Preface

This book arises from the involvement of its authors in the Regional Hunger and Vulnerability Programme (RHVP) in southern Africa, funded principally by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) with co-funding from the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID). RHVP began in mid-2005 and its first three-year phase of funding ended in mid-2008. A second phase lasting for two years through to 2010 has since got underway. RHVP was created in order to move forward the policy debate about how best to tackle persistent poverty and vulnerability, following a period of recurrent food security crises in the southern African region necessitating frequent recourse to emergency responses with their attendant high and unpredictable costs. By 2005, many personnel in DFID were becoming persuaded that regular social transfers to the persistently poorest and most vulnerable (‘predictable funding for predictable needs’) would avoid a considerable proportion of emergency responses, the latter then only being required for catastrophic events with wide adverse impacts.

RHVP was set up with three overlapping components, which were support to vulnerability assessment capabilities, evidence gathering (the research component), and policy advice and advocacy (feeding new ideas into policy processes in country governments). The authors of this book acted as mentors of the research component and established a regional network of country researchers who conducted an initial analysis of knowledge gaps and then proceeded to explore these gaps through the medium of case study social protection schemes and programmes. The research component was known as the Regional Evidence Building Agenda, and it established a template for undertaking case study research comprising six modules, which were vulnerability, targeting, coordination and coverage, cost-effectiveness, asset effects and market impacts. These same modules also formed the basis for comparative lesson learning across case studies. This book retains this core framework as originally devised for RHVP, with the modules becoming the theme chapters in the first part of the book, and a selection of the schemes and programmes that were studied providing the case studies in the second half of the book.

The work conducted under the auspices of RHVP since 2005 can be accessed at the programme website known as www.wahenga.net. Wahenga
is a Swahili word meaning ‘those who can be relied upon to give sound advice’. The website is a useful resource for all matters related to hunger, vulnerability and social protection in southern Africa and more widely in sub-Saharan Africa, and includes commissioned studies, outputs from the research programme, training materials, news items, video clips, and links to other sites covering the same or closely adjacent topics. In the early phases of the programme there was some debate about whether hunger and vulnerability (implying a specific focus on secure access to food) was quite the same as social protection (with its broader remits about rights, social justice, labour standards and so on). It soon became evident that little is achieved by treating this as an important distinction, and this is illustrated especially well by predictable cash transfers to the extreme poor that are becoming mainstream in social protection in Africa, and which have the fundamental purpose of reducing the chronic hunger and vulnerability of their recipient families. The book provides information on larger scale predictable social transfer programmes outside southern Africa in the form of boxed examples, including the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) in Ethiopia, the Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP) in Kenya and the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme in Ghana.

The authors of the book owe a substantial debt to DFID and RHVP for providing the institutional framework, the logistical support, and the funding that enabled the research underlying the book to take place. Needless to say, the book represents the views of its authors, not those of RHVP or DFID. Two individuals deserve special mention and these are Nicholas Freeland, the director of RHVP, and John Rook, the programme manager, both of whom were instrumental in creating the space that allowed the research component of RHVP to flourish, and in supporting it throughout the evidence gathering process. From 2006 to 2008, RHVP was organized in part on the basis of ‘country coordinators’ who acted as the facilitators and networkers on social protection in each participating country (Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia, Zimbabwe). The country coordinators were critical to the success of the research and we are very grateful to them. They were Chaka Ntsane (Lesotho), Duncan Samikwa (Malawi), Anabela Mabota (Mozambique), Patricia Musi (Swaziland), Emmanuel Ngulube and Chosi Nkhata (Zambia), and Ngonidzashe Mararike (Zimbabwe). The case studies and thematic chapters of the book represent the final synthesis of material that was collected and written up by country researchers. The institutions involved were: for Lesotho, the Institute of Southern African Studies, National University; for Malawi, Wadonda Consult and Centre for Social Research, University of Malawi; for Mozambique, several independent researchers; for Swaziland,
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It seems appropriate to end this preface on an optimistic note. When RHVP started its work, there was great confusion concerning the best way forward for achieving more secure access to food and basic needs for the poorest of the poor in sub-Saharan Africa. Strongly polarized stances were at that time being adopted with respect to such questions as needs against rights, food against cash, conditionality against non-conditionality, targeting against universal provision and so on. In the intervening period, these discussions have moved on, and it is apparent that there is no single and definitive solution to providing effective social protection, but rather a range of options that can potentially be drawn upon in a lot of different ways in order to achieve social assistance and livelihood promotion outcomes. While the shift from emergency food to predictable cash constitutes a fundamental change in thinking, it is not the end of the story, and the future provides great scope for innovation in the effective provision of social protection in Africa. By examining patterns of experience and distinguishing features that work from those that plainly do not, it is hoped that this book can make some small contribution to this quest.