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MONITORING HUMAN AND SOCIAL INDICATORS

IN THE ADJUSTMENT PROCESS:

FOOD AND NUTRITION SURVEILLANCE

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MONITORING AND STATISTICS FOR ADJUSTMENT

1. There has been an increasing recognition in the last few years of the devastating effects of economic recession on poor and vulnerable groups, especially children, and of the importance of ensuring that the current structural adjustment policies that governments are obliged to carry out are so designed that these damaging effects are reduced to the minimum. The objective of monitoring human and social indicators in the adjustment process is therefore to protect vulnerable population groups, such as young children, from the negative impact of structural adjustment policies. Such protection involves safeguarding and monitoring children's health and, in particular, their nutritional status.

2. Given the very limited organizational and statistical capacity of the majority of the countries in which the monitoring will take place it is evident that only simple mechanisms will work in national programmes in Africa to monitor trends on a regular, frequent and disaggregated basis and bring them to the attention of the highest level of responsible officials. The macro-economic indicators normally used for monitoring economic adjustment are unable to capture the changes occurring in child welfare. Reliance on these data not only completely neglects non-economic factors, but they are also inadequate, because of the variables selected and the level of aggregation, to capture those processes which affect children, especially in poor households.

3. Efficient monitoring of changes in child welfare for the purpose of policy making requires the regular collection and analysis of three sorts of indicators - status, process and output ^{1/}. Status indicators, measuring success or failure in the programme to protect vulnerable groups would consist primarily of the nutritional and health status of children. They would include particularly:

- I. Indicators of nutritional status for the under fives and for children entering primary school.
- II. Low birth weight.
- III. Infant and under-five mortality rates, and
- IV. Indicators of morbidity.

 1/ The following section is based on the chapter by Frances Stewart on "Monitoring and Statistics" in the publication Adjustment with a Human Face edited by G.A. Cornia, R. Jolly and F. Stewart.

The indicators of low birth weight and nutritional status are particularly suitable for monitoring adjustment because they will show deterioration in a short time span.

4. Process indicators would include the prevalence of breast-feeding, access to and use of oral rehydration therapy, immunization coverage, availability of clear water and access to health services. Regular monitoring of these and other variables is needed to assess the long-term development strategy for improving the human condition. However, from an adjustment perspective, information is particularly needed on the items which are likely to change with economic recession, adjustment, and policy interventions. Input indicators would include real incomes of low-income groups; real government expenditures per head on social services, maternal health, etc.

5. It is essential to disaggregate the indicators particularly if interventions are targeted to the specially needy. Without disaggregation policies may be devised which do not effectively reach the children most at risk. The appropriate disaggregation will vary among countries. However, it should include broad regional and provincial breakdowns with sufficient socio-economic detail to identify the nature of the vulnerable groups, e.g. formal or informal sector wage earners, shanty town dwellers, rural and urban populations, recent migrants, cultural and ethnic minorities, etc.

6. At present, relevant information on vulnerable groups is usually published randomly if at all and often after considerable delay. An ideal system considerably in advance of that prevailing in most developing countries is described by Frances Stewart in the publication "Adjustment with a Human Face". In it she suggests the collection, analysis, publication and wide dissemination of a set of leading indicators of social stress. This data set would be published every two or three months and would include the most recent data both on actual development, e.g. levels of malnutrition; and prospects, making use of systems like the FAO system of early warning on food shortfalls.

7. Each of the indicators that have been mentioned would be suitable for inclusion in this set of leading indicators of social stress and something is possible even in countries with the weakest of statistical bases. Frances Stewart gives the example of what could be possible in a country like Ghana where, although many of these data are not available at all or only after long intervals and with considerable margins of errors and bias, there are still enough data to provide a useful set of indicators. In the case of Ghana, the indicators and sources suggested were:

<u>Indicator</u>	<u>Source</u>
1. Measures of second and third degree malnutrition	Catholic Relief Services
2. Cases of kwashiorkor and marasmus	Major hospitals
3. Proportion of low birth weight	Major hospitals
4. Deaths from measles	Clinics/hospitals
5. Standing crop and crop conditions	Farmers' own assessment
6. Food prices in regional markets throughout the country	Ministry of Agriculture
7. Rainfall	Ministry of Agriculture
8. In some countries it might be possible to add infant and child mortality; changes in sales of assets; changes in indebtedness; changes in migration; data from the FAO early-warning system for food supplies, nutritional status of school entrants; real incomes in the urban informal sector; the proportion of household expenditure spent on food in low-income families, etc.	
9. Developing leading indicators of social stress along these lines would fulfill a number of purposes:	
(a) Provide early warning and assist in monitoring programmes to protect vulnerable groups.	
(b) Achieve collection of data on the social situation on a regular basis with the dissemination of a minimal data set in the national press, radio and television and the Government's regular official publications.	
(c) Give prominence to information on the situation of vulnerable groups equal to that given to economic data.	
(d) Provide an incentive to search for and develop better data.	

INTERAGENCY FOOD AND NUTRITION SURVEILLANCE PROGRAMME (FNS)

10. Monitoring nutrition, particularly of vulnerable groups, is one of the best methods of assessing how people are being affected and how compensatory measures are working. The growing concern with the human dimension of economic adjustment policies has underlined the urgent need to monitor changes in nutritional status in as many countries as possible. The nutritional status

of young children is probably the most sensitive indicator of sudden changes in food security and health status, acting as an early warning signal of distress, ill health, famine and, eventually, death.

11. These ideas have been receiving increasing support within the UN system, from a meeting of the ACC Sub-Committee on Nutrition (SCN) in Tokyo, in April 1986, to one of the World Food Council in Rome in May 1987. There have been important public statements on these themes by the Presidents of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and by the delegations to the governing bodies of UNICEF, FAO and WHO, supporting the use of food and nutrition surveillance to keep watch over the human condition and provide information on a regular and systematic basis that, together with other economic indicators, can be used by national policy makers.

12. As a consequence, UNICEF's Executive Board, at its 1987 session at the beginning of May, approved a recommendation for a \$10 million noted project to support the strengthening of food and nutrition surveillance systems. The interagency Food and Nutrition Surveillance programme (FNS) is a joint initiative by the food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Health Organization and UNICEF, and was formally endorsed by the ACC Sub-Committee on Nutrition. The interagency programme plans to assist a large number of countries and regional institutions to strengthen food and nutrition surveillance programmes over the next five years.

13. Following approval by the UNICEF Executive Board, the interagency Food and Nutritional Surveillance programme (FNS) was developed to respond to this need for better food and nutrition surveillance and provides a means for supporting the collection, interpretation, and use of food and nutrition information in a much wider range of countries than has previously been possible. The main thrust of the programme is to support appropriate institutions in the development of country capability for food and nutrition surveillance. The essential feature of this development is not only the ability to collect and analyze information but also its subsequent linkage to decision-making.

14. The special focus of the FNS programme is to encourage the regular and frequent reporting of a few common indicators in a standardized fashion in order to alert decision-makers to the presence of a problem, and to stimulate them to make use of further information in order to take appropriate action. The programme will also support surveillance systems in the broader context, appropriate to the country situation.

15. The specific objectives of the FNS programme are:

In the short term:

- (a) To produce and analyze existing information on trends in a limited number of specified indicators of food and nutrition at national and subnational levels for 20 to 40 countries;
- (b) To promote the prompt use of this information for national and international advocacy, stressing that the identified trends in food availability and nutritional status merit immediate recognition and innovative consideration in development strategies, and national planning with particular reference to structural adjustment programmes

In the long term:

- (c) To strengthen the institutional capacity of 40 to 60 developing countries to produce, analyze and use these food and nutrition data by providing appropriate training and other support; and
- (d) To promote recognition and use of this information at country and regional levels by advocating that considerations of human nutrition are essential for the proper development of policies and programmes.

16. The role of surveillance in monitoring the social consequences of countries undergoing adjustment programmes is typified by the experience of Ghana. In Ghana, data on moderately or seriously malnourished children have been collected monthly since 1980, covering a quarter of a million children under five from all ten provinces of the country. The data show an alarming increase in the moderately and seriously malnourished from 35 per cent in 1980 to 42 per cent in 1982 and up to 47 per cent in 1983. These data, with other food and nutritional data, have been used to demonstrate the need for a "human recovery programme" to be set alongside the economic recovery and adjustment programme adopted by the government since 1983. At the consultative group meeting in Paris in May 1987 the government formally presented a \$35 million package of measures to strengthen the nutrition and other basic needs of vulnerable groups in both urban and rural areas of the country. The proposal received support from a number of donor agencies and an interagency mission led by the World Bank visited Ghana to help plan this human recovery programme.

17. The experience of Botswana has been to monitor vulnerable groups and to intervene with compensatory measures. Monthly food and nutrition surveillance covering almost all children in the country has been in operation since 1977, with the data mainly derived from weighing children under five at health clinics in both rural and urban areas. The data have been used both as a component of an early warning anti-drought system and to guide the operators of various famine relief and nutrition protection measures. At the individual level, mothers attending the clinics who have children recorded as moderately or severely malnourished receive a supplementary food ration designed to provide the whole household, as well as the young child, with supplementary food. In addition, the food and nutrition surveillance system has been used as a trigger for various forms of community support during the recent sustained period of drought. If a certain percentage of children in a village is found to be moderately or severely malnourished, several measures are taken applying to the whole village, e.g. school meals are provided at weekends as well as on school days, and for three times a day, not just once a day. Other measures such as food for work schemes for able-bodied males have been guided by nutrition surveillance as have other supplementary food programmes focussed on the needs of pregnant and breastfeeding women.

Core indicators

18. A small international working group met in UNICEF headquarters on 21-22 October 1987 to discuss the common indicators that the interagency FNS programme should encourage countries to collect and use in their food and nutrition surveillance programmes. The main working paper for this meeting was a discussion paper entitled "Core Indicators for the Interagency Food and Nutrition Surveillance Programme (FNS)" by Beverley A. Carlson of UNICEF. Additional accounts of regional experiences were presented by David Alwrick of UNICEF, Nairobi, with respect to Eastern and Southern Africa, and Hernan Delgado of INCAP, Guatemala City, with respect to Central America. Representatives of other agencies provided an account of their organization's experiences and viewpoints.

19. The objective of these discussions was to move toward a greater consensus and more standardization in the collection, analysis, presentation and use of a minimum list of common indicators that could measure changes over time in food and nutritional status. These common indicators should be feasible for developing countries with limited statistical and information infrastructures and analytical capabilities to obtain on a

regular and frequent basis and use for advocacy, policy, planning and programme monitoring. As far as possible these indicators should be consistent with those already being used by national governments and by the concerned international agencies. It was understood that these basic indicators would be set into national food and nutrition contexts which would vary from country-to-country depending upon their national circumstances and the requirements of the users.

20. The purpose of having a minimum set of common indicators is to help countries describe their food and nutrition outcomes, to measure aspects of the human dimensions of their social development, and to monitor the social impact of their structural and economic adjustment policies. The emphasis should be on frequency, timeliness, improved coverage and understandable presentation of a few simple useable population-based outcome indicators rather than a less frequent, more complex comprehensive approach. It was felt that anthropometric measures would help to identify the problems of the human condition, particularly where these problems are getting worse and where they are most severe. Identification of trends and differentials is particularly useful in the short-term and this is clearly feasible with the use of anthropometric measures which can pinpoint target populations or geographic areas requiring further investigation in an operational way. Nutritional status indicators by themselves cannot identify the determinants which would require a much broader range of indicators but, allied with the local knowledge of the economic and social situation in the country and through existing information systems, they can be powerful instruments for identifying contributory factors and suggesting appropriate courses of action

21. A special emphasis of the FNS programme is to measure the "human face" of structural adjustment policies in terms of the damaging social impact on vulnerable population groups and more broadly the poor. It was thought that simple measures are required to monitor the trends on a regular and frequent basis and bring them to the attention of the highest level of responsible officials.

22. The working group agreed that the FNS programme should recommend to countries the use of a few common indicators that would monitor changes over time on a regular, frequent and standardized basis. These common indicators would include the three anthropometric indicators proposed in the discussion paper plus one or two food indicators to be selected after further discussion.

23. The three nutritional status indicators that were recommended as common indicators for the FNS programme are as follows, and the reasons for these recommendations are set out in the discussion paper:

- I. Birth weight: as the measure of the nutritional status of the child at birth, as a predictor of the child's likelihood to grow and develop, as an indirect measure of health and nutritional status of the mother of the child and in aggregate terms, of pregnant women and mothers as a vulnerable group.
- II. Weight-for-age of children under five: for monitoring growth and development of this vulnerable group, preferably disaggregated by more specific age groups and, where possible, as in household surveys, supplemented by weight-for-height and height-for-age which are more specific measures.
- III. Height-for-age of primary school entrants: a measure taken at the end of the early period of growth and development which then becomes a cumulative indicator of the overall nutritional and health status of the child at the beginning of its school-going years and as an overall indicator of social and economic development.

24. The common indicators would be collected through a broad range of statistical instruments depending upon the nature of the indicators, the capacity of the country to produce them, the frequency with which they would be collected and, above all, the uses to which they would be put. It was further agreed that all the collection instruments reviewed in the discussion paper, i.e. clinics, household sample surveys, sentinel sites, schools, etc., will have to be used on various occasions by countries taking into account the advantages and disadvantages in using different collection systems. A major objective of the programme will therefore be to promote the appropriate use of these various collection instruments to provide the recommended common indicators on a regular and frequent basis and to assist countries in strengthening the capacity of their institutions to undertake this work. It was agreed that, wherever possible, countries should be encouraged to aim for at least quarterly reporting.

25. The working group meeting recognized that, in practice, a country's choice of specific indicators and collection instruments would be very much dictated by what is already being done or has already been planned. For example if weight-for-age

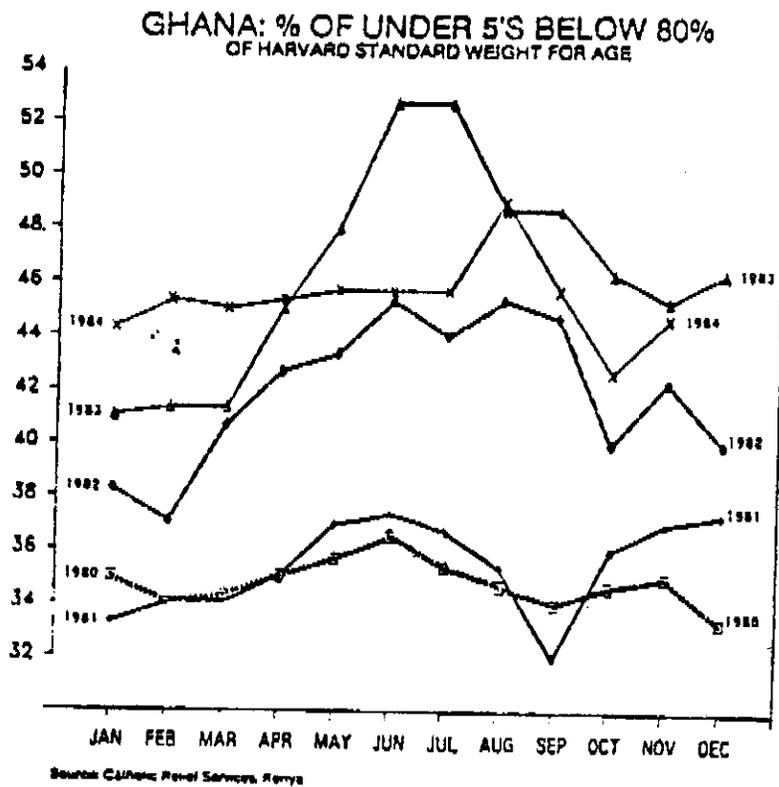
is the common practice it will be impractical to switch to weight-for-age. It will also be necessary to piggy-back food and nutrition surveillance onto existing data gathering operations so as to minimize the additional marginal costs and to take advantage of what is already available, e.g. introducing more frequent reporting in an under five health clinic system, adding a nutritional status module to a forthcoming household survey or presenting nutritional status trends in a regular publication of economic indicators.

Levels of support

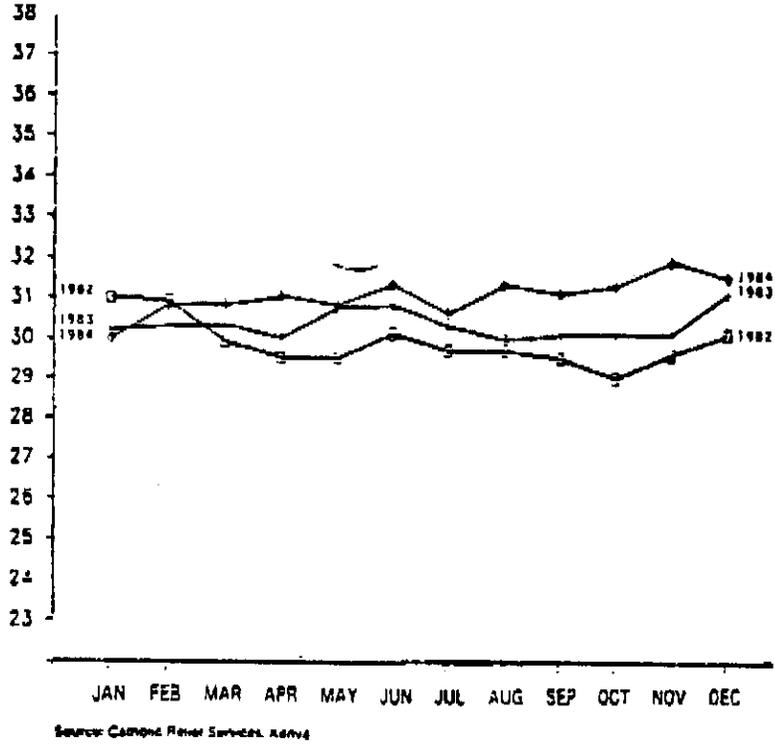
26. Support will be provided at three levels:

- (a) Country. The aim of the programme is to help some 40 to 60 countries to produce food and nutrition data on a regular and frequent basis and to use these data to guide their own policies and programmes. The programme recognizes that many countries are already producing food and nutrition data though these are often not adequately collected, analyzed or used. The immediate objective therefore is to make better use of what is or could easily be made available, rather than to initiate new systems.
- (b) Regional. The programme calls for regional support to obtain and analyze country data that are immediately available, to hold country workshops and to develop regional co-operative agreements for training and support to countries in the region.
- (c) Interregional and global. Overall support to the programme will include the provision of technical documentation, software and hardware support systems, technical studies and training, and consultants in special areas.

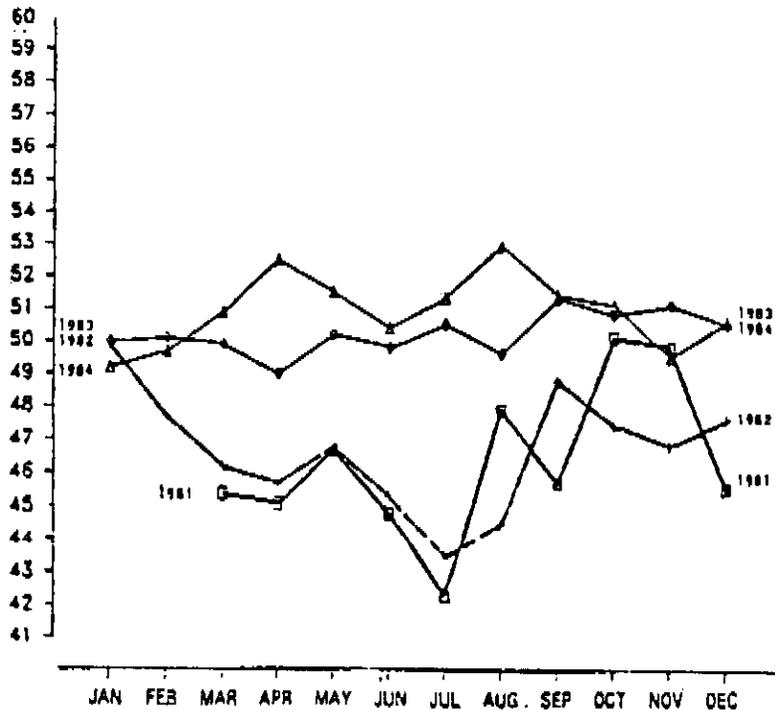
27. A typical project would be a programme to monitor and report on a frequent basis on the social impact of current structural adjustment policies as manifested in the nutritional status of children and the availability of food, with particular reference to vulnerable groups most likely to be adversely affected by these policies. The proposal should demonstrate how the information from the food and nutrition surveillance will be used. This is an essential feature of all project proposals. As an example, UNICEF has collaborated with the Catholic Relief Services in African countries to produce trends in monthly changes, of under-weight children under five as illustrated below.



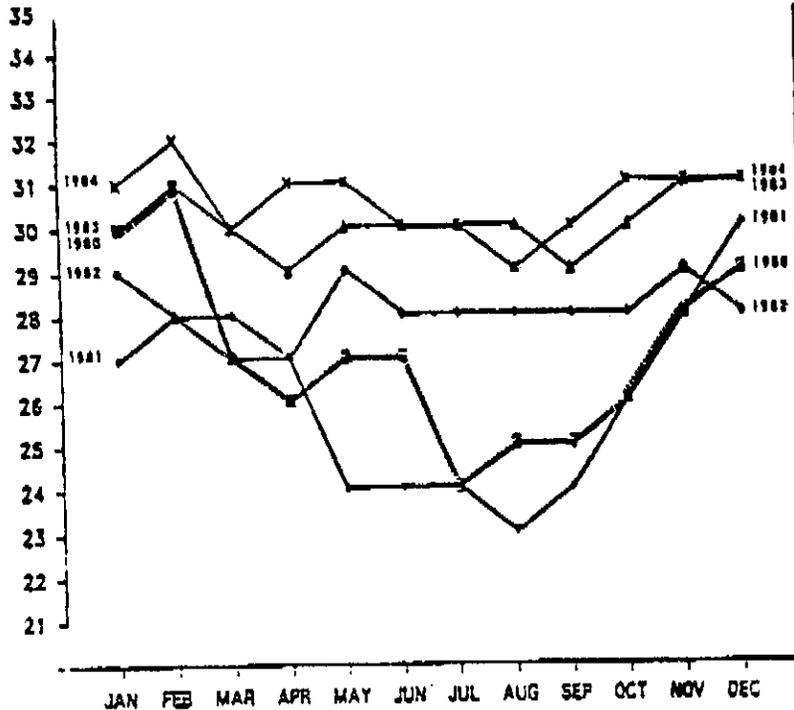
RWANDA: % OF UNDER 5'S BELOW 80%
 OF HARVARD STANDARD WEIGHT FOR AGE



BURUNDI: % OF UNDER 5'S BELOW 80%
 OF HARVARD STANDARD WEIGHT FOR AGE

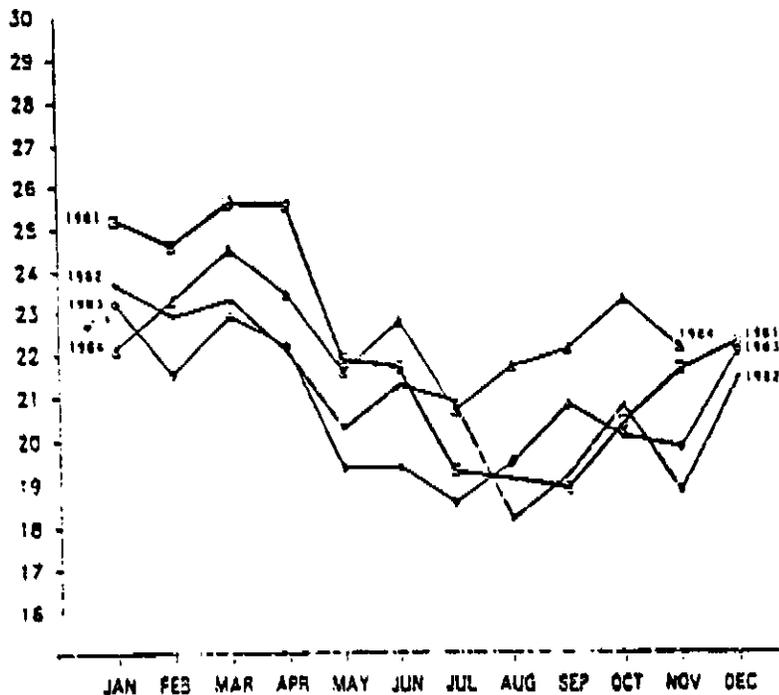


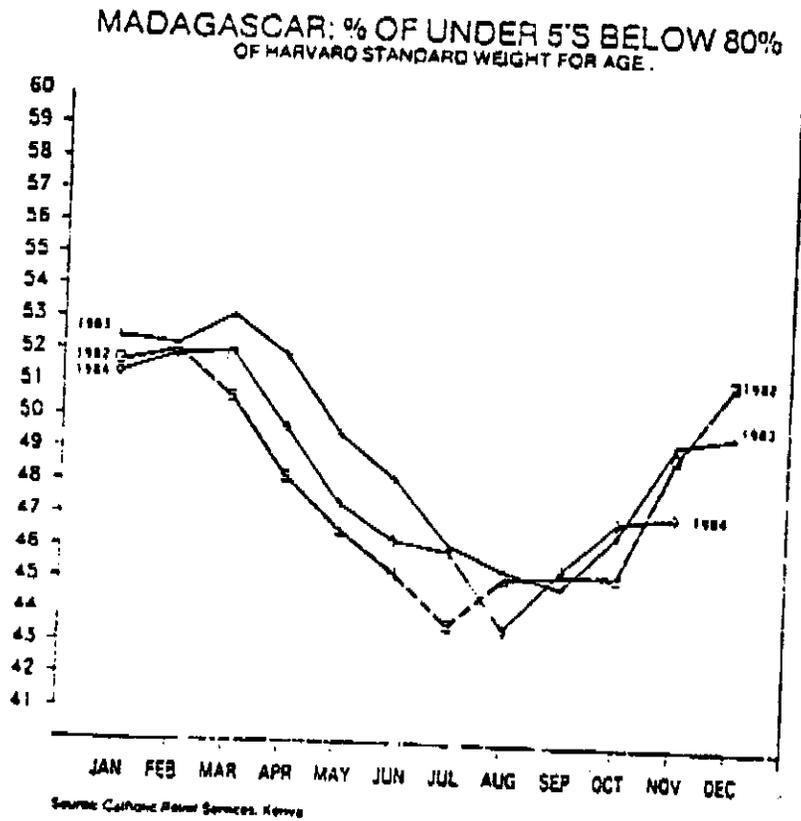
BOTSWANA: % OF UNDER 5'S BELOW 80% OF HARVARD STANDARD WEIGHT FOR AGE



Sources: Background Papers for Workshops on Social and Nutritional Surveys in Eastern and Southern Africa; UNICEF Social Statistics Bulletin, Vol. 5

LESOTHO: % OF UNDER 5'S BELOW 80% OF HARVARD STANDARD WEIGHT FOR AGE





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