.

### **Increasing access to and participation in market chains for poor and marginalised women, men and young people**

Poor people often identify problems with markets as a factor contributing to poverty. They are often excluded from markets because of the conditions governing participation, such as price, volume and quality requirements, distances to markets, a lack of market information or connections with influential traders. They may lack an understanding of how markets work and the ability to overcome the unequal power relationships that also govern participation. Although changing consumption trends globally present new opportunities for poor people in high-value markets, they are often unable to participate on an equal basis.

VSO will work for change by:

- researching and building holistic understanding of markets with which poor and marginalised people have links, using participatory techniques to map the structure, key actors (including private businesses) and changes in value of a product along the market chain
- working with market actors to identify barriers to poor women, men and young people's participation in markets as well as opportunities for them to gain greater or more secure benefits
- developing partnerships with and building capacity of organisations working strategically within market chains, and through these partnerships enabling poor and marginalised women, men and young people to access markets
- ensuring the partner organisations we work with support the empowerment of poor and marginalised women, men and young people, are responsive to their concerns in relation to markets, and can represent them effectively

- facilitating increased cooperation and communications between market actors, private businesses, partner organisations, government service providers and other market stakeholders
- supporting, in collaboration with private enterprises, the development of market initiatives that seek to increase the share of product value for poor and marginalised women, men and young people
- working with civil society organisations, private sector organisations, research institutes and governments to improve policies and practices and to advocate the removal of barriers that prevent poor and marginalised people from developing small businesses and gaining access to markets.





## MARKET CHAINS AND VALUE CHAINS

A market chain is a chain of people, activities or enterprises – from producer to retailer – that delivers a particular product to the consumer. A value chain focuses on achieving higher rewards for the final product, through market-focused collaboration between market chain actors, the sharing of profits between market chain actors and good governance within the chain.

Market chain and value chain approaches are based on analysis of the market for particular products, looking at the structure of the market, the actors involved and the points at which it changes in value, to identify the constraints on and opportunities for poor people. VSO aims to enhance the functioning of the market chain so that there are more and better opportunities for poor people – for example, more jobs, higher prices paid for produce and better conditions of trading.

### IN PRACTICE

Farmers in a remote rural area of Malawi were getting low prices for tangerines because they were relying on local middlemen for sales. With support from a VSO volunteer, a market research study was carried out and identified three ways by which they could make a better living from their produce:

- by satisfying the demand for tangerines in urban areas, some 150km away
- by grading fruit in order to achieve higher prices
- by getting support for transport costs to reach the more lucrative urban markets.

A fund was set up enabling the farmers to obtain loans for transport and they received training on grading and marketing their produce. The farmers are now selling tangerines in city markets at six times the price they were previously receiving. They have also been supported by the volunteer to lobby market authorities and district officials to stop other market vendors extorting illegal charges. And finally, with market information, they are now able to negotiate better prices from local middlemen.

## LEARNING CENTRES ON MARKET CHAIN APPROACHES

Working with Accenture, our corporate partner and Secure Livelihoods Goal Champion, VSO is piloting the implementation of market chain approaches to increase incomes for poor and marginalised groups in learning centres in Tanzania, Malawi and Cambodia. Volunteers are working with market chain actors, including governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and private sector organisations, to improve the functioning of the chains.

### IN PRACTICE

In Zanzibar, where 40 per cent of the rural population is living in poverty, there is great potential for local farmers to supply the growing tourist industry with local produce. Currently, 80 per cent of vegetables are imported from the mainland to meet local demand. A market assessment team led by VSO volunteers found that weak provision of support services such as inputs, advice, information and finance were contributing to low yields, short seasonal availability, poor quality and high wastage of produce. Opportunities were identified for VSO to support producers to improve quality and quantity of production and thereby gain access to market channels supplying local higher-value markets and hotels and restaurants. To achieve this, VSO is working with farmers' associations to increase their understanding of market chain opportunities and to facilitate market linkages.

Maurice Kwame is a VSO enterprise and marketing adviser working with local government in Zanzibar to support local women's groups. He says: "We've helped the women look for markets. Before, they didn't have the means or power to go and negotiate in the marketplace. Now that we have got the women working more closely as a group, they have stronger bargaining power. The market chain is working well." Negotiations are under way for two more communities to sell directly to a consortium of hotels.

Raphael Mhule Jeremiah is a member of UWAMWIMA, a Zanzibari farmers' group supported by VSO. Raphael says: "We get together to share problems, support each other, find out who's growing what so that we can prepare for the market. We want to coordinate our growing so that we can supply hotels with the produce that tourists want, like spinach."



## KEY ISSUES

### VSO and climate change

VSO is committed to tackling climate change. We aim to integrate analysis of climate change issues into our programme work in developing countries within all our development goals. We will carry out research to determine VSO's longer-term response to environment and climate change issues. As part of the Secure Livelihoods goal, VSO will focus support for our partners on helping poor and marginalised people adapt to the impact of climate change and cope with its effect upon their ability to make a living. We recognise it is also vital that we cut our own carbon emissions by reducing international flights by staff, reducing energy and water consumption, recycling more and sending less to landfill, and adopting environmentally friendly purchasing and procurement policies.

### VSO and the global food crisis

From 2006 until mid-2008, there was a rapid increase in food prices. This was closely linked to rises in fuel prices but was also the result of a range of complex interrelated factors, including climate change, population increases and increases in standards of living due to economic growth. The impact of the price rises differs in each country where VSO works. We believe that a long-term approach is needed to tackle the root causes of disadvantage, which are being exacerbated by current market dynamics for food. This approach will be focused on the twin objectives as set out in this paper: improved food and income security through sustainable natural resource management, and increased access to and participation in markets. By achieving these objectives, we will support poor and marginalised people to realise their rights to adequate food and livelihoods.



## WHO VSO WORKS WITH

### People

We focus our work on people who are on low incomes and vulnerable to poverty, and poor people who are at risk of stigma and discrimination. We believe our target groups should be equal participants in the development process and we seek to ensure their involvement in the design, planning and review of our programmes. As women and girls are often over-represented among the poorest people, VSO expects that the majority benefiting from our work in Secure Livelihoods will be women and girls.

Although VSO works in both urban and rural locations, currently our Secure Livelihoods programmes have a greater rural focus due to the high incidence of rural poverty and our greater experience of working in rural areas. Geographical priorities are determined by VSO in each country where we work, taking into account poverty indicators and local conditions.

### Partners

VSO's partners range from community-based organisations, local and national NGOs, to government and private sector organisations. The majority of our partners are not-for-profit organisations but we also work with commercial organisations if it is clear that such relationships will benefit the poorest groups.

VSO also supports our partners to work with us in our other development goals. Our programmes in these areas enable VSO to facilitate cross-sectoral working and a holistic approach to improving the livelihoods of poor and marginalised people.

VSO aims to enhance communications and collaboration between our partners and other stakeholders working at community, service provision and institutional levels to improve coordination, to build trust and cooperation and to break down barriers that restrict poor people's opportunities to enhance their livelihoods. We recognise that, in order to have a holistic approach, we need to develop strategic partnerships with governments and national and international organisations.

### The private sector

Private sector development is crucial to economic growth. By creating jobs and producing goods and services that are sold on or exported, private firms

and farms are responsible for a large part of a country's economy. In most developing countries, informal work in the private sector is, apart from agriculture, the main means of survival for poor people. Very often, they work in harsh conditions for low pay and their jobs are insecure. Policy and institutional reforms are needed to improve both how the private sector functions and the environment in which businesses operate.

We aim to increase our own and our partners' understanding of the role of private sector companies in contributing to the growth of a local economy and the opportunities for poor people to gain a better income from their involvement in markets.

By facilitating dialogue within the market chain regarding constraints and opportunities, VSO aims to design interventions that will support the development of private businesses only if this will provide direct benefits to poor and marginalised people without making unsustainable demands on the natural environment. The benefits provided could include job creation or improved purchase prices and/or contract conditions for produce from poor people.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> For more information on VSO's engagement with the private sector, please see *The Private Sector, Development and Volunteering*, VSO 2007, which can be obtained from VSO.

## HOW VSO WORKS FOR CHANGE

### FOCUSING ON POOR AND MARGINALISED GROUPS

VSO recognises poverty and disadvantage are experienced differently by different groups. Thus, specific analysis, support and approaches are needed to ensure our work includes all poor and marginalised groups and empowers them to gain more control over their livelihoods. Particular attention must be given to reaching groups whose vulnerability is increased by circumstances that affect their ability to earn a living or who may not be able to access mainstream services due to limited mobility, illness, age or other reasons.

VSO therefore works in partnership with a range of organisations, some that target people who are on low incomes and vulnerable to poverty, and others that work with people whose incomes are limited by stigma and discrimination, such as women and girls, young people, indigenous communities, people living with HIV and AIDS and people with disabilities.

Ways in which we work towards an inclusive approach include:

- advocating for service providers to adopt policies and practices that recognise the rights of all people to access services
- involving poor and marginalised people in the design of appropriate programmes that respond to their concerns and enable them to have control over their livelihoods
- supporting our partners to provide training and technical support to poor and marginalised groups to make the most of their skills and opportunities for work
- using our expertise and resources to reach people living with HIV and AIDS and people with disabilities and to facilitate access for social protection support where needed.

Examples of our work:

- In **Mozambique**, VSO has helped families affected by HIV and AIDS to get training in low-input farming and livestock management techniques, as well as providing small grants. This has enabled the families to improve levels of crop and livestock production to meet their food needs.

- In **Kenya**, VSO volunteers have negotiated with microfinance institutions to persuade them to provide loans for people with disabilities so they can start a business. With training from VSO, over 1,000 people with disabilities have taken out loans, thus enabling them to contribute to the family income.
- In **Zambia**, VSO volunteers have worked with local NGOs to enable households of people living with HIV and AIDS (70 per cent headed by women) to access food supplies and thus improve the effectiveness of anti retroviral therapy. Men and women who were previously too weak to work are now able to produce their own food.

### IMPROVING ACCESS TO SERVICES

The lack of key support services, such as technical advice, transport, farming resources, market information and microfinance, is frequently identified as a barrier to poor people making the most of opportunities they have. VSO works with local partners to support poor people by:

- improving partners' capacity to provide, or facilitate access to, input supplies, financial services and business development services
- supporting the internal capacity development of partner organisations, such as strengthening planning and management functions, ensuring robust finance and human resources systems and developing fundraising skills
- building commitment and skills of partner staff to consult poor and marginalised groups and be responsive to their concerns
- developing initiatives through partner organisations that build on market opportunities for poor and marginalised groups and/or increase their share of product value
- facilitating access to social safety nets in respect of food security and nutrition for the most vulnerable groups
- developing inclusive ways of working and removing barriers that may prevent poor and marginalised groups from accessing their services.

Examples of our work:

- In **Ghana**, VSO and a local partner have piloted a community-based system of training and advisory services, using female volunteer workers to help poor women farmers obtain agricultural training and advice. Women in seven communities have reported reduced livestock losses since receiving training on livestock management.

- In **Kenya**, support from VSO volunteers in eight youth polytechnics has built organisational capacity and has helped them improve the quality of training and develop demand-driven short courses. Enrolments have increased by up to 100 per cent in some polytechnics and 65 per cent of graduates from four of the youth polytechnics are running their own businesses.
- In **Malawi**, VSO volunteer irrigation officers are supporting local government and NGOs in six districts to improve irrigation of crops. Over 3,000 smallholder farmers are now able to produce a staple crop during the long dry season, with some farmers' groups achieving a surplus for sale.
- In **Mongolia**, VSO's support has significantly increased the quality and accessibility of business development services in three rural areas, enabling small businesses to access credit and financial grants as well as to expand and take on new staff.
- In **Tanzania**, support from a VSO volunteer has enabled an important business information centre to become a self-sustaining business service provider. Clients pay for services such as IT training or HIV and AIDS information, enabling the centre to meet monthly running costs including salaries for two staff.

### IMPROVING THE INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Factors in the institutional environment often create barriers that prevent poor people having more control over their livelihoods. These include policies and laws that do not recognise their concerns, trading standards and regulations that they are unable to comply with, and less visible cultural norms that restrict their opportunities, such as having to pay bribes to facilitate transactions or discrimination on the basis of age, gender, ethnicity, disability or HIV status. VSO works through national coalitions and local partnerships to influence governments and private sector organisations to change their policies and practices by:

- supporting our partners to represent better the views of poor and marginalised people in the development of policies, laws, standards and regulations
- working with government at local level to ensure the implementation of national level policies and standards that protect poor and marginalised people's access to natural resources, enhance their ability to manage natural resources sustainably and increase their food and income security and participation in markets

- tackling poor governance and 'informal' rules, based on local cultural norms, that exclude poor and marginalised people
- developing understanding of how international trading standards and agreements affect poor people and addressing barriers that prevent their equal participation in markets.

Examples of our work:

- In **Cambodia**, VSO volunteers have worked closely with the national Fisheries Administration to support fisheries reform so that poor people don't suffer from over-fishing or poor resource management. The government now recognises the importance of involving local communities in planning, and community-based organisations are officially recognised in fisheries management.
- In **Latin America and the Caribbean**, CUSO has supported the development of the innovative Iberoamerican Model Forest Network for more participatory community natural resource management, based on ownership by local stakeholders and their involvement in the management of these resources.
- In **Nigeria**, building upon CUSO's solid foundation of experience and partnerships, VSO is participating in a five-year programme involving the Nigerian government, Canada International Development Agency, civil society stakeholders and science research groups to develop a National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy for Nigeria and to engage stakeholders in climate change action, research and learning.
- In the **Philippines**, VSO volunteers have helped to protect valuable coastal resources. Fish wardens, supported by local government, have been appointed in two locations and enforcement teams set up. These will ensure local fishermen are able to fish sustainably. This has resulted in a substantial reduction in illegal fishing.
- In **Zambia**, a volunteer with media and advocacy skills is working with Zambia Land Alliance (ZLA) to promote more equal access to land for disadvantaged people. The ZLA has influenced the government to acknowledge the importance of a land policy with safeguards to protect poor and marginalised people.

## GLOSSARY OF LIVELIHOODS TERMS USED IN THIS DOCUMENT

**Business development services** – advice on planning, accountancy, book-keeping, legal issues and marketing, as well as technical services such as training for specific trades and providing access to improved technologies.

**Community-based natural resource management** – management of natural resources by jointly agreed plans, focusing on the local community's perspective and involving cooperation and support from other stakeholders, such as local government, government agencies and non-governmental organisations.

**Economic growth** – increase in capacity to produce goods and services, usually measured in terms of increases in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – the total market value of all goods and services produced within a country during a year.

**Enterprise development** – supporting the start-up and growth of private sector businesses.

**Food security** – “when all people, at all times, have access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”.<sup>3</sup> In VSO's work, the term 'food security' usually refers to work supporting increased food production through improved agricultural and livestock practices.

**Financial services** – includes savings, loans and insurance services.

**Informal work** – casual labour, self-employed individuals or small businesses that are not registered or regulated by any economic or legal institutions.

**Market** – formal or informal structure in which buyers exchange goods, labour

---

<sup>3</sup> Definition from 1996 World Food Summit.

or services for cash or other goods. Defined by forces of supply and demand, rather than geographical location.

**Private sector** – businesses or organisations run for profit by private individuals and not subject to government control.

**Social protection** – policies and plans that reduce economic and social vulnerability of poor and marginalised groups through food, cash and other benefits.

**Sustainable natural resource management** – management of natural resources, such as land, water, soil, plants and animals, with a particular focus on how management affects the quality of life for both present and future generations. Involves management of the natural resources themselves (soil, water, trees, fish etc) and the institutional and policy arrangements for managing those resources.

VSO's work in developing countries is supported by VSO Federation Members and Resource Partners in Canada, India, Ireland, Kenya, the Netherlands, the Philippines and the United Kingdom who recruit volunteers from many countries, raise funds to support our work and develop partnerships with local businesses to promote skills-sharing and fundraising.

VSO currently has Secure Livelihoods programmes in 17 countries in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. Through CUSO-VSO, we will be extending our outreach to a further six countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

VSO uses a range of delivery activities, including:

- international volunteering options: long-term and short-term specialist assignments, youth volunteering and youth exchange programmes
- community, national and Diaspora volunteering initiatives
- workshops and training
- policy research and advocacy
- development awareness
- study tours, partner-to-partner links and work placements
- small grants.

For more information on VSO's work, see [www.vsointernational.org](http://www.vsointernational.org)

### **Acknowledgements**

VSO's work in Secure Livelihoods has received generous support for strategy development and implementation from Accenture, our Secure Livelihoods Goal Champion. VSO has also received long-term support for implementation through our Programme Partnership Arrangement with the UK Department for International Development (DFID).

The development of VSO's approach has drawn substantially upon current pro-poor approaches to market development, in particular, the work of Practical Action ([www.practicalaction.org](http://www.practicalaction.org)) and the Springfield Centre ([www.springfieldcentre.com](http://www.springfieldcentre.com)).

---

Author: Louise Davis

Special thanks for support in preparing this paper to: Alison Griffith (Practical Action), Jo Zaremba (Oxfam), John Barrett (DFID), Jane Clarke (DFID), VSO Secure Livelihoods staff, VSO Programme Learning and Advocacy Team, VSO Secure Livelihoods Goal Committee, CUSO-VSO colleagues.

---