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Non-food responses to food insecurity in emergencies

Tufts University

Strengthening Emergency Needs Assessment Capacity (SENAC)

November 2005

Non-food responses to food insecurity in emergencies

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This study was prepared under the umbrella of the "Strengthening Emergency Needs Assessment Capacity" (SENAC) project. The SENAC project aims to reinforce WFP's capacity to assess humanitarian needs in the food sector during emergencies and the immediate aftermath through accurate and impartial needs assessments.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report records the results of a desk review of non-food assessments and ensuing responses to food insecurity in emergencies. It reviews current emergency assessment practices, draws upon relevant aspects of non-emergency assessment methodologies and recommends an assessment framework best suited to a thorough assessment of food security in emergencies, which, in turn, will enable implementing organizations to design the most appropriate food and/or non-food interventions.

Food aid continues to be the most prevalent external response to food insecurity in emergencies. This is due to a variety of factors, including political pressure from donor governments and endogenous and exogenous pressure on implementing organizations. Food aid does play an important role in saving lives and can be useful in preventing the sale of assets and the adoption of irreversible coping strategies. Providing free food aid, however, should come late in a response strategy and should only be considered only after other interventions to improve availability, access and utilization have been considered. These other interventions include non-food responses.

The challenges to conducting good assessments in emergencies are manifold. These challenges include the urgent need to save lives, the difficulty of operating in conditions of political instability and violence, the pressure to produce relevant information in a timely fashion, and the need to ensure the quality of assessments. Pressure from constituents, donors and host governments compounds the urgency of developing a rapid and visible response. Organizations must decide when to prioritize the protection of livelihoods, even though these programmes are less likely to generate public or political support. Emergency assessments also must also balance an examination of the obvious symptoms of food insecurity – poor food availability, insufficient food access or inadequate food utilization – with a discussion of the underlying factors that are likely to contribute to the nature and severity of food insecurity, including public health crises and conflict.

In practice, responding to these challenges usually involves making calculated trade-offs between the nature of objectives or outcomes. For example, when conditions necessitate an extremely rapid assessment and response in order to save lives, the organization conducting the assessment will choose speed over data quality, with quality referring to the reliability, validity and rigour of the data. Although these trade-offs are often inevitable, the assessment reports themselves rarely include reference to the decisions and calculations that lead to them.

The assessment methodologies used to develop food and non-food responses are fundamentally similar and rely on the same types of frameworks and tools. The key determinants of whether an emergency assessment will lead to a food or a non-food response to food insecurity are: who does the assessment (the mandate and capacities of the assessing agency, including technical expertise, local knowledge and relationships with local government, civil society and the affected community); the objectives and particular focus of the assessment and particular focus; and the "room for manoeuvre" of an organization within a given context, in regard to the opportunities, capacities and resources for non-food programming in response to food insecurity.

The emergency assessment methods of different organizations are also broadly similar. Differences that do exist are due to the size of an organization, the extent to which decisions within an organization are centralized or made by field offices, an organization's mandate and the implications of the mandate on assessment objectives, and the preferred methodology of an organization. In seeking to measure the severity and nature of need in emergencies, organizations will usually conduct a food security assessment or a nutrition survey, or will use a livelihood approach. Policy-makers can use any or all of these tools to programme an emergency response to food insecurity. The choice of survey method is based on the mandate, objectives and previous field experience of the organization.

Although multiple options for non-food responses exist, those that seek to protect, support or promote livelihood assets and/or livelihood strategies are likely to have the greatest impact over time. Livelihood interventions may be aimed at specific groups – such as pastoralists, farmers or fishers – or they may seek to address different types of livelihood contexts, vulnerabilities and resources, such as markets. Livelihood interventions will differ depending on the particular aspect of a livelihood strategy that they seek to address, i.e., the bundle of assets that a household can access or the policies, institutions and processes that influence the ways in which households pursue their livelihood.

Summary of recommendations

This report recommends the use of a food security assessment framework drawn from a livelihoods perspective for conducting assessments and designing interventions in emergencies. The envisioned approach seeks to expand on, rather than to replace, existing models for food security assessments and livelihood approaches. Recognizing that it is nearly impossible to conduct a complete livelihoods assessment in the conditions that often characterize an emergency, we recommend an adaptation of current livelihood approaches to place greater emphasis on *assets* and on the role of *conflict.*

This proposed framework seeks to introduce greater nuance into the current understanding of how different livelihood groups experience, adapt to and – in some cases – benefit from an emergency, and how these different strategies lead to variations in food security. To this end, central components of the assessment framework include conflict analysis to understand the interests of various groups in the emergency, a greater focus on public health as an underlying factor, and a more thorough examination of coping and crisis strategies and the role of these in mitigating or exacerbating food insecurity.

Key steps in the proposed assessment framework include:

1. *Conduct desk reviews* of the current food security situation in relation to the pre-disaster or baseline information. The temporal dimension is critical in this part of the analysis, including whether the food insecurity is chronic or transitory and what, if any, are the seasonal and intra-annual variations. A desk-based study (rapid or extended, depending on the nature of the crisis) is appropriate for compiling a portion of this information.

2. *Identify the livelihood groups* within a geographical or agro-ecological zone, as well as the standard livelihood zones. Risks and shocks affect different livelihood groups in different ways, even within the same community, and thus may require different responses to preserve or rebuild livelihood assets and/or strategies.

3. *Identify relevant household livelihood assets* or capital, including human, natural, physical, financial and social assets. Focus on those assets that are the most important to the livelihood strategies of a particular group – such as livestock for pastoralists, land and agricultural inputs for farmers – taking into account the roles of kinship and social safety nets (social assets) and health and education (human assets) for all population groups. Note that certain assets can also be liabilities, particularly in situations of conflict and political instability.

4. *Identify the livelihood goals* or desired livelihood outcomes of different groups in order to understand how the current crisis has hindered or enabled achievement of these goals and what adaptations, if any, households have made in a continuing effort to meet these goals. Take into account the various coping and crisis strategies and ascertain what, if any, irreversible or damaging strategies may have been adopted.

5. *Review the processes, institutions and policies* (PIPs) that influence the current state of food security. Relevant PIPs are also those that have affected or been affected by the evolution of the crisis, as well as the livelihood and coping strategies of the various groups. Understanding the various PIPs according to the level at which they operate – local, national and international – is important not only for understanding the nature of the PIPs but also for identifying the level at which a response might be the most appropriate.

6. *Conduct conflict analysis:* Conduct analysis of the main stakeholders, interest groups, drivers of the conflict or emergency, and underlying factors. Even in emergencies not explicitly linked to conflict, this analysis will provide valuable information on the dynamics at work within society and the way that these dynamics will affect or be affected by a humanitarian intervention.

7. *Analyze markets and trade:* Market studies and analyses of trade, including transborder trade, should complement the desk-based review. These studies could include commodity chain analysis of key products in the area (legal and illicit) that underpin specific dimensions of the emergency (e.g. weapons, drugs, people, natural resources, cattle, etc).

8. *Examine migration and remittance flows:* Processes of migration have been shown to be central to livelihoods and food security, whether in terms of distress migration and the associated loss of livelihoods and crisis conditions that often follow, or regarding the more positive labour migration associated with remittance flows back to the disaster-affected population. Migration and remittance flows may be linked to wider processes of regional trade flows, and it is important to understand them in relation to markets.

The distinguishing factors between this proposed approach and other food security assessment methods are: (a) the attempt to capture more of the livelihood diversity within the affected population; (b) a greater focus on livelihood assets as well as livelihood strategies; and (c) the emphasis on conflict analysis. If successful, this approach will enable practitioners more precisely to plan and implement humanitarian interventions for livelihood groups, based on their livelihood-specific needs.

The proposed approach is well-suited to demonstrate the potential links between food insecurity and non-food responses It identifies diverse livelihood groups and examines how crisis affects the livelihood strategies and outcomes of households within each group. By compiling data on the policies, institutions and processes affecting food security and by examining underlying factors such as public health and the vulnerability context, this framework will indicate a range of possibilities for the implementation of non-food interventions. Such responses might support or protect assets, such as livestock, microcredit or emergency health interventions; enable policies that support livelihoods, such as regulations on land access or transborder trade; or support institutions, such as civil society and governance, or processes, such as economic processes.

PREFACE

This report records the results of a desk review of non-food assessments and ensuing responses to food insecurity in emergencies. The Emergency Needs Assessment Branch (ODAN) of WFP commissioned the Feinstein International Famine Center (FIFC) of Tufts University to conduct this review as part of the larger Strengthening Emergency Needs Assessment Capacities (SENAC) process. SENAC is a three-year, multi-themed process funded by the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO). It arose out of the need for improved emergency assessment capacity within WFP and other agencies. In the case of WFP, the practice of incorporating assessments into emergency appeals was felt to bias the manner in which information was presented, and the perception of an overemphasis on food aid as an emergency response raised particular concerns (WFP, 2004: 4). The SENAC project is part of WFP's ongoing efforts to respond to some of these criticisms (Goyder, 2005: 10).

This report expands the understanding of assessment methods leading to non-food interventions and examines the wide range of non-food responses to food insecurity in emergencies as implemented by international humanitarian organizations. The report reviews current emergency assessment practices, with emphasis on those that have led to non-food responses,[1] draws on relevant aspects of non-emergency assessment methodologies, and recommends a framework best suited to a thorough assessment of food security in emergencies, which will enable implementing organizations to design the most appropriate food and/or non-food interventions. The wider aim of the document is to contribute to the debate within international organizations and agencies on how to improve assessments, how better to link assessments to actual needs, and how to ensure that emergency interventions are designed to take a more strategic approach to addressing not only the symptoms of food insecurity, but also some of the underlying causes and contributing factors.

Our findings show that there should be little difference between assessment methodologies leading to food and those leading to non-food responses. Neither do the tools used by field agencies in conducting assessments vary greatly from one type of food security assessment to the next. Rather, the key determinants of whether an emergency assessment leads to a food or a non-food response to food insecurity are: who does the assessment – the particular mandate and capacities of the assessing agency, including technical expertise, local knowledge and relationships with local government, civil society and the affected community; the objectives of the assessment and particular focus; and the "room for manoeuvre" regarding opportunities, capacities and resources for non-food food security programming in a particular context.

This report is broad in scope and includes a review of more than 50 assessment reports, programme documents and a small number of evaluations of emergency

[1] The category of 'non-food' responses is intentionally broad in order to include a variety of sectoral responses,; but this report is not able to touch on all possible responses. Interventions not considered here include for example, market-based interventions, microfinance, education and training, selective feeding (supplementary and therapeutic), political settlements (bi-lateral or multi-lateral), and humanitarian military interventions. Cash-based interventions are not covered, as a recent report by Paul Harvey at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) covered such interventions in detail (Harvey, 2005).

interventions undertaken by international organizations and agencies. (See Annex III for organizations and agencies sampled). We would have preferred to locate three documents for each emergency intervention – the assessment, the programme document, and an evaluation of the programme. Unfortunately, it proved nearly impossible to locate complete sets of documents for specific emergency responses, and the team was rarely able to acquire both the assessment and the document on the ensuing programme. As a result, this desk review focuses on the approaches and tools that organizations use to conduct assessments in emergencies, and the range of possible non-food responses to addressing food insecurity.

Although the review encompasses many assessments and programme documents collected over ten weeks, many more assessments, guidelines and programme documents were not reviewed. The review does not purport to demonstrate a balanced analysis across all international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), donors and agencies, but rather seeks to offer an analysis of the observable patterns and trends in emergency assessments and ensuing non-food interventions.

INTRODUCTION

This report is based on an understanding of food security as multidimensional and influenced by a broad range of factors, such as external shocks, the institutional and policy environment, and household capacities, including health and nutrition. An understanding of food security as multidimensional allows for a broad set of possible responses to address food insecurity. Developing such responses, however, requires a thorough understanding of the context, its multiple dimensions and the priority factors and linkages that lead to food insecurity.

The balance between the need to gather and analyse accurate information and the need to respond rapidly is just one of the challenges facing organizations and field staff conducting assessments in emergencies. Organizations must seek to establish an accurate diagnosis of the nature and severity of the food security crisis and to recognize underlying factors exacerbating food security. An organization's own mandate and objectives will affect the nature of the assessment process and the analysis of the results. Only through these processes will the avenues for non-food versus food interventions become apparent.

Following a discussion of key concepts, the report briefly addresses the current prevalence of food aid as an emergency humanitarian response and the justification for expanding into non-food interventions. We highlight some of the major challenges to conducting food security assessments in emergencies, before moving on to discuss the role of assessments in emergencies. After an analysis of organizational approaches, objectives and tools, the report turns to specific non-food responses based on a livelihoods framework. It ends with a section on findings and recommendations.

Key concepts

This brief review of key concepts reflects a consensus built up over more than two decades and represents the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of humanitarian approaches to food security assessment and response.

Food security

This report uses WFP's definition of **food security** as adopted at the World Food Summit: "access of all people at all times to the food needed for an active and healthy life".[2] Use of this definition, or a close approximation, is widespread, although some organizations and agencies, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), distinguish between the physical and economic dimensions of adequate access and others, including the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), emphasize the need to be able to lead a "productive" life.

Within these definitions, three distinct components are central to attaining food security at the household and/or individual level: food availability, food access and food utilization. **Availability** refers to the presence of a sufficient and regular quantity of food in reasonable proximity to households and individuals. **Access** refers to the ability of households and individuals to access consistently the food that is available, through production, markets, transfer, barter or exchange (Sen, 1981). **Utilization** can also include consumption, and refers both to the proper usage of food prior to eating (e.g. proper storage and processing, adequate health and sanitation – and to the physiological processing of food following consumption. Health status, food preparation and sanitation can all affect the ability of an individual to utilize properly the food that is available and accessible.

Livelihoods

The concept of **livelihoods** is central to this report. There are many different definitions of livelihoods, but most share key characteristics. The definition underpinning many of these variations was developed by Chambers and Conway (Chambers and Conway, 1992):

> *A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social assets) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resources base.*

Continuing research on livelihoods – particularly on livelihoods in disasters – has resulted in adaptations to this definition, including the incorporation of the role of risk and vulnerability. Practitioners from FIFC at Tufts University developed a definition of livelihoods applicable to households and communities facing conflict (FIFC, 2002: 11):

> *Livelihoods comprise the ways in which people access and mobilize resources that enable them to pursue goals necessary for their survival and longer-term well-being, and thereby reduce the vulnerability created and exacerbated by conflict.*

[2] WFP Mission Statement, available at: www.wfp.org/policies/introduction/mission/index.asp?section=6&sub_section=1.

Households apply livelihood strategies to pursue their desired goals or outcomes. A household's livelihood strategy is determined by the resources and assets that it owns, has access to or controls, and the restrictions created by the institutional environment. A household seeks to adapt its livelihood strategy in response to crises such as conflict, natural disaster or economic shock. Although the FIFC definition was developed specifically for analysis of conflict, vulnerability is a factor in how households adapt their livelihood strategies in all types of emergencies.

Livelihood strategies and food security are symbiotic. In the absence of adequate food security, livelihoods are unlikely to be resilient and are therefore unable to recover from shock. For many households, the pursuit of food security is the most important livelihood goal or outcome, and livelihood strategies are geared specifically towards accessing food or income to buy food. Poor and/or vulnerable households are the groups most likely to dedicate their livelihood strategies to procuring food. Emergencies have the greatest impact on the most vulnerable households, thereby increasing the difficultly of meeting basic food needs. As discussed in more detail below, rich and poor alike may be vulnerable to shock, but the rich usually have more resilient or diverse livelihood strategies and are therefore more adept at coping with the shocks that may arise.

Coping strategies

Coping strategies are temporary responses employed by households in an effort to adjust to or compensate for shock. Coping strategies are commonly adopted by households experiencing food insecurity. Reversible coping strategies with no long-term negative effects include intensification or diversification of existing livelihood strategies (Scoones, 1998), collecting wild foods or the temporary migration of a family member in search of employment. Strategies used at a later stage of food insecurity are sometimes called crisis strategies and may permanently undermine food security in the future (Corbett, 1988). These irreversible strategies include sale of land, destruction of natural resources such as forests, and distress migration (Sphere Project, 2004: 113). Some coping strategies, such as prostitution, joining armed groups or engaging in illicit activities, may have long-term implications for the physical and social well-being of the individual and the household.

Nutrition

Food security is necessary, but on its own insufficient, to ensure good **nutrition**. This is because food insecurity is only one of three underlying causes of malnutrition – along with the social and care environment and public health – that can lead to acute malnutrition, chronic malnutrition or micronutrient deficiencies. Because of this complexity, food insecurity does not always lead to acute malnutrition, and acute malnutrition is not always a result of inadequate food security. For instance, a household may prioritize the use of what little food it has for the feeding of infants and younger children, thereby protecting their nutritional status. Thus, positive care giving behaviours may protect children from underlying food insecurity. Similarly, a relatively food-secure community may be suffering from a high prevalence of acute malnutrition and vitamin A deficiency as the result of a measles outbreak, for example.

Child malnutrition is of concern because it can restrict growth and inhibit the immune system. As a result, child malnutrition is associated with increased incidence, duration and severity of disease, and consequently increased risk of death. Nutrition surveys that estimate the prevalence of acute malnutrition and mortality rates among children under 5 years of age have therefore become critically important tools in emergency assessments of food crises and famine. However, unless the underlying causes of malnutrition are assessed simultaneously, it is not possible to judge whether malnutrition is a result of food insecurity, inadequate care or poor public health.

Acute malnutrition, or wasting, is a sensitive indicator of seasonal or other changes in food security, and surveillance systems have been established to monitor nutrition as part of famine early warning or food security monitoring systems, such as the Food Security Assessment Unit and nutritional surveillance programme in Somalia.

The linkages between nutrition and food security are context-specific, and it is therefore the task of the assessments to determine not only the type, scale and severity of malnutrition, but also the relative importance of food, health and care as underlying causes (Young and Jaspars, 1995).

Public health

In the worst emergencies, food security crises may be linked to **public health crises**, a lethal combination in which overcrowding and lack of shelter, clean water and sanitation lead to increased transmission and incidence of disease. This in turn can lead to extremely high mortality rates. Although food aid can ameliorate food insecurity, combined health and food responses are required to treat disease, limit transmission and reduce excess deaths. In this sense, food aid programming is only one part of a wider, more strategic humanitarian response. Nevertheless, it is recognized that emergency food aid has made very substantial contributions in maintaining the nutritional status and health of large emergency-affected populations (NICS/RNIS, 1993 to 2005).

Vulnerability and risk

Vulnerability to food insecurity for individuals, households or communities varies according to their exposure to **risks** – including climatic shocks such as drought or floods, market shocks such as hyper-inflation or collapse in commodity prices, and conflict and scorched earth tactics aimed at destroying livelihoods – and their capacity to cope with, or their resilience to, these shocks and threats (Chambers, 2002). It may appear that crises and disasters affect the poor disproportionately, when in fact the poor may simply be less adept at protecting their assets and livelihoods in the face of crisis than those who are better off (FIFC, 2002: 7).

Risk and vulnerability depend on the nature of the shock and the coping strategies of a household. In some cases, people who have assets may be more vulnerable than those who do not. For example, an economic shock caused by trade restrictions, such as Saudi Arabia's ban on livestock imports from Somalia, affects households that are relatively well-off but heavily invested in the livestock market, while poorer households with no livestock to export are less affected. Vulnerability may also cut across wealth groups. When the Afghan currency appreciated in 2002, for instance,

individuals and households with outstanding debt saw the value of their debt double as prices and salaries fell by half. Shopkeepers who acquired goods on short-term credit and people who had borrowed money against their land or houses were particularly hard hit (Lautze *et al.*, 2002: 12).

Natural disasters affect both rich and poor populations, but the marginalization of the poor means that they usually experience a more pronounced and potentially devastating impact. As FIFC explained, vulnerability to natural disasters results from a lack of resources, services and security, and the people most lacking these elements are very often constrained to live in areas that are least likely to receive the benefits of development, and the most likely to face a range of hazards (FIFC, 2002: 6, citing Alexander, 1997).

Vulnerability and risk are more complex in situations of armed conflict than in emergencies brought on by economic shock or natural disasters, as armed groups often deliberately destroy and/or exploit civilians and civilian livelihoods (see, for example, de Waal, 1993; FIFC, 2002; Lautze, 1997; Macrae and Zwi, 1992; Pain and Lautze, 2002). Physical insecurity renders transport, trade and transhumance networks unusable and can hinder or halt agricultural production at both the subsistence and the national levels. As livelihoods are targeted and production and trade become more difficult, food supply declines and commodity prices increase, exacerbating food insecurity at multiple levels.

The prevalence of food aid

Food aid is usually one of the largest and longest-running external responses to large-scale emergencies (Oxfam International, 2005a). Food aid responses also tend to be better funded than other sectors, although this difference appears to have declined in 2005 (United Nations, 2005). The use of free food as a humanitarian response increased in the last 15 years, even though the overall volume of food aid decreased over the same period (WFP, 2005a). A combination of political and economic factors at the national and international levels helps to explain the prevalence of food aid as an emergency response (Barrett and Maxwell, 2005).

First, the provision of free food through humanitarian distributions to those who have completely lost their ability to meet their basic needs is a much needed life-saving humanitarian measure, without which the affected communities may face increased risk of famine and death. These situations of extreme and acute crisis are often associated with forced or distress migration of refugees or internally displaced people, who have left behind or otherwise lost their usual livelihood resources such as fields, livestock, productive assets, jobs or social connections. Displacement is often associated with separation of families, break-up of communities and loss of social support structures and cohesion. This is a form of social breakdown, dismantling an important safety net and curtailing access to social assets for the pursuit of livelihood strategies. Food security assessment and programming is less challenging in these extreme contexts than it is in situations where households maintain some access to food, but not sufficient for their needs in the longer term. The lack of adequate food access over time threatens to further undermine household livelihoods and, consequently, future food security. The loss of access to livelihood assets and social networks can lead to the adoption of alternative and potentially damaging coping

strategies in an effort to meet basic needs, including food. When targeted and programmed effectively, food aid can prevent households from selling productive or essential assets or adopting irreversible or damaging coping strategies. Thus, food aid provision is potentially a means of preserving assets.

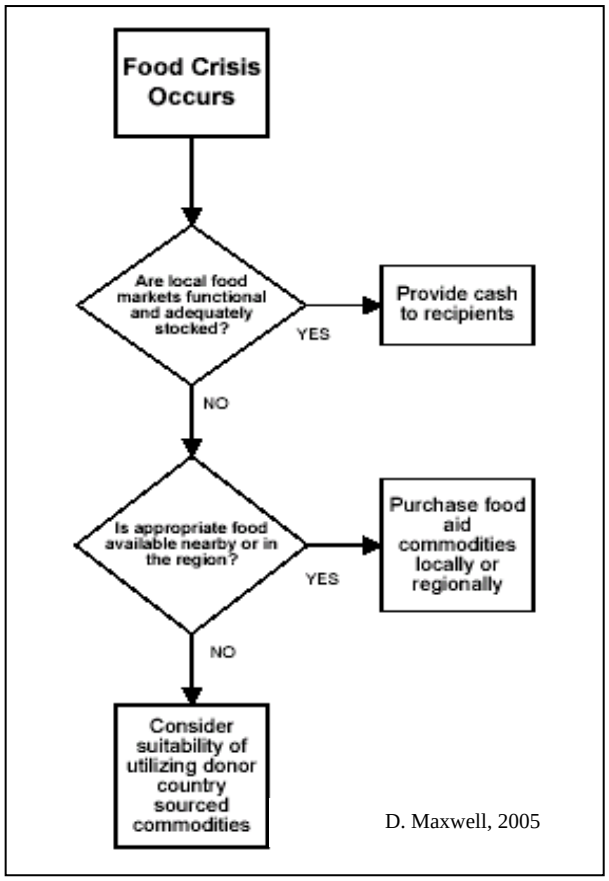
Second, food is readily available on the world market and is frequently provided as in-kind relief by major donors, especially the United States. The United States government no longer holds large reserves of farm surpluses in stock (with the exception of nonfat dry milk), but does use food aid allocations as one method of supporting farmers and the agricultural industry in times of excess supply, although the utility of this is increasingly questioned (ITAP, 2005: 4; Barrett and Maxwell, 2005). The United States is the largest donor of food aid, funding 57 percent of global food aid deliveries in 2004, followed by the European Union with 20 percent and Japan with 8 percent (WFP, 2005a). As the largest donor, the United States can frequently be relied on to provide large amounts of food aid in response to WFP appeals, even when this may not be the most appropriate intervention for the situation. Following the tsunami in southeast Asia in December 2004, for instance, the United States responded to WFP's appeal with 30,000 metric tons (mt) of in-kind food aid, despite the fact that the local and regional markets in the area had experienced a bumper harvest that year and most local communities needed food aid only until local markets could be restored (Oxfam International, 2005a).

Third, food assistance benefits many stakeholders, at least in the short term. Donor countries are able to take credit for responding to the needs of the less fortunate or disaster-affected; beneficiary governments are able to respond to the actual or presumed short-term needs of their populations; private contractors are able to turn a profit, especially in the food supply, processing and logistic sectors; and NGOs and United Nations agencies are able to fulfil their mandates and satisfy their donors. In addition, aid agencies (particularly in the United States) that rely on the acquisition and distribution of food aid for the main proportion of their cash flows may be reluctant to look at alternative operating strategies because of the potential risk to income and continuous programming.

There is a growing awareness of the negative externalities linked to the provision of free food aid, particularly over extended periods. From the donor perspective, one of the most obvious drawbacks of the current food aid system is cost inefficiency. Most food aid from donor countries comes in the form of direct transfer (5.5 million mt in 2004), resulting in extremely high logistics expenses as a proportion of overall relief. For example, US$92 million of WFP's tsunami relief budget of US$210 million was allocated to the transport and storage of donated food (Oxfam International, 2005a). The oft-cited negative effects for the recipient population include a drop in commodity prices for farmers and traders, disincentives for producers, and the development of a dependency mentality, although the notion of dependency as a response to humanitarian relief is increasingly questioned (Harvey and Lind, 2005). Free food distributions of in-kind food can cause lost opportunities to support local or regional markets, farmers and transporters through local or regional purchases.

When is food aid the appropriate response?

Figure 1: Decision tree for food aid utilization



Although free food aid can have a wide variety of negative effects, there are numerous instances where free food is the correct and appropriate intervention in response to emergencies. The decision tree for food aid utilization developed by Dan Maxwell illustrates some of the key questions that should be asked before programming free food aid (Figure 1).

In particular, free food aid is often an appropriate and necessary short-term response to hunger experienced during or immediately following an emergency. Conflict, natural disaster and economic shocks can all affect the availability of and access to food, occasionally with severe and sudden onset. Rapid assessments and direct observation can indicate the need for an immediate short-term intervention of free food distribution. A more in-depth assessment helps to identify specific groups that may have less access than others to food through market channels or alternative means, but even in the absence of such an assessment, the provision of appropriate food in a timely fashion in the immediate aftermath of a crisis can help to save lives and protect livelihoods.

Food aid may also be an appropriate intervention in other forms or at different times in an emergency response. For instance, food for work is appropriate when there is a lack of food available in local markets and surplus able-bodied labour within targeted households, and when the work tasks make appropriate and necessary contributions to rebuilding livelihoods and infrastructure (Levine and Chastre, 2004). Alternative food programming modalities have been introduced in recent years, including vulnerable group feeding and institutional group feeding. The role of food security assessments in determining the application of these food programming modalities is not yet clear.

Following international consultation within the humanitarian community, the Sphere Project concluded that although life-saving responses to food insecurity should be prioritized and food distribution is likely to be the most common of these responses,

other types of response are also needed to help people meet their immediate food needs. The project concluded that general free food distribution may not be appropriate when:

- adequate supplies of food are available in the area, in which case the need is to address obstacles to access;
- a localized lack of food availability can be addressed by supporting market systems;
- local attitudes or policies are against free food handouts. (Sphere Project, 2004: chapter 3)

Practitioners involved in food security assessments need to be able to conduct analyses that weigh food and non-food options. This requires a good understanding of the multiple dimensions of food security, and how they have been affected by crisis and might be influenced by different response strategies. A clear assessment framework allows teams to make sense of otherwise unmanageable amounts of information and data. This process of food security analysis and prioritization of response strategies is critical for both the short and long terms.

In an effort to save lives in the short term, however, agencies often implement both food and non-food emergency interventions with minimal knowledge of the actual conditions on the ground. In some cases, the emergency is such that agencies are unable to conduct assessments before they programme relief interventions.

Ideally, assessments should gather information and analyse the underlying causes of the emergency, the effects of these on food security and livelihoods and the implications for public health and nutrition. Assessments should also include an understanding of the key factors for each of the different livelihood groups in the area. Such factors include:

- how households get by over time under normal conditions (their livelihoods);
- how households are managing to survive this period of stress (their coping strategies) and the risks or costs involved, particularly threats to personal safety, security, social cohesion, nutrition and health;
- how households and communities perceive their own short- and long-term needs (their priorities and goals).

Acquiring this more detailed information requires a combination of better desk studies of the background to the crisis and assessments that take local needs and priorities into account. Too often, however, these assessments are not carried out because of the perceived or actual urgency of the situation, lack of knowledge of prevailing conditions on the part of the implementing agency, and assumptions about community needs and priorities. In the absence of such assessments, donors, national governments and humanitarian agencies lack critical information necessary to guide the immediate response and provide sustainable and relevant assistance.

Expanding the options into non-food responses

A growing number of practitioners, academics and agencies recommend a more integrated and participatory approach to food security assessments and response in the context of emergencies. These experts argue for exchanging the concept of a seamless path between relief and development for an approach that recognizes the roots of conflict, crisis and vulnerability within the pre-crisis society (Korf and Bauer, 2002: 4). This necessitates an understanding of the broader factors that contribute to problems of food availability, access or utilization. An assessment and analysis that is able to take into account (if not necessarily respond to) the multiple dimensions of food security in the short and long terms is more likely to lead to interventions that incorporate non-food components.

Expanding emergency responses to food insecurity by including non-food interventions necessitates a more integrated response than that of responding with food alone. The Sphere Project identifies three dimensions for possible non-food responses to food insecurity, including:

- supporting and protecting primary production (agriculture, fishing, livestock and food processing);
- supporting and protecting income-earning opportunities and employment;
- supporting and protecting safe access to market goods and services for producers, consumers and traders.

Designing non-food interventions requires that field staff look beyond the immediate problem of lack of food in the household in order to understand the effects of the emergency on the livelihood strategies that ultimately determine access to food. There are inherent challenges in conducting assessments and designing appropriate responses in emergency contexts. Some of these challenges are discussed in the following section.

CHALLENGES FOR ASSESSMENTS IN EMERGENCIES

Although it is accepted good practice among the international humanitarian community that emergency assessments are essential for understanding and responding appropriately to humanitarian crises, there nevertheless exist many practical challenges to doing assessments, and to doing them well. Recognizing food insecurity in an emergency can be as straightforward as identifying whether the problem is one of food availability, food access or food utilization. The challenges lie in the pressure to act rapidly, thereby often making saving lives a priority over protecting livelihoods; the importance of accurately diagnosing the severity and nature of the food insecurity, including understanding whether the problem is transitory or chronic and recognizing underlying factors; and the need for organizations to overcome the internal constraints posed by having only a set number of mechanisms for assessment and response.

Many of these challenges involve making calculated trade-offs among objectives and outcomes. For example, when emergency conditions necessitate an extremely rapid assessment to save lives, the organization conducting the assessment is likely to

choose speed over the *quality* of the data collected, in terms of the reliability, validity and rigour of the data (Benini and Conley, forthcoming).

Rapid assessments, rapid results

Emergencies bring great challenges to those conducting assessments and designing interventions. Lives are at risk and organizations must react quickly to prevent spikes in morbidity and mortality. Assessments are needed to indicate the appropriate response, but assessments require time and personnel, both of which are valuable and often scarce inputs in the emergency response phase. In the absence of assessments, however, it is impossible to implement responses that accurately reflect the priorities and needs, and support the existing positive coping mechanisms of the affected populations. Emergencies in conflict zones pose particular challenges, as organizations must ensure the safety of their personnel while gathering information on the impact of the violence and insecurity.

Donors may compound these challenges by pushing for a rapid response with visible results, such as balance sheets indicating tonnages of food delivered, images of villagers receiving food, numbers of children vaccinated, etc. This may be particularly true of government donors associated with political administrations – such as USAID, the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), among many others – as these agencies are the vehicles through which the demands of constituents and the humanitarian urges and foreign policy agendas of governing administrations are transferred. For example, during an interview on 20 October 2005, a former humanitarian coordination official with the United States Government offered his personal opinion on the political imperative that led to a massive shipment of P.L.-480 food aid to Ethiopia in response to food shortages in 2000 and 2001:

> *The Clinton administration had been criticized for not responding in an adequate and timely manner to the Bahr El Ghazal famine in Sudan in 1998. Word came of impending and severe food shortages in Ethiopia in 2000 and the administration was determined not to be "caught out" once again. We shipped thousands of metric tons to Ethiopia as quickly as possible. The emphasis was on the "shipping of food", not upon the nuances of the actual need on the ground, who the food would reach or how the Ethiopian Government would manage the food once it arrived. The aid may have done some good in Ethiopia, but the response was entirely based on political imperatives within the United States.*

Media outlets sometimes compound the difficulty of balancing speed and quality in a response. Sometimes called the "CNN effect", media coverage of an emergency can result in a clamour from donors to "do something".[3] This places pressure on humanitarian organizations to act as rapidly as possible, and may entail the prioritization of funds in a way that does not correlate to actual needs. Of course, the media also play an important role in generating international interest in the wake of a crisis, particularly a natural disaster. Once engaged, the public may act both as donors

[3] The CNN effect also refers to the way in which the media affects broader foreign policy-making. For a more nuanced discussion of the role of media in humanitarian response, see Ignatieff, 1998.

and as advocates to pressure governments and other interest groups to follow through with pledges of support and to take other action as necessary.

As a result of the urgency surrounding emergencies and humanitarian response, organizations, donors and governments often draw conclusions regarding emergency needs with little information from the ground. (This is also the case if organizations are unable to access a region or population for security or political reasons, as discussed in greater detail below.) Such conclusions may be based on famine early warning or food information monitoring systems, pre-existing studies, information and analysis from contacts in the region, military assessments or the appeals of national governments, to name a few. Such information guides the initial stages of the international intervention, and is often sufficient to allow the planning of an emergency response of food or non-food items. For instance, in the wake of the Kashmir earthquake in October 2005, the need for emergency shelter and immediate medical care was obvious from the reports of the few NGOs with access to the area. Similarly, the mass movement of large numbers of refugees across national borders into areas that are known to be unable to support them can trigger a response before a needs assessment has been conducted. This occurred, for example, in the former eastern Zaire in 1994, when about 1 million Rwandans crossed the border in a short period.

In other instances, however, the need for a quick response may lead to less appropriate assistance being provided for perceived needs. This is often caused by a failure of implementing organizations to understand how households are surviving the crisis and how international humanitarian efforts can best support or protect existing strategies. Livelihood strategies are assumed to have collapsed; coping mechanisms are assumed to be detrimental and unsustainable; and food – usually through free food distributions – is assumed to be the most effective method for responding to the visible signs of hunger, such as malnourished children, emaciated livestock and empty larders.

Although often challenging, there are ways to balance the urgency of emergency responses with the need to conduct assessments that lead to a more in-depth understanding of the situation and thus to the programming of better interventions. For instance, some organizations conduct rapid or initial emergency needs assessments immediately after the emergency, and use the results of these to programme short-term life-saving inputs such as food aid, emergency medical care and emergency shelter. Once immediate life-saving needs are being addressed, organizations conduct more thorough assessments to examine the broader and deeper effects of the crisis and to seek greater input from the affected communities.[4] (A later section of this paper discusses this double assessment approach in greater detail.)

Assessments in situations of chronic conflict and political instability

Situations of chronic conflict and political instability pose a particular set of challenges for organizations conducting emergency needs assessments and

[4] Organizations that strive to conduct dual assessments in emergency situations include Save the Children UK, Oxfam Great Britain, Mercy Corps International and WFP. The Sphere Project has developed minimum standards for both initial assessments and more in-depth food security and nutrition assessments.

implementing relief interventions. As discussed by Jaspars and Shoham (2002), such situations are associated with a parallel economy centred on conflict and usually include a high degree of violence and a weak or failed governance environment. Vulnerability is determined largely by political or social status, and livelihood strategies often aim primarily to ensure food security or survival. The deliberate destruction of livelihoods is a common characteristic of such situations (Schafer, 2002). Armed political groups or the State are more likely to control or limit access to affected populations, posing serious challenges and potential security risks to those seeking to conduct needs assessments and interventions. Aid agencies working in such environments typically need to make decisions quickly in response to rapidly changing circumstances, limitations imposed by funding agencies and the risks of operating for extended periods in an insecure environment (Boudreau and Coutts, 2002).

Agencies working in situations of chronic conflict and political instability often have to adapt their methods in order to collect assessment information. Possible adaptations include redefining the characterizations of population groups according to political, ethnic, security or displacement factors, rather than livelihood groups (Jaspars and Shoham, 2002: 16–17). Thus, instead of grouping people according to their livelihoods – such as marine fishers or rice farmers – practitioners group them in other ways, such as all of the people living in a particular conflict zone, all of the Hutus, or all of the displaced people. When primary data cannot be collected, field staff may need to place greater emphasis on secondary information, or rely on displaced populations and key informants for information on inaccessible regions. It becomes more important for organizations to include conflict analysis in emergency assessments. Organizations must also take into account the increased potential of assistance to do harm by unintentionally supporting the agendas of particular interest groups, thereby undermining the neutrality or impartiality of the assistance (Jaspars and Shoham, 2002: 16–17; Collinson, 2003; Anderson, 1999).

Timing is everything

As discussed, agencies must balance the urgency of responding quickly to an acute emergency with the need to gather good information. The impetus to save lives is not the only pressure when conducting emergency assessments. An assessment must be conducted in a timely fashion so as to provide useful information and analysis at a juncture that is relevant for both programme decision-makers and policy-makers. Thorough compilation of information, particularly on more complex issues such as livelihood strategies, necessitates greater time for fieldwork, desk studies and review. Initial rapid emergency assessments are often characterized by the "recycling" of information, with reports recirculating the same limited information and suppositions until these take on a life of their own. Issues of quality must also be considered, as it is not possible to cross-check data through triangulation in greatly abbreviated time frames. The importance of producing timely and useful information must be balanced with considerations of accuracy and the need for information that reflects the needs and priorities of crisis-affected populations. Achieving this balance requires collaboration among all stakeholders, especially field offices and those deciding on or approving programmes.

Saving lives versus saving livelihoods

The predominant focus of humanitarian response is saving lives. The protection of livelihoods therefore tends to receive less emphasis, in terms of timing, funding and political will. This dichotomy is created by several factors, including donors, the media and the humanitarian imperative. As discussed, most donors like to see their funds being put to rapid use with visible results, which means that a project to provide supplementary food for children takes precedence over one to provide emergency fodder to livestock. Similarly, media coverage is an important tool in humanitarian response, and media representatives such as journalists, producers and camera operators must be shown projects that have an obvious and direct human impact, such as therapeutic feeding centres for the treatment of severe malnutrition or free food aid distributions.

Saving lives will and should remain the central goal of emergency interventions, but there must also be room for concurrent or consecutive interventions that seek to support, protect or promote livelihoods. Evidence shows that affected populations often take drastic steps to protect their livelihood assets in disasters, such as painstakingly watering orchards and gardens by hand, or sharing the household's scarce drinking-water – or even its relief food rations – with livestock in severe droughts (Lautze *et al.*, 2002; Young *et al.*, 2005). Reducing the number of meals per day and switching to less preferred but cheaper food to conserve scarce resources are common coping strategies in Africa and Asia (Young and Jaspars, 1995). Coping strategies often carry extreme personal costs, including the separation of families or engagement in demeaning activities. Emergency interventions can go far in helping households to protect their assets and livelihood strategies while upholding dignity, either by providing food aid to prevent distress sales and migration or by providing non-food support to improve food availability and access, such as micro-credit, vouchers, cash or livestock. The challenges of such interventions start with the assessment. Unless this is geared towards understanding how livelihoods are threatened by the emergency and the implications for food security, it is unlikely that subsequent intervention strategies will take livelihoods into account.

Emergency humanitarian interventions cannot support livelihood and coping strategies when information on local priorities and needs and an understanding of how the crisis has affected livelihood strategies are lacking. As discussed below, many of these effects may become apparent through analysis of the underlying factors and causes. The ability to gather information on these topics and design interventions accordingly depends on the assessment framework, donor willingness and organization mandate.

Chronic versus transitory food insecurity – the temporal dimension

A proper assessment of food security examines issues of timing, duration and severity. Even in stable contexts, there are seasonal variations in food security based on the agricultural calendar or the seasonal availability of employment. These variations may affect the levels of food security experienced throughout the year and from one year to the next. Such inter- and intra-annual patterns are reflected in famine early warning monitoring systems, such as the Global Information and Early-Warning System (GIEWS), and influence the time frame and type of response.

In 1986, the World Bank first made the distinction between transitory and chronic food insecurity. Chronic food insecurity means that a household runs a continually high risk of being unable to meet the food needs of its members. Transitory food insecurity means that a household faces a temporary decline in the security of its entitlement, and the risk of failure to meet food needs is of short duration. In practice, the two are often closely linked, as successive seasonal (i.e. transitory) exposure to food insecurity may increase the vulnerability of a household and make it more liable to become chronically food insecure. The distinction between chronic and transitory food insecure is purely temporal, and does not include an analysis of the severity or intensity of the food insecurity that may exist.[5]

A particular challenge for policy-makers is the coexistence of chronic and transitory food insecurity. When the problem has been identified as chronic food insecurity, the broader time line allows practitioners and policy-makers to consider livelihood strategies, establish baseline data, study market trends and trade flows and work with communities to understand coping mechanisms and survival strategies. The question remains as to whether the variations in responses to chronic versus transitory food insecurity are based on differences in the nature of the crises concerned or differences in the ways the international humanitarian community views these crises and designs interventions.[6]

Ethiopian example

In many cases, there are several institutional frameworks for responding to the problems of chronic and transitory food insecurity. For example, since the 1970s, the Government of Ethiopia has been active in disaster prevention, preparedness and response, with policies focused on transitory food insecurity. Chronic food insecurity has received less attention. However, the Ethiopian Government is now prioritizing a rural development strategy that includes a new Coalition for Food and Livelihood Security (CFS), which was established during the height of the 2003 food crisis. CFS is intended to address the problems of chronic food insecurity and is linked to the government's larger programme for sustainable development and poverty reduction (Steering Committee, 2004).

Under the Ethiopian Government's new initiative to distinguish between types of food insecurity, up to 5.14 million chronically food-insecure individuals are now covered by the Productive Safety Nets Programme (PSNP), while the transitory food-insecure remain under the National Policy for Disaster Prevention and Management (NPDPM). The two responses have different time frames and goals, with PSNP prioritizing the reduction of household vulnerability, improved resilience to shock and the promotion of sustainable community development through providing multi-year, predictable resources. In theory, those who are chronically food-insecure should move out of

[5] The distinction between chronic and transitory food insecurity is often conflated with measures of severity, whereby transitory food insecurity is assumed to be severe and chronic food insecurity moderate. As Stephen Devereux points out in a work in progress, the severity of food insecurity does not depend on the temporal dimension (Stephen Devereux, IDS presentation at the SENAC meetings, 2 November 2005).

[6] For instance, WFP's policy "is that chronic situations should be addressed with longer-term development programmes, though distinguishing between chronic and transitory needs in crisis is a major challenge" for emergency needs assessments. (WFP, 2005b: 7).

PSNP – by no longer being food-insecure – within five years. The programme is in its early phases and many aspects are yet to be tested, but it is one of the few national responses that seeks to qualify the differences between types of food insecurity on the basis of time frame, and to respond accordingly.

Recognizing underlying factors and causes

The complexity of food insecurity in emergencies poses a challenge to those conducting assessments, particularly if the organization is hoping to implement non-food responses. An assessment framework must first be appropriate for gathering information on the multiple dimensions contributing to food insecurity, such as malnutrition, a health crisis, a poor policy or institutional environment, damaging coping strategies or lack of physical security. Following data collection, the analysis must be able to indicate possible intervention points within the various sectors and understand the ways in which such interventions are likely to affect food security in the short and long terms.

Understanding the underlying factors helps an organization to decide the appropriate sector or sectors for intervention. For example, if an assessment indicates that food insecurity is caused by a health crisis that has affected households' abilities to mobilize assets (such as labour,) usually used to access food, the appropriate intervention may be in the health sector.

One of the challenges to identifying the underlying factors behind food insecurity is that most assessments are geared towards specific sectors, such as health, water and sanitation or food security. For instance, nutrition surveys and food security assessments are both important aspects of emergency needs assessment and response. Assessments of food security and nutrition surveys are often carried out in parallel, but the different methods employed mean that the populations sampled are often not comparable. (For instance, nutrition surveys are often based on 30-cluster samples, while food security assessments are likely to sample specific food security or livelihood groups.) Although there is consensus that nutrition surveys should examine the underlying causes of malnutrition – food security, public health and the care environment (Sphere Project, 2004: chapter 3, assessment and analysis standard 2) – there is no consensus that food security assessments should explicitly seek information on nutritional status. A growing number of organizations, including Oxfam Great Britain, *Action Contre la Faim* (ACF) and Save the Children UK, regularly incorporate analysis of food, health and care factors in their nutrition surveys. In addition, there is growing interest in incorporating questions about food intake, such as food frequency and dietary diversity, as part of food security assessment and analysis. This may expand the use of nutritional indicators within food security assessments.

Ideally, assessments should indicate how household coping strategies serve as underlying factors in ameliorating or exacerbating food insecurity. Coping strategies that involve the sale of essential or productive assets or outmigration may improve food security in the short term, but exacerbate the situation over a longer time frame. Household decision-making is complex, as households seek to balance long-term goals with short-term necessities. Understanding these trade-offs and the possible harmful effects of coping strategies requires a wider knowledge of the social, political

and economic context, as a strategy that is acceptable and reversible in one situation may be irreversible and damaging in another.

As mentioned, the pressure to act rapidly in emergencies competes with the ability to understand the underlying aspects and contributing factors affecting and exacerbating the crisis, such as livelihood strategies, coping mechanisms, societal dynamics and links between livelihoods and conflict. The "one-size-fits-all" or top-down management characteristics of some relief operations contrast starkly with the more open, iterative and participatory style best suited to gathering in-depth information.

Moving beyond the familiar

At the organizational level, there may be obstacles to adopting assessment methods or frameworks that lead to new types of response. An organization that has traditionally handled a great deal of food aid, for instance, may shy away from sector-specific assessments that are likely to lead to other types of response. Reluctance to move beyond traditional programme areas may be a result of internal obstacles – such as lack of expertise in other sectors or over-reliance on predictable resource streams such as Title II food aid – or external obstacles, such as lack of donor support for non-traditional programmes. These constraints ultimately drive the nature of an organization's interventions, and affect assessment frameworks and analysis.

Familiarity breeds … familiarity

Some organizations focus on assessment and response in sectors with which they are familiar. The expertise of field staff may also limit or determine both the type of data collected in an assessment and the parameters of the ensuing intervention. When there is no nutritionist in the field, for instance, a field office cannot undertake anthropometric surveys or particular types of nutritional intervention in response to food insecurity.[7]

This is not necessarily a negative trend; sector-specific expertise is critical and can only be built through repeated and extensive experience. No one, for example, would recommend that *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF) build houses or schools. For organizations with broader scopes of work, however, the tendency to programme what they know or have can lead to packaged responses that vary little from one emergency to the next, regardless of underlying factors or context.

Supply-based considerations driving the intervention

Donor pressure and lack of alternative resources may result in the repeated programming of one type of resource, particularly food aid, without assessment-based evidence indicating whether a specific intervention is actually needed, and for whom.[8]

[7] In some contexts, certain agencies supply technical expertise for the wider humanitarian community. For example, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Malawi makes nutritionists available to agencies that lack such expertise. Similarly, FAO provides support to agencies undertaking agricultural interventions.

[8] During an interview on 3 October 2005, a staff member of a United States-based NGO cited this as a widespread problem that had most recently occurred following the South Asian tsunami in December 2004. With lack of other available resources and strong pressure from private donors, the Food for

At other times, a donor may wish to pilot or promote certain types of programme, regardless of the abilities of partner organizations or the assessments that these organizations are conducting in a given area or population. For instance, in early 2002, USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) sought to increase the number of cash-for-work programmes in Afghanistan, and had dedicated a total of US$29.8 million to such programmes by the end of the year (Lautze and Stites, 2002: 18). This left organizations in the field scrambling to respond in order to continue to receive OFDA funding. In other cases, field staff may simply not agree that conducting assessments is a valid use of time, particularly when the needs of the population in question appear obvious.[9]

Push system versus pull system

A former USAID staff member described this last situation as a "push system" of sending prepositioned emergency goods, as opposed to a "pull system" of responding with appropriate items based on assessed needs. "Push" factors may be influenced by the presence of a regular and reliable supplier of certain relief commodities, which may affect the type and quality of relief goods sent to the field. For instance, USAID's initial response strategy in emergencies is based on providing a limited number of commodities that are prepurchased and stocked in large volumes. Regardless of the actual needs on the ground, these items become the first line of response in emergencies because they are prepositioned. For USAID, they include plastic sheeting, 5-gallon jerry cans, 5-gallon collapsible water bladders and blankets.[10]

THE ROLE OF ASSESSMENTS IN EMERGENCIES

According to the common standards of the Sphere Project (2002: common standard 2):

> *Assessments provide an understanding of the disaster situation and a clear analysis of threats to life, dignity, health and livelihoods to determine, in consultation with the relevant authorities, whether an external response is required and, if so, the nature of the response.*

Information gathered from assessments helps organizations to make informed programme decisions. For example, information may allow an organization to assess current and future vulnerability based on the context of the crisis and the use of coping strategies. An assessment may also enable policy-makers to decide whether external assistance is needed in response to existing needs. Analysis of assessment data allows organizations to decide the appropriate modalities for implementing

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Peace office of USAID and WFP, the individual felt that the NGO had little choice but to provide free food distributions, even months after the tsunami had hit. The individual stressed that no assessments had ever been conducted to show continuing or widespread food insecurity that would warrant such a response.

[9] Interview with Save the Children US staff member, 1 October 2005.

[10] Interview with former USAID official, 17 September 2005. As of 20 October 2005, USAID had responded to the earthquake of 8 October with "shelter materials for 67,500 people" according to the agency's "Fact Sheet No. 12, South Asia-Earthquake". This translated into 900 rolls of plastic sheeting (providing shelter for roughly 60,000 people *if* support materials such as lumber are available – and tents for the remaining 7,500. As stated by USAID in the same document, the United Nations had emphasized the need for winter tents as the appropriate and needed form of shelter assistance.

programmes, i.e., whether assistance should be provided through existing structures, such as local government bodies, or by establishing new ones.

Accurate assessment data allow for geographic targeting of humanitarian assistance. When disaggregated by livelihood group, assessments may indicate the sector of the population that is most vulnerable to the shock and has experienced the greatest impact. This information allows organizations to establish appropriate targeting criteria.[11] In the absence of assessments, organizations are more likely to base targeting criteria on assumptions of need. For instance, the needs of IDPs are often assumed to be greater than those of settled populations, but a settled population may have equal or greater needs than IDPs in the same area. In particular, economic vulnerability may not be apparent without an assessment, but it can have a pronounced impact on households' ability to maintain food security. Save the Children UK conducted a rapid livelihoods assessment in South India following the December 2004 tsunami. It found that most relief interventions focused on individuals and households that had suffered tangible losses, such as destruction of property or death of family members, as experienced by many marine fishers. The tsunami had less visible effects on inland fishers, fish merchants and agricultural labourers, among others, while traders, shopkeepers, petty traders, money lenders and others experienced invisible but pronounced effects on their livelihoods. These latter groups were receiving little attention or relief at the time of the assessment (LeJeune, 2005: 14).

Food security assessments need to take into account specific criteria relating to food availability, access and utilization. The WFP (2004: 5) parameters specify that when an initial assessment has identified the need for external assistance, an emergency needs assessment should report on:

- the magnitude and geographic extent of the crisis;
- the gap in meeting minimum nutritional needs;
- gender and age differences in terms of vulnerability, capabilities, livelihood systems and needs for food, non-food items and care;
- household coping capacities in regard to ability to produce or procure food;
- the national capacity to respond to the crisis;
- the extent to which food needs can be met through market interventions, safety-net programmes or other non-food means;
- the time period in which livelihoods are expected to return to normal.

Although these criteria refer specifically to situations in which a need for food aid has already been identified, they are equally applicable to broader food security assessments that might lead to non-food or a combination of food and non-food responses.

Insecurity or lack of access to a given population sometimes makes it impossible to conduct assessments in emergencies. When this is the case, partial access is usually possible or data may be gathered through indirect assessments, such as the testimony of IDPs or refugees, for instance. Follow-up assessments can be conducted in acute

[11] The targeting decisions of who should receive what are usually made after the assessment phase. Clear targeting criteria are usually established through community consultation. WFP is increasingly using a model of community-based targeting (CBT).

emergencies to check assumptions and make adjustments to the relief programmed immediately after the emergency. These alternatives to conducting thorough initial emergency needs assessments allow organizations to take into account the ways in which the needs and priorities on the ground affect continuing emergency programming.

In many instances, however, organizations do not overcome the challenges to conducting emergency assessments. This may mean that longer-term emergency programmes of several months or more are based on data from an initial emergency assessment that is more appropriate to short-term rapid interventions. Alternatively, decisions may be made in the absence of any assessment. This often means that the initial emergency input, such as free food aid, continues to flow as originally scheduled, regardless of changes over time or the continuing appropriateness of the intervention. Evidence of this trend comes from an ODI review of seven food security interventions in emergencies in the Great Lakes Region between 1996 and 2003. Humanitarian agencies supplied free food in all of these cases, but assessments to determine whether or not free food was appropriate were carried out in only three, even though at least some access would have been possible in the other instances (Levine and Chastre, 2004: 10). ODI research indicated that a lack of purchasing power was the most serious constraint to household food security in most of the case studies, thereby illustrating that responses to improve households' *access* to food would have been a more appropriate response than food distributions.[12]

APPROACHES, OBJECTIVES AND TOOLS

Assessment methods do not differ radically from one international humanitarian organization to another. This is partly because of the flow of staff among organizations, the sharing of knowledge and experience in the field and at headquarters, and the relatively small body of secondary literature, theories, reviews and field studies that provide operational knowledge. Variations that do exist lie not in the tools that organizations use in the field, but rather in their approaches and underlying conceptual models.

There are also few differences in the assessment methods that lead to food versus non-food interventions. Assessments resulting in non-food interventions are likely to have a somewhat broader perspective and to take more account of underlying factors contributing to food insecurity than assessments that lead to food-based responses; these must include a means of estimating the food gap or deficit and the numbers of people affected. Although households' ability to meet their food requirements is relevant to non-food assessments, it does not need to be analysed with the same degree of precision if the information is not being used to calculate food aid requirements. The following discussion of the similarities and differences in assessments does not dwell in detail on food versus non-food distinctions.

[12] Small amounts of cash were provided through cash-for-work programmes in three of the seven instances, but these were not the same cases in which an emergency needs assessments had been conducted. This raises doubts as to whether cash for work was appropriate in these settings (Levine and Chastre, 2004: 13).

Approaches to emergency assessments

Three general approaches to conducting assessments and analysing data in emergencies were apparent in the documents reviewed for this report. These should be taken as flexible and overlapping categories that may vary according to the situation. The approaches are not static, and an organization may choose to vary or combine assessment approaches and methods when working in a particular situation.

The first is an *organization-wide* approach, in which an organization develops guidelines to be used in all assessments. This does not necessarily mean that the same methods are always used, as methods are likely to vary according to the local context and the security environment, among other factors. The guidelines often contain specific tools, information on sampling, instructions for data analysis and guidance on forming recommendations based on the analysis. Large organizations with operations or offices in many countries are the most likely to use an organization-wide approach, as it is easier to ensure the consistency and comparability of data if field staff in all countries follow a similar model. Having comparable data enables headquarters to design interventions and allocate funds based on analysis of the severity of needs on the ground. For example, WFP uses the emergency food security assessment (EFSA) as a universal guideline, but stresses that this assessment approach can be adapted to the needs of each situation (WFP, 2005c: 2). Similarly, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is in the final stages of developing an assessment manual for use in emergency assessments in all of its 181 national societies.

The second approach is that of *standard methods*, whereby an organization uses one assessment method in most emergencies, but country offices and field teams have flexibility to adapt this method as appropriate. This approach is less uniform than the organization-wide approach because of greater flexibility of application in the field. The household economy approach (HEA) of Save the Children UK is a good example of an approach based on standard assessment methods (Boudreau, 1998; Boudreau and Coutts, 2002). The HEA entails gathering qualitative data to capture the effects of shocks on household production, income and expenditure. This allows practitioners to identify population groups that are vulnerable to food insecurity. Save the Children UK and other organizations, including WFP, use the HEA for emergency assessments in many different situations, but field personnel may adapt and/or supplement the methodology according to the country context and specific issue to be examined. For instance, Save the Children UK in Indonesia adapted the assessment methodology to include a rapid livelihoods assessment (Save the Children UK, 2005a) and supplemented HEA with analysis of the effects of HIV/AIDS on two communities in Malawi (Seaman, Petty and Acidri, 2005).

Organizations may also use a standard framework for analysing data that have been collected through a variety of assessment models. For instance, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has recently adopted the use of an integral human development (IHD) framework "to help in analysing local situations from a holistic perspective" (CRS, 2005: 3). This aims to analyse assessment data from a livelihoods and rights-based perspective, taking into account the vulnerability context, structures, systems and assets of affected households. The framework includes three main objectives for response strategies: the reduction of vulnerability; the strengthening of existing

structures and systems to make them more effective for recovery and future disaster preparedness; and the rebuilding of productive assets and livelihood strategies in order to improve future well-being and resilience (CRS, 2005: 9). Although not yet tested in multiple country cases, the IHD framework represents one agency's attempts to create a standard framework for understanding data and improving emergency responses.

An off-shoot of the standard methods approach uses a tool kit for conducting assessments. Rather than following a centralized set of guidelines, field staff and country offices select the most appropriate method for the emergency at hand from the tool kit. Ideally, trainings provide staff with information on how to make the best use of tools in a given situation. Some organizations use a list of tools for certain types of assessment methods, such as Mercy Corps, which draws from a "menu" of participatory approaches called ASSETS. Mercy Corps does not mandate the use of ASSETS in every situation, but seeks to ensure that staff members are comfortable and familiar with these approaches and recognize the importance of including communities in assessments.[13]

The third method of conducting assessments entails a *context-specific* approach. The organization assumes that each emergency is unique, and does not seek to establish universal guidelines or standard methods. Assessments may seek to answer the same over-arching questions in every situation, but there is no proscribed formula for determining the most appropriate response. For instance, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) intentionally avoids an organization-wide approach out of concern that this would limit the ability of assessment teams to take into account the context-specific nature of each emergency situation.[14] Mercy Corps, although using the ASSETS menu for participatory approaches, also adheres to a context-specific approach, allowing staff to decide the nature of the assessment data to be collected. An off-shoot of this approach is the decentralized model followed by, for instance, the Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE). In this model, country offices pilot assessment methodologies and interventions adapted to the particular country and operating environment. CARE headquarters provides support to help country offices' transition in and out of emergency mode, and also collects examples of good practices from the field to share with and disseminate to other country offices.[15]

Objectives of emergency assessments

Assessments usually begin by identifying the objectives of the assessment process: without clear objectives the assessment lacks direction and is essentially meaningless. The objectives determine what the assessment looks for, how the analysis is conducted and how the results are interpreted. Objectives are shaped by the context of the emergency, but vary according to the conducting organization's mandate, goals,

[13] Interviews with Mercy Corps staff members, 24 August and 9 September 2005.
[14] Interview with ICRC staff members, 7 September 2005. ICRC has a reference framework to help staff develop thematic guidelines when planning assistance. This document outlines the broad steps that should be followed when thinking about emergencies and interventions, but is not a blueprint for conducting assessments (ICRC, 2004a). Additional operational guidelines for economic security staff provide further reference on assessments and interventions, but are designed to be flexible and adaptive.
[15] Personal communication, CARE staff member, 27 August 2005.

preferred methodology and conceptual basis, as well as the nature of the assessment itself. Many different types of assessment are relevant in emergencies, but food security assessments, nutrition surveys and livelihood approaches to food security assessments feed directly into emergency responses to food insecurity. Some of the main differences in the objectives and underlying rationale of these three approaches are briefly examined here.

Food security assessments

Food security assessments examine aspects of food availability, food access and food utilization, but usually focus on the food security *strategies* of households, i.e., the different ways in which households acquire food or income to buy food – their entitlements. Based on Sen's entitlement theory approach, emergency assessments examine the ways in which human-induced or natural shocks affect these strategies and how households seek to adapt in response. The exact objectives of food security assessments differ among organizations and emergencies. Examples of the specific objectives of organizations include:

- Using the HEA, Save the Children UK seeks to "identify the impact of a shock on the ability of households to acquire food and non-food goods" (Jaspars and Shoham, 2002: 42). This is usually with a view to determining the size and duration of the food gap, which when combined with the number of affected people leads to an estimate of food aid needed.
- MSF-Holland seeks to "determine the stage of food insecurity and appropriate food and health interventions" (Jaspars and Shoham, 2002: 46). This information assists the understanding of how food insecurity might affect health status.
- In 2002, a Southern African Development Community (SADC) vulnerability assessment committee (VAC) carried out regional emergency food security assessment to "generate timely and necessary information and analysis to guide critical decision-making" (SADC, 2002: 2).

As these examples indicate, assessments can have specific or broad objectives. These differences reflect, at least in part, the size of the organization and the complexity of the assessment model. For instance, the SACD VAC carried out assessments in seven countries, with multiple assessment teams from several organizations working in different contexts but all feeding results into one assessment report.

Nearly all food security assessments take into account the past context (i.e. what did food security strategies look like before this crisis?) and the future implications of present survival methods (i.e. what are the longer-term impacts of the present strategy going to be?). Establishing changes in food security over time, such as shifts in entitlements and the adoption of coping strategies, helps the understanding of how food insecurity has evolved and the likelihood of famine. In the objectives given, only MSF-Holland is explicit about determining "the stage of food insecurity". These stages relate to the types of coping or crisis strategies.

Objectives often relate directly to the mandate of an organization, and seek to generate the exact information desired in fulfilment of that mandate. For instance, WFP has traditionally focused on the need for food assistance. Accordingly, the

objectives of WFP emergency assessments address whether or not there is a need for food aid and, if so, whether the international community should respond. The objectives for WFP's EFSA process are to:

- determine whether there is or will be a food security or nutritional problem that is beyond the coping and recovery abilities of the affected communities;
- determine what kind of assistance is needed, by whom, and where, when and how it should be provided;
- determine whether the government and other national organizations can meet the needs without outside assistance.

These broad objectives are designed to allow WFP to determine whether it should be involved in a given emergency response. (WFP, 2005c: section 1.1)

Nutrition surveys

Nutrition is both an outcome of food security, in that food insecurity is an underlying cause of malnutrition, and an integral part of food security, in that it directly relates to food quality and utilization – how food is prepared and distributed within the household, and its physiological utilization within the body.

Nutritional (or anthropometric) surveys are principally concerned with measuring the impact of the emergency on the general nutritional situation. This is done by assessing the extent and severity of acute malnutrition or wasting among children under 5 years of age.[16] In some cases, surveys also estimate the under-5 mortality rate (U5MR) and the crude mortality rate (CMR).[17]

However, food insecurity is only one of three underlying causes of malnutrition and changes in nutritional status. For this reason it is accepted good practice to review not only food insecurity, but also public health (access to health services, water and sanitation and shelter) and the social and care environment as part of a nutrition survey, in order to understand the relative importance of food insecurity in causing changes in nutritional status. Review of underlying causes is particularly important in the absence of an established nutritional surveillance system or previous nutrition surveys with which to compare emergency findings. If other significant underlying causes of malnutrition are not present, the nutritional status of children under 5 years of age is a sensitive indicator of food insecurity at the local level (Young and Jaspars, 1995). A complete nutritional assessment examines nutrition, health and care, and the seasonal and intra-annual variations in these.

Livelihood approaches to food security assessments

Based on those originally developed by Conway and Chambers (1992), livelihoods approaches are very broad and can cover a wide range of sectors and coping within

[16] Acute malnutrition or wasting is a sensitive indicator of recent nutrition, and can therefore reflect change in the nutritional status of communities.

[17] Micronutrient deficiency diseases are also a risk in emergencies, but there are no standardized survey procedures for assessing them as this usually involves clinical and/or biological analysis. Nutrition surveys, on the other hand, involve relatively straightforward and standardized anthropometric measures.

households. This report considers livelihood approaches that focus on food security. A growing number of organizations incorporate a livelihoods approach into food security assessment methods, for example CARE and Oxfam GB. Save the Children UK has positioned its household food economy model within a livelihoods context, recognizing that food or household economies operate in the wider context of livelihoods. The IHD framework of CRS is a modified livelihoods assessment mechanism, and CARE uses an approach based on the sustainable livelihoods framework, but this is rarely used in sudden-onset emergencies (CARE, 2002).[18] A 2003 review by WFP of its emergency operations (EMOPs) and protracted relief and recovery operations (PRROs) found that roughly one-third of EMOPs and two-thirds of PRROs included objectives relating to the preservation of assets and the restoration of livelihoods for people affected by emergencies (WFP, 2003: 6).

The objectives of livelihood assessments of food security usually vary according to the specifics of the emergency. For instance, Oxfam GB used a livelihoods approach in a food security assessment in Mauritania in 2004. The objectives of this assessment were to:

- assess the damage caused by the locust invasion;
- improve understanding of the food security context;
- assess the impact of the crisis on food security and livelihoods;
- identify the most relevant response to the crisis (Oxfam GB, 2004: 3).

In Malawi in 2005, the joint Oxfam programmes used a livelihoods approach to conduct an emergency assessment, and used the HEA developed by Save the Children. This assessment sought to:

- determine the impacts of the prolonged dry spell on agricultural production, both crops and livestock;
- determine the impact of the dry spell on the various wealth groups;
- determine the coping strategies employed by different groups, and the long-term implications of these on future livelihoods;
- determine the impact of the dry spell on winter cropping and access to water;
- generate relevant information on food access and livelihoods to better inform future programming (Oxfam International, 2005b: 5).

The themes in these objectives focus explicitly on access to food and income and on coping strategies in the past, present and future. Livelihood approaches to food security tend to focus on strategies for acquiring food and income, but do so within the broader context of livelihoods and how these strategies are likely to influence the longer-term sustainability of household livelihoods.

By examining present and future coping strategies, livelihood approaches indicate areas of possible intervention to support and protect assets and prevent the adoption of possibly damaging crisis strategies. However, by focusing explicitly on strategies to acquire food, most food security assessments that use a livelihood approach tend to

[18] In a personal communication of 2 November 2005, Tim Frankenberger of TANGO emphasizes that CARE was the first organization, before DFID, to develop and implement a sustainable livelihoods approach to fieldwork.

ignore the set of human, natural, physical, financial and social assets that households access or strive to access in pursuit of livelihood strategies. Examination of access to, control over or loss of these assets improves assessments' understanding of adaptations and responses to emergencies at the household and individual levels. Analysis of assets may clarify the opportunities for non-food interventions.

Emergency assessment types and tools

Approaches to conducting emergency assessments may vary, but there are more similarities than differences in the tools used to gather information in the field. Most differences in assessment methods are related more to the time frame and manner in which tools are used, than to the tools themselves. Initial emergency assessments are often classified as "rapid", but this time frame varies by organization and emergency.

Initial emergency assessments lasting only a few days use fewer tools than longer assessments, or they use the same tools but with less in-depth collection of data. A review of field assessments and assessment guidelines shows that the tools most likely to be used in brief initial emergency assessments include:

- review of secondary data and literature, including the data available from early warning systems, local monitoring systems and humanitarian information centres for the region;
- direct non-sampled observation of the situation, such as analysis of housing stock, testing of water and external evaluation of livestock conditions;
- rapid appraisal techniques, including semi-structured interviews with key informants and focus group interviews;
- checklists.

The range of tools is broader in the longer emergency assessments of one to two weeks. These assessment methods are likely to include all of these tools and some or all of the following:

- nutrition surveys;
- household surveys;
- market assessments and possibly commodity chain analysis.

The duration of the initial assessment has implications for the type and quality of data collected. For instance, an agency conducting an assessment over three hours may be able to gather information through direct observation, checklists, a focus group interview using participatory techniques and one or two interviews with key informants. The data will likely provide a snapshot of some of the key elements of the emergency, including the condition of livestock, crops and houses, food availability in the local market, and the concerns of one sector of the population. This information may be sufficient for the programming of stop-gap assistance, such as a general food distribution, but will be less useful for targeting effective livelihoods support or analysing possible non-food priorities and needs.

In contrast, assessments carried out over a longer period – of two weeks, for example – are likely to provide more thorough information on the context of the emergency and the dynamics within the affected communities. For instance, more extensive focus

group interviews might produce findings that reflect vulnerability indicators or profiles, an analysis of coping mechanisms by demographic or livelihood group and a greater understanding of community priorities and needs. Market and commodity chain analysis allows an understanding of commercial and exchange relationships and of the way in which power dynamics affect these important aspects of livelihood strategies and food security. Emergency assessments in human-induced emergencies include conflict analysis, which seeks to predict the risk and potential impact of conflict on livelihood strategies (Jaspars and Shoham, 2002: 27). Household questionnaires to gather representative quantitative data may be included in longer and more in-depth assessments. Annex I provides more information on the use of specific tools.

Variations among assessments according to their duration do not necessarily correlate to the quality of information or intervention. Organizations can gather more detailed information through a longer assessment, but there are instances in which such an assessment is not possible because of the urgency of need or security concerns for staff and personnel. In such instances, an assessment of a few hours or days can gather sufficient information to enable organizations to decide whether an immediate response is necessary, and if so what form such a response should take.

Multiple assessment stages – a logical information system

Regular food crises and high levels of chronic food insecurity in many disaster-affected countries mean that food security assessments are one component of a wider information system, which includes early warning, initial assessment, monitoring, evaluation and specific sectoral assessments and studies. Maxwell and Watkins (2003) reviewed the logical components and their linkages in the Greater Horn of Africa. The components may not be institutionally or formally linked, but they are informed by and inform each other. They constitute "learning cycles" within a wider humanitarian information system.

Thus, many humanitarian organizations seek to conduct assessments in several stages or cycles. Field staff or local partners of international organizations in the region may conduct an initial rapid assessment during or as soon as possible after the emergency. Based on the standards of the Sphere Project (2004: common standard 2), an initial assessment:

> *is not an end in itself, but should be seen as a first step in a continuous process of reviewing and updating as part of the monitoring process, usually when the situation is evolving rapidly, or when there are critical developments such as large population movements or an outbreak of disease.*

Following an initial assessment, a humanitarian organization may conduct a more in-depth assessment to expand on or verify the findings. In some instances, the teams for these second assessments include additional personnel with specific technical expertise. The second round of assessments may also include a more in-depth examination of specific sectors, based on needs indicated in the initial analysis.

WFP's EFSA contains three stages of emergency needs assessments. *Initial investigations* usually last from two to five days. They aim to determine whether or

not there is or could be a food security crisis requiring an external response, and if so what form of assistance is likely to be needed. The second stage entails *rapid EFSAs*, which occur either after an initial investigation or when a major change or new crisis is likely to have affected previous operations. A rapid EFSA typically lasts from two to six weeks and aims to determine the type, scale and timing of the needed response. The third level of assessment is the *in-depth EFSA*, which is implemented in response to a slow-onset crisis or when a situation has stabilized and more detailed information is needed for developing future programming. An in-depth assessment includes representative household surveys and seeks to develop a detailed understanding of the food insecurity and to create a household profile for each subgroup in the population (WFP, 2005c: 8–10).

NON-FOOD RESPONSES BASED ON A LIVELIHOODS FRAMEWORK

Emergency assessments indicate gaps in the ability of affected populations to meet their needs through the use of coping strategies. Such gaps include food insecurity, and households' inability to secure proper shelter, access to health care or physical security. An assessment that identifies food insecurity will indicate the obstacles, constraints or vulnerabilities that prevent households from achieving food security. These might be related to external processes, such as chronic poverty or prolonged or adverse climatic conditions; to political, social or economic processes such as ethnicity, gender, political marginalization or trade restrictions; to vulnerabilities such as geographic location, poor nutrition or exposure to hazards; to shocks within the household such as unemployment, illness or death; or to damaging coping mechanisms such a sale of assets or migration.

Identifying the factors that contribute to food insecurity is the first step in designing an appropriate non-food response. These factors may point to a specific type of non-food response, but understanding the exact form that the response should take is more complicated. If, for example, an assessment indicates that food insecurity is linked to the collapse of the livestock sector, an organization must select from among a range of possible livestock interventions, including fodder provision, veterinary support, destocking and restocking. Selecting the appropriate intervention requires knowledge of the overall sector and the affected population, and possibly the collection of additional information. Practitioners must also consider the possible negative effects of an intervention prior to implementation, particularly when operating in conditions of conflict or political tension. For instance, a response that provides assets such as livestock may increase susceptibility to banditry and looting, thereby leading to further asset stripping and increased vulnerability.

This section includes a brief overview of sector-specific non-food responses based on a livelihoods framework. (More detailed examples of these responses are provided in Annex II.) Classifying food security interventions according to a livelihoods framework allows analysis of the ways in which such interventions aim to protect, support or promote livelihood strategies and assets. The responses focus on the assets, policies, institutions and processes that form the basis of household livelihood strategies.

A livelihoods framework

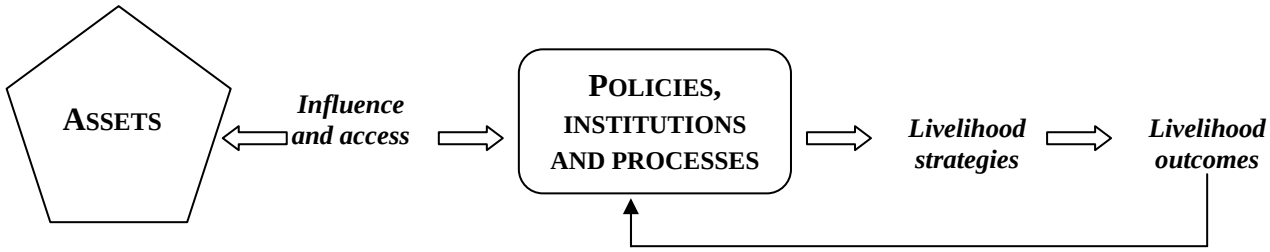
Emergency interventions to support livelihoods take many forms. Livelihood interventions protect, support or promote livelihood strategies as a means either of saving lives or of reducing suffering, poverty or vulnerability over the longer term. For example, a livestock destocking programme aims to *protect* the livelihoods of pastoralists by preventing the loss of remaining livestock and converting the off-take animals into cash or other assets. An intervention that establishes a weather radio network for fishers is a *preventive* livelihood protection strategy. An intervention that provides nets to fishing communities following a typhoon strives to *support* an existing but weakened livelihood strategy by helping households to rebuild their asset bases. Interventions that protect or support livelihoods in emergencies enable households and communities to rely on their own coping strategies for survival. In contrast, an intervention that introduces new diversified crops to an agrarian community seeks to *promote* a new and more diversified livelihood strategy in an effort to reduce vulnerability and expand households' coping options.

Livelihood interventions may be aimed at specific groups, such as pastoralists, farmers or fishers, or may seek to address different types of livelihood contexts, vulnerabilities and resources, such as markets (Lautze and Stites, 2002: 7). Livelihood interventions also differ depending on the aspect of a livelihood strategy that they seek to address. The two main components of a livelihoods framework are:

- the bundle of assets that a household has access to; and
- the policies, institutions and processes (PIPs) that influence the ways in which a household is able to pursue its livelihood strategies over time.

FIFC uses an adapted livelihoods framework based on the sustainable livelihood approach developed by CARE in the early 1990s, DFID's (1999) sustainable livelihoods framework and Collinson's (2003) framework. Figure 2 illustrates this framework.

Figure 2: Simplified livelihoods framework



Emergency livelihood interventions focus either on households' assets – or capital – or on the PIPs that enable or hinder livelihood strategies. Interventions that target a household's asset or human, financial, physical, natural and social capital base may prevent erosion of that household's livelihood strategies and mitigate its vulnerability to external shock by promoting a diversified asset base. However, the possession of

assets can be a liability leading to increased vulnerability in certain situations, such as in emergencies characterized by cattle raiding, banditry or looting.

Livelihood interventions that target PIPs may focus on policy or advocacy and are not always obvious to the beneficiaries. Such interventions include policy changes to ensure better access to natural resources, political or economic interventions to promote trade or improve the flow of goods and services, and advocacy to improve the position of vulnerable households or to encourage improved governance.

Annex II provides more information and examples of livelihood interventions in two categories, those that focus on assets and those that target PIPs.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings

This desk review of emergency assessments and response interventions indicates patterns in the collection and analysis of information and how these affect humanitarian response to food insecurity. Key findings are as follows:

- The number of assessments conducted in an emergency is substantially smaller than the number of relief programmes implemented. In many instances, organizations do not conduct emergency assessments, but instead design programmes based on assumptions regarding need, baselines from pre-existing programmes or findings from secondary data. This is not always negative, as these sources often make it possible to determine what the first tier of assistance should include. However, it is critical to conduct an assessment following or during the initial response in order to verify assumptions and plan any future programming.

- Food aid continues to be the most prevalent and longest-running external response to food insecurity in emergencies. This is because of diverse factors, including political pressure from donor governments, and other endogenous and exogenous pressures on implementing organizations. Food aid plays a critical role in saving lives, preserving household assets and preventing the adoption of irreversible coping strategies such as migration and the early marriage of children. However, the provision of food aid – particularly from external rather than local or regional sources – should be considered only after other interventions to improve availability, access and utilization have been carefully weighed. Such interventions may include non-food responses or a combination of food aid and non-food interventions.

- The challenges to conducting good assessments in emergencies are manifold.

    - *Trade-offs:* Emergency assessments almost always entail making calculated trade-offs, regarding both how the assessment is conducted and the nature of the ensuing programme or intervention. The most obvious trade-off in the assessment process is between speed and quality. The urgency to save lives means that the speed of an assessment is prioritized over the quality, breadth and depth of the

information gathered. (In this instance, quality refers to the coverage, reliability, validity and relevance of the data.) In the programming that follows assessments, trade-offs are made necessary by resource allocations, staff capacity and the situation on the ground, among other factors. Trade-offs are inevitable, and the fact that they have been made should be acknowledged in the assessment methodology (e.g., "Quality was sacrificed for speed in the gathering of information") and programme response (e.g., "The assessment indicated an important role for micro-credit, but this is not possible under our current funding stream").

- *Situational:* The nature of an emergency itself poses obstacles. These include difficulties of operating in conditions of political instability, which may be violent and are often in flux, lack of access to vulnerable or marginalized populations, weak governance and civil society, and extreme environmental conditions. These factors hamper both the logistics of conducting assessments and the ability to gather good information.[19]
- *Time frame:* Distinguishing between chronic and transitory food insecurity and appropriate responses poses a challenge for both practitioners and policy-makers. Organizations must decide when to prioritize the protection of livelihoods in chronically food-insecure environments, even though such programmes are less likely to generate public or political support than are more overt efforts to save lives. Field staff must decide how to use information on food insecurity to call attention to a crisis and raise funds. This can be difficult in cases of chronic food insecurity, even when indicators such as nutritional status point to an acute crisis.
- *Symptoms and causes:* In reporting results, emergency assessments must balance examination of the obvious symptoms of food insecurity – poor food availability, insufficient food access or inadequate food utilization – with discussion of the underlying factors that contribute to the nature and severity of that food insecurity. This is a challenge, as it is always easier to recognize symptoms than causes, and understanding the specific underlying factors requires greater knowledge of the situation. Such information is critical to effective and appropriate programming that is likely to have long-term effects.

➢ There is much common ground among the food security assessment approaches of international humanitarian organizations, including:

- a shared understanding of the concept of food security as including availability, access and utilization; this generates similar conceptual frameworks and common elements within assessments;
- higher-level goals and purposes for assessments, which are all rooted in the humanitarian imperative to prevent and alleviate suffering;

[19] War destroys information, as well as lives and livelihoods. For example, situations of conflict may be characterized by a lack of reliable population censuses, the destruction or loss of records, and a brain drain of those with relevant knowledge. In many instances, population displacement renders any information that does exist obsolete (Benini and Conley, forthcoming).

- methodological tools and techniques, which are all drawn from a quantitative tradition, such as indicator-based surveys and monitoring systems, and/or qualitative approaches, such as key informant and focus group interviews.

- By identifying the common ground among organizations' assessment approaches, the variations become more apparent. These variations lie not in the tools used in the field but rather in the organizational approaches, the specific objectives, the interpretation or adaptation of core concepts and the application of methods. Although the higher-level goals and purposes of assessment are similar among organizations, the objectives of a specific assessment are likely to be shaped by the context of the crisis. Changes in objectives influence the assessment design, including its sampling approach and selection of data collection and analytical techniques.

  One of the key differences in food security assessments lies in the trade-offs between speed and quality. A related trade-off is that between available resources – such as technical expertise, field teams and logistical support – and quality. Speed and resources are often the key factors that limit an agency's capacity to assess and analyse the multiple dimensions of food security and the factors affecting it.

- No specific tool or set of tools used in emergency assessments is more or less likely to indicate the need for a non-food response. Greater emphasis on the breadth of factors affecting food security is more likely to point to non-food responses, but this does not entail the use of specific tools. The broader factors to be considered include the destruction of livelihood strategies, the loss of assets, public health crises, displacement, and the use of potentially damaging coping strategies. Agencies seeking to collect thorough information on the causes of food insecurity must strike a balance between gathering context-specific data, which focus on aspects that are important in the context, and using a broad framework that examines the multiple dimensions of food security.

- Food security assessments take place within the broader framework of the humanitarian information system. The details of this framework vary according to context, but the logical components of the international information system have been identified, and structures such as humanitarian information centres (HICs) and early warning systems (EWS) are in place to support them. Any developments in food security assessment methods should be shared within the broader strategic framework of information systems. Adjustments to assessment approaches and methodologies should be considered in terms of their broader implications for the information system.

- Conducting assessments in several stages leads to more complete analysis of need and a shorter learning cycle. This improved learning cycle leads to assessments and responses that take into account change over time and enables necessary adjustments in programming and advocacy strategies. Organizations using multi-stage assessments may conduct a rapid initial

assessment immediately after an emergency, following this with a more in-depth assessment as soon as circumstances allow.

- Although there are many options for non-food responses, those that seek to protect, support or promote livelihood strategies and/or assets are likely to have the greatest impact over time. The preservation of assets is a key aspect of humanitarian interventions, as preventing asset loss mitigates vulnerability and the adoption of detrimental coping strategies. Livelihood approaches include a vast range of non-food responses, such as livestock programmes, agricultural support, health interventions, water and sanitation improvements, and cash and credit responses.

Recommendations

A new take on existing frameworks

These findings lead the review team to recommend the use of a food security assessment framework that draws from a livelihoods perspective for conducting assessments and designing interventions in emergencies. Such an approach expands on, rather than replaces, existing models for food security assessments and livelihood approaches. Recognizing that it is nearly impossible to conduct a complete livelihoods assessment in the conditions of insecurity and urgency that often characterize an emergency, we recommend an adaptation of current livelihood approaches to place greater emphasis on *assets* and the role of *conflict*.

In emergency contexts, a livelihoods approach usually focuses primarily on food security strategies based on the means of a household for accessing food and income, sometimes includes expenditures, and in only a few cases examines the impact of the emergency on the natural, physical, financial, human and social assets. Examination of the PIPs that affect livelihoods in an emergency is almost unknown.[20]

The proposed approach introduces greater nuance into the current understanding of how different livelihood groups experience, adapt to and, in some cases, benefit from an emergency, and how different strategies lead to variations in food security. The central components and features of the approach are described below, followed by a summary of the key steps.

Conflict analysis

A central component of the proposed approach is the use of conflict analysis tools even in situations that are not explicitly associated with conflict. Conflict analysis helps to indicate the potential tensions within society, the different stakeholders and interest groups in an emergency, and the role of governance and civil structures in supporting positive or negative change. Understanding these aspects provides information that is extremely useful to the transition out of an emergency, regardless of the causes of the crisis. An analysis of who is benefiting or making a profit from an emergency also helps to shape interventions and, possibly, recovery efforts.

[20] An exception is a 2003 report by an FIFC research team (Lautze *et al.*, 2003).

"Winners" and "losers" exist in any context, but the differences between these groups or individuals may be more pronounced in an emergency. An individual, household or community whose livelihood strategy reaps rewards – a "winner" – is not necessarily exploiting or manipulating the situation. For instance, a subsistence farmer with surplus production of a drought-resistant crop is likely to make money at the market in a drought year; a community-based animal health worker is likely to see an upsurge in business during a livestock epidemic; a carpenter or lumber supplier reaps a profit following the destruction of homes; and the owner of a trucking company hired to move relief goods will benefit from the inflow of humanitarian assistance. All of these "winners" provide needed services and, as a result, may be better off than others in their communities during an emergency. An understanding of these patterns assists practitioners and policy-makers in directing assistance to where it will have the greatest positive impact, which does not always mean to the poorest of the poor.

Conflict analysis also indicates the potential flash points within a society or community under stress. The dichotomy between those who stand to benefit and those who do not is often more pronounced during the tension and resource scarcity of an emergency. The onset of a natural disaster or economic shock magnifies existing social, political and economic cleavages within a society. Certain groups and individuals gain from these situations, while others lose; this difference is partly caused by shifts in access to assets and the ways in which groups are able to adapt livelihood strategies in times of crisis (e.g., Keen, 2000). In some instances, the visible benefits to some members of society may increase tensions or create a liability. This can occur with remittances, humanitarian assistance, commercial capital growth or livestock holdings.

In situations of armed conflict, the role of policies and institutions in the form of governance also needs to be considered in programming and policy making. On one hand, armed conflict contributes to increased vulnerability, risk and insecurity, while on the other hand, poor governance hinders the implementation of well-targeted humanitarian programmes. Conflict analysis must therefore take account of the underlying causes of conflict and their implications for vulnerability and governance. The World Bank, DFID, FEWER and USAID all see conflict analysis as a key element in their programme development, and frameworks for conflict analysis are increasingly being utilized in the field.

WFP should also examine the underlying causes of armed conflicts and emergencies in general and the likely effects of these factors on targeting, distribution and operations. For WFP, conflict analysis can contribute to improved analysis of and more impartial response to the wide-ranging needs of an emergency-affected population. Conflict analysis should include an analysis of governance and related institutions, including the relationship of governing institutions to the conflict, and local perceptions of the roles of these institutions. This is a necessary part of determining sources and levels of risk and vulnerability and establishing the operational capacity to target food according to need. The ultimate question that international aid agencies must ask is whether or not public institutions are sufficiently impartial, professional and accountable to assist in the targeting and distribution of food assistance.

Tools that are useful for conflict analysis include:[21]

- carrying out a secondary literature review;
- establishing a historical time line of the conflict at the national level, in specific communities or for different groups;
- conducting stakeholder analysis to understand not only who the winners and losers are, but also the motives and roles of the political players, combatants, constituencies, etc;
- understanding the structures that contribute to the conflict and the dynamics that determine how stakeholders relate to these structures;
- reviewing how different sides in an armed conflict or different interest groups in an emergency have evolved and what they seek to gain from a particular outcome or evolution of the emergency.

The temporal and historical dimensions

The approach proposed here emphasizes the importance of reviewing historical data and change over time, with a view to developing a more complete understanding of a crisis. Such information is invaluable for understanding the drivers of the conflict or crisis and the previous local and national responses to similar circumstances. Owing to the rapid turnover of field personnel in international humanitarian organizations, there are often very few staff members with in-depth historical or institutional knowledge of past crises and responses. The conditions of urgency make historical reviews impossible at the height of crisis, but organizations can take proactive measures by drafting desk studies and reviews in countries where they have existing programmes and that are prone to disaster or conflict – i.e., disaster preparedness activities. Donor organizations and multinational agencies can address this need by developing local capacity for emergency response, including commissioning studies on a broad range of countries likely to experience crisis.

Promotion of good practice principles and capacities to review assessment quality

Collecting relevant and accurate information over a relatively short period in crisis situations requires the ability to conduct good qualitative research. This requires efforts by assessment teams to improve the validity and rigour of data collection and analysis. Although processes for improving the quality of quantitative surveys are well established and commonly applied,[22] this is less true of qualitative approaches. Good practice principles for qualitative approaches exist, but they are not standardized across organizations,[23] nor are they routinely reflected in food security assessment reports. Such good practice principles would include:

[21] For specific conflict analysis tools, see World Bank, 2005 and Goodhand, Vaux and Walker, 2002.

[22] For example, reviewing the representativeness of the sampling design, selection of indicators and cut-off points, statistical analyses, and training and experience of the survey team.

[23] For example, procedures for nutrition surveys are available in documents that have been coauthored, and therefore validated, by a range of United Nations organizations including WFP, UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO). In contrast, only a few joint publications promote good practice in qualitative food security assessments. This lack of agreed best practices is a major gap in the field of emergency needs assessment.

- an explanation of the justification and rationale for sampling, as well as the selection process for assessment sites, key informants and focus groups; this should follow a rationale that supports the objectives of the assessment while seeking to collect information on a range of different viewpoints;
- a focus on team identity and self-awareness, with a view to identifying potential team bias in the collection of data;
- the practice of optimal ignorance, collecting only information that is needed for the assessment objectives and related decisions;
- use of iterative data collection and analysis, with continual review and examination of information leading to adaptations of the assessment – e.g., modifications to checklists, the sequencing of rapid appraisal techniques and/or the groups and sites visited – and contributes to a continual learning process whereby data analysis does not occur only at the end of the assessment;
- the importance of adaptability during implementation of the assessment, including in regard to data tools and sampling approaches (Benini and Conley, forthcoming); it must be clear what adaptations to survey approaches are acceptable at the field level;
- use of triangulation to cross-validate findings through a range of information sources and perspectives;
- the practice of conducting field reviews with stakeholders, including the ultimate users of the information.

This list is provisional and incomplete. Review and revision by the wider body of international experts and organizations is required in order to arrive at a shared vision of good practice in food security assessment. The list can then serve as the basis for promoting national and local capacities for food security assessment.

Information about information

Related to the notion of good practices in data collection, there is a need for more explicit information about the information itself – both that included in the specific assessment and that within the wider humanitarian information system. Assessments should include more reporting on and analysis of the constraints and challenges to undertaking the assessment, including the trade-offs made, the limitations posed by the emergency, potential biases in the data analysis or survey methods, and unexpected obstacles that occurred during the assessment. Such information is critical if others are to evaluate the quality, based on rigour and validity, of the assessment findings. Discussion of methods and constraints is standard practice in quantitatively based studies, such as most nutrition surveys, but is rarely found in the more qualitative food security assessments. Once collected, this information needs to be collated and regularly reported on by the wider humanitarian information system.

Linkages with public health and nutrition

Few food security assessments explicitly consider the risks to public health and nutrition caused by an emergency, i.e., the threats to life and the causes of excess mortality and high levels of acute malnutrition. This is a major gap in current food security assessment methods, and the linkages between emergencies and health crises need to be reinforced. A frequently asked question is how best to incorporate an

analysis of the causes of malnutrition into the broader livelihoods framework. We recommend that rather than developing a new conceptual framework, we should focus on improving practice in the fields of nutrition, public health, food security and livelihoods assessment, and increase attention to the linkages among these core concepts. The first step in achieving this is to make an understanding of these linkages an explicit objective of assessments, and then to build practical methods to address this question.[24]

Steps within the proposed framework

Many of the central objectives and key steps of the proposed framework draw directly on aspects already included in standard food security or livelihood approaches to assessments. It is the combination of these elements – and the increased focus on conflict analysis, the historical context and public health in emergencies – that makes the framework a new contribution to assessments in emergencies. The proposed framework entails the following critical objectives and key steps for conducting an assessment. Although these are numbered sequentially, their precise logical order may be adapted to suit local circumstances.

1. *Conduct desk reviews*
   Review the current food security situation in relation to pre-disaster or baseline information. The temporal dimension is critical at this point of the analysis, including whether the food insecurity is chronic or transitory and what, if any, are the seasonal and intra-annual variations. A desk-based study can be rapid or extended, depending on the nature of the crisis, and is appropriate for collecting this information. Useful sources include data from early warning systems, FAO/WFP food and crop studies, programme documents and evaluations of previous crises and interventions, and accessible anthropologic or ethnographic reports. Tools include a review of secondary or grey literature, participatory approaches to generate data on good versus bad years, a food security time line, etc.

2. *Identify livelihood groups*
   Identify the livelihood groups within geographic or agro-ecologic zones, as well as within the standard livelihood zones. (This expands on the current HEA, which identifies food economy zones but assumes homogeneity of livelihood groups within these zones.) Risks and shocks affect different livelihood groups in different ways, even within the same community; different responses may therefore be required to preserve or rebuild livelihood assets and/or strategies. Identifying livelihood groups within agro-ecologic zones – as opposed to assuming homogeneity across a zone – requires a more detailed understanding of the situation, and hence a more fine-tuned emergency response.

[24] The urgent need to create greater synergy among these aspects of an emergency is reflected in the recent Niger crisis. The Famine Early-Warning System Network (FEWS-NET) was able to predict the food crises and food insecurity, but unable to pick up the nutritional crises reflected by the increased numbers of severely malnourished people attending therapeutic feeding programmes. (This is a subject for further discussion and review.)

3. Identify important assets and implications of the emergency on assets

Review relevant household livelihood assets or capital, including human, natural, physical, financial and social assets. Focus on those assets that are the most important to the livelihood strategies of a particular group – e.g. livestock for pastoralists, land and agricultural inputs for farmers – taking into account the role of kinship and social safety nets as social assets, and health and education as human assets for all population groups. Some assets can also be liabilities, particularly in situations of conflict and political instability.

4. Identify livelihood goals

Review the livelihood goals (or desired livelihood outcomes) of different groups in order to understand how the current crisis has hindered or enabled these goals, and what adaptations, if any, households have made to their efforts to meet them. As part of conflict analysis, identify those groups that benefit or seek to benefit from the emergency. Take into account the various coping and crisis strategies, and ascertain what if any irreversible or damaging strategies have been adopted.

5. Review PIPS

Review the PIPs that influence the current state of food security, including those that have affected or been affected by the evolution of the crisis and by the livelihood and coping strategies of the various groups.

Processes that should be reviewed include natural shocks such as droughts, economic processes such as inflation or currency fluctuations, and the impacts of conflict, collapsed or failing States, and predatory governments or non-State actors. Institutions to consider include civil society, structures of governance at the local and national levels, armed combatants, tribal and ethnic systems, and gender dimensions. Relevant policies are those that affect food availability, access and utilization at the local, national and international levels. A breakdown of the various PIPs according to the level at which they operate – local, national or international – is important for understanding not only the nature of the PIP, but also the level at which a response might be the most appropriate.

6. Conduct conflict analysis

Analyse the main stakeholders, interest groups, drivers of the conflict or emergency, and underlying factors. Even in emergencies that are not explicitly linked to conflict, such an analysis provides valuable information on the dynamics within society and the way that these will affect or be affected by a humanitarian intervention.

7. Analyse markets and trade

Market studies and analysis of trade, including transborder trade, should complement the desk-based analysis. Such studies include commodity chain analysis of both legal and illicit products that have a market beyond the area affected by disaster and that underpin specific dimensions of the emergency, for example, weapons, drugs, people, natural resources and livestock.

8. Examine migration and remittance flows

Processes of migration, including local push and pull factors, have been shown to be central to livelihoods and food security, whether in terms of distress migration

and the associated loss of livelihoods and crisis conditions that often follow, or in terms of the more positive labour migration associated with remittance flows back to the disaster-affected population. Migration and remittance flows may be linked to wider processes of regional trade flows, and it is important to understand them in relation to markets.

The distinguishing factors between this proposed approach and other food security assessment methods are: (a) an attempt to capture more of the livelihood diversity within the affected population; (b) a greater focus on livelihood assets and strategies; and (c) an emphasis on conflict analysis. If successful, this approach will enable practitioners more precisely to plan and implement humanitarian interventions for livelihood groups based on their specific needs. This contrasts with general food aid distributions, which are often targeted on the basis of poverty or vulnerability indicators.

The proposed approach demonstrates the potential links between food insecurity and non-food responses. This is because it identifies diverse livelihood groups and examines how crisis affects the livelihood strategies and outcomes of households within each group. By compiling data on the PIPs affecting food security, and examining underlying factors such as public health and the vulnerability context, this framework indicates a range of possible non-food interventions. Such responses might support or protect assets, such as livestock, microcredit or emergency health interventions; enable policies that support livelihoods, such as regulations on land access or transborder trade; or support institutions, such as civil society and governance, or processes, such as economic processes.

Conclusion

The predominant international humanitarian response to food insecurity in emergencies remains food-based programming. There may be increasing room for livelihood responses, non-food responses, rights-based approaches and increased protection as emergency response mechanisms. However, as food aid is the dominant paradigm, it will require institutional change – and not simply a reworking of assessment methods – to make the shift from emphasising food-based responses. Such institutional change requires a rethinking of how the international community assesses need and designs responses. For WFP, this may require deciding whether or not the agency should continue as "*the* food aid agency" or as "*a* food security agency".

Changing assessment approaches will have little impact on the broader context unless there is a parallel shift in the factors that make food aid prevalent in the first place. In other words, donor governments, particularly the United States, will have to accept the importance of using locally sourced resources, including food, in emergency responses. This will require decreasing the influence of domestic imperatives and lobbyists in the drafting of legislation that determines the resources for international relief. Large international NGOs will need to decrease their reliance on Title II food aid as a resource stream and halt the practice of monetizing food aid in local markets, where appropriate. The governments of beneficiary nations will have to take increased responsibility for longer-term programmes, safety nets and the delivery of social services.

The room for innovative interventions will increase if and when international and institutional shifts away from food aid begin. When these occur, organizations will need to expand their current frameworks and methodologies to include a greater range of response options for non-food interventions. In the meantime, policy-makers and practitioners should advocate for transforming the food-based humanitarian system, should adapt their own programmes and resource bases to rely less on international food aid mechanisms, and should promote broad-based assessment mechanisms that prioritize response to actual need and solutions to the underlying factors that lead to food insecurity.

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ANNEX I: TOOLS TO ASSESS FOOD SECURITY IN EMERGENCIES

International humanitarian organizations use a range of tools to assess food security in emergencies. Although each agency or organization employs a unique approach, nearly all draw on a common set of tools for data collection and analysis. The most thorough assessments use a combination of tools; this allows information to be cross-referenced and checked for accuracy. Applying different tools also enables field staff to consider multiple perspectives of respondents and to acquire a greater understanding of the different factors underlying and influencing the crisis. Specific details of selected tools are given below.

Direct non-sampled observation: Direct observation entails the collection of qualitative data by field workers, usually involving a walk around the area in question and possible conversations with people encountered. Data are gathered on visible indicators, such as food availability in markets, the condition of crops and livestock, the condition of shelters, the destruction caused by war or natural disaster, and water availability. This does not necessarily include the participation or input of local community members, but may include some key informant interviews.

Nutrition surveys: Anthropometric surveys estimate the prevalence of acute malnutrition among children under 5 years of age, and sometimes include estimates of under-5 and crude mortality rates. Acute malnutrition is a sensitive indicator of recent nutrition, and can therefore reflect recent changes in the nutritional status of communities. In the absence of other significant underlying causes of malnutrition, the nutritional status of children under 5 years of age has proven to be a sensitive indicator of food insecurity at the local level (Young and Jaspars, 1995).

Food insecurity is only one of three underlying causes of malnutrition and changed nutritional status. For this reason, it is accepted good practice that nutrition surveys review food insecurity, public health – access to health services, water and sanitation, and shelter – and the social and care environment in order to understand the relative importance of food insecurity in causing change in nutritional status. Review of underlying causes is particularly important when there is no established nutrition surveillance system in place and no previous nutrition surveys with which to compare findings.

Commodity chain analysis: Commodity chain analysis applies basic principles of financial accounting to enable policy-makers to understand the process of production and involvement of key actors. It is particularly useful for understanding production and marketing links. The technique identifies power relations, structures of governance and exchange relationships within commercial networks, from primary production to consumption and from the local to the international levels. It identifies who controls the production and exchange of specific commodities (Collinson, 2003: 11). Conducting commodity chain analysis in an emergency can help policy-makers and programme designers to understand the impact of the crisis on all aspects of food production, transport, trade, etc., and enable them to identify who benefits and who loses in these transactions.

Conflict analysis:[25] Conflict analysis takes into account the aspects of the larger environment that affect the lives and livelihoods of populations experiencing conflict or at risk of experiencing conflict. Such aspects include war strategies and their impacts, the political economy of war, and the governance environment. Several authors and agencies have developed specific tools that take into account the effects and impact of conflict. Common elements of these tools include:

- historical antecedents or origins of conflict;
- political, economic, social and security factors that contribute to tension or conflict;
- political rights or the lack thereof;
- interests and incentives of various actors in the conflict;
- exploitation and exchange of key commodities.

Agencies have also developed specific frameworks to understand components of conflict analysis. These include benefit–harm tools, rights-based analysis and tools that characterize the economic activities of actors in conflict.

Review of secondary literature: The availability and quality of secondary literature vary depending on the location, the history of research in the area and the presence of relief or development organizations with long-standing track-records. Useful secondary literature includes baseline data on prices, past nutrition surveys, the programme and project reports of local and international NGOs and United Nations agencies, anthropologic or ethnographic studies, and historical studies. Reviewing secondary data enables practitioners to expand their understanding and analysis with material that has been collected by other individuals or agencies. Field staff should seek to ascertain the current accuracy and applicability of secondary data, as well as the soundness of the methods used in their collection.

Review of early warning data: A review of data from early warning systems can provide important background information on the trajectory of the current emergency and context for the current situation or events. Early warning data often include extensive information on specific indicators. These indicators can serve as a baseline of pre-crisis conditions and provide information on important seasonal shifts and patterns. A review of early warning indicators also enables staff members who are unfamiliar with a country or region to understand the specific elements contributing to the current emergency. FEWSNET, for example, the USAID-funded famine early warning system for Africa, establishes crisis indicators that point to the onset of an emergency. By examining these specific indicators, field staff may be better able to understand the run-up to a specific crisis. Early warning data are less relevant in a sudden onset natural disaster such as a tsunami or cyclone, but may still be useful as a baseline of pre-crisis conditions and can offer insight into different categories of vulnerability.

Household surveys: Household surveys are used to gather quantitative data in representative studies. A sample of households is selected to represent a larger population group, and trained enumerators repeat the same survey with all selected households. The use of representative data is the only way to determine the

[25] This explanation draws heavily on Jaspars and Shoham, 2002: 27–30.

experiences of a population with any accuracy. Household surveys are used in more in-depth assessments, such as WFP's in-depth EFSAs, to provide information on the experiences of population subgroups. Information from such surveys allows comparison among population groups, geographic areas and types of livelihood. This provides extensive information on differences in the underlying causes and effects of food insecurity.

In-depth market assessments: Practitioners conduct market assessments in emergencies in order better to understand the local, regional and national economic systems and how these have been affected by or responded to the emergency. Data from market assessments indicate the resilience of markets, the reliability of local market channels in the emergency, and the possible role of markets in the relief and reconstruction process. In assessing food security, field staff attempt to determine the availability of food on the market and the ability of households to access available foods. Lack of access for households may be caused by sudden price increases, insufficient cash within a household, lack of access to credit, lack of transport, distance from the market, or inability to access the market owing to ethnicity, gender, age or disability factors. A thorough assessment considers the function of markets beyond the physical locale of trade, and how an emergency may have affected these aspects. For instance, the concept of a market should include the economic exchanges outside centralized or legitimate channels – including barter systems, farmgate purchase, informal markets and illegal market economies – as well as the non-economic role of markets, such as the social and information exchanges that occur in market settings. Market assessments in emergencies also include analysis of the individuals, companies and sectors that stand to gain as a result of the emergency, whether the gains are legitimate or otherwise.

Checklists: Checklists are a widely used tool for qualitative approaches and rapid assessments. They provide a useful way of ensuring that all key areas have been examined in an assessment or participatory exercise. The Sphere Project includes standardized checklists for each area of technical expertise – e.g., water and sanitation, food security, health – but practitioners should adapt checklists to suit the local contexts. The information on checklists should be tested for accuracy, relevancy and completeness in the early phase of an assessment, and should be adjusted if necessary.

Rapid appraisal techniques

Most organizations seek to include the perspectives and voices of affected communities and potential beneficiaries in the assessment process and design of interventions. This is usually achieved through methods known as rapid appraisals or, when organizations are seeking to empower the communities, participatory rapid appraisals (PRAs). Use of such techniques in rapid emergency assessments has three main benefits: they can produce valuable qualitative information from the household or community level; they generate data rapidly; and they can start a process of communication that may increase community participation in the relief intervention. Ideally, this enables "more imaginative and more appropriate relief strategies" to be developed through consultation with the affected populations. Such strategies include

"non-food options such as cash, livestock support, labour support, and health support".[26]

Semi-structured interviews with key informants: Interviews with key informants provide information on select topics that are useful to the design of the emergency response. Key informants include local community leaders, regional or federal government officials, staff from local and international relief or development agencies, shop-owners, traders, heads of civil society organizations and local professionals. The semi-structured interview format allows field staff to follow-up on points of interest. Key informants often offer a great deal of contextual qualitative information, but there is no guarantee of objectivity, neutrality or accuracy in the information provided.

Focus group interviews: Focus group interviews can serve as a relatively rapid means of collecting information from a specific population group. In an emergency, such interviews provide qualitative data on the strategies, problems and priorities of a group of interest to the assessing organizations. Field staff can tailor the criteria for focus groups according to aspects of interest or perceived need. Criteria include gender, age, livelihood strategy (e.g., agropastoralist, pastoralist, fisher), location, social or political division /ethnicity, religion, caste) and wealth group. Focus groups based on receipt of assistance, such as parents of children in supplementary feeding programmes or participants in cash- or food-for-work programmes, can improve field staff's understanding of targeting, programme design and underlying factors contributing to specific vulnerabilities, such as malnutrition in children.

[26] Slim and Mitchell (1992) point out that the fear, mistrust and panic that characterize an emergency situation make it difficult to use rapid appraisal techniques with any degree of accuracy in emergency assessments.

ANNEX II: SPECIFIC NON-FOOD INTERVENTIONS BASED ON A LIVELIHOODS FRAMEWORK

Based on the review of assessments

Interventions targeting assets

Health interventions: supporting human capital

One way of supporting human capital in emergencies is through health interventions. The nature of health interventions in emergencies depends on the impact of the emergency on the affected population. In natural disasters or acute conflict, the appropriate health interventions may be highly specialized and medical in nature, such as treating and evacuating the injured, or treating contagious diseases. This section examines health interventions that seek to improve food availability, access and utilization at the household level in emergencies. Some of these interventions overlap with water and sanitation responses, which are covered later.

Many food-insecure households are unable to access food that might be available through markets, production or other entitlements. This problem of access may be due to insufficient cash to cover food expenses, shortage of human capital to produce food or work for income or exchange, or the collapse of social networks; poor health can be a determining factor in all three of these cases. Emergency health interventions in support of human capital can help to mitigate these factors' contribution to food insecurity.

Inability to cover food expenses

Households that rely on markets for a significant portion of their food needs are susceptible to food insecurity if commodity prices increase, terms of trade worsen for goods or services exchanged in kind or sold, or the asset base of the household decreases. A household facing these constraints may adapt consumption or expenditure patterns in an attempt to minimize food insecurity. One such adaptation is to cut back on other expenses, such as health care, and to use the cash or commodities to access food.

Households that spend a great deal of time accessing health services may decrease their use of health services, thereby freeing up time and human resources for the pursuit of food. As documented by an FIFC research team in Bosnia-Herzegovina, however, the shift of resources from health needs to food resources can be detrimental to the overall health of the household, and may necessitate prioritizing the health of some family members over that of others (Stites *et al.*, 2005).

Health interventions to alleviate some of these resource-based constraints to food security include improving medical facilities near affected populations. In order to be successful, such interventions should include a fee reduction or waiver, if fees are charged for services. An example of such a response comes from Bunia in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where Save the Children UK noted that international agencies' support to area health facilities had "significantly reduced

household health expenses", thereby releasing money for other basic needs, including food (Guluma, 2003).

Shortage of human capital

Although chronic illness within the household does not equate with food insecurity,[27] vulnerability to food insecurity is likely to increase when able-bodied individuals are unable to work for income or to produce food. This is also the case when other productive or school-going individuals spend a significant portion of their time as care givers, or when a large percentage of the household income is dedicated to medical expenses. Interventions to lessen such burdens within households include direct measures to improve human health, thereby increasing the productive capacity of the household, decreasing the time spent by other members in care giving roles and lowering medical expenses.

Health interventions help to build resilience to shock. Increased resilience and better health help to protect and maintain the food security of households. For example, a rapid food security assessment conducted by Oxfam GB in the Ugandan district of Kotido found that malaria was a severe health risk in an area where poor households were vulnerable to food insecurity. Oxfam recommended that efforts to prevent and treat malaria be included in the emergency food security response "as a matter of urgency" owing to the high rates of morbidity and mortality arising from malaria (Oxfam GB, 2005: 20). The centrality of a public health response to the recommended intervention, which included cash for work and improved monitoring of food security, illustrates the importance of good human health in decreasing food insecurity and mitigating vulnerability.

Other emergency responses in support of human capital with a direct impact on household food security include the distribution of hygiene kits to displaced or affected households,[28] controlling cholera outbreaks in overcrowded areas and vaccinating against measles to help prevent vitamin A deficiencies.

Collapse of social networks

The collapse of social networks can be a major contributing factor to food insecurity. Many households rely on social exchange through gifts, charity, trade or barter as a central component of their food security strategy. A variety of factors can negatively affect social networks with ensuing detrimental effects on food security. For instance, social networks may become inoperative if members are displaced, particularly over great distances or for prolonged periods. Widespread economic shock with impacts across wealth groups can have a strong impact on social networks and systems of exchange, as the better-off find themselves unable to provide assistance to family or friends in times of need. An FIFC research team found this to be the case in Afghanistan in 2002, after three years of severe drought. Economic hardship across nearly all levels of society prevented extended family and village networks from

[27] See, for instance, O'Donnell, 2004, which points out that HIV/AIDS-affected households should not be presumed to be food-insecure and that many factors, as well as HIV/AIDS, contribute to vulnerability and food insecurity.

[28] Oxfam GB recommended the distribution of hygiene kits in conjunction with public health promotion following the December 2004 tsunami (Phelps, Hoque and Cruickshank, 2005: 9).

providing the support that had traditionally helped the more vulnerable or needy members of society to mitigate food insecurity (Lautze *et al.*, 2002).

The high prevalence of HIV/AIDS in some countries and communities has had a pronounced effect on the functioning of social networks. For example, the informal stokvels and burial societies in South African communities are traditional networks that provide financial and social support to their members. Stovkels are by-invitation group rotating savings and credit schemes. Families and close friends make regular investments to a collective pool of savings from which they can withdraw money to cover important events or emergencies. Burial societies work in a similar manner, but cover the costs of burial expenses for families of society members.[29]

HIV/AIDS has challenged the stability of some of these societies. Members may be unable to make regular investments because of illness within their households, and are likely to need more frequent and larger withdrawals. Members may also die, and the burial societies find their resources quickly depleted as withdrawals for funeral expenses, which are expected to be spread across an extended period, become a more frequent occurrence. The social and financial pressures associated with HIV/AIDS may increase the vulnerability of some of these social networks to collapse. However, evidence indicates that informal rotating savings and credit networks may become more prevalent in certain contexts as borrowers seek ways of coping financially with the effects of the AIDS crisis (Green *et al.*, 2004).

Social networks act as safety nets and are important mechanisms for maintaining food security. Emergency health interventions in support of these networks aim at supporting the wider community and strengthening the coping strategies inherent in social networks.

Water and sanitation interventions to protect human capital

In emergencies, the link between water and sanitation interventions and food security is related to the third component of food security: utilization. Water and sanitation are particularly critical determinants for survival in the initial stages of an emergency, as people affected by crises are generally more susceptible to illness and diseases. The transmission of diseases is often related to inadequate sanitation or water supply (Sphere Project, 2004: chapter 2). In turn, many diseases affect the body's ability to utilize nutrients adequately, resulting in illness and exacerbating food insecurity.

Water and sanitation interventions in emergencies seek to reduce the transmission of disease by minimizing exposure to vectors of contagion. The most common actions to this end are the promotion of good hygiene practices, the provision of safe drinking-water and the reduction of environmental health risks (Sphere Project, 2004: chapter 2). In regard to food security, emergency water interventions may also seek to improve or protect water sources other than those used for human consumption, such as irrigation and water for livestock.

[29] For more information, see the Financial Diaries, a year-long household survey project to examine financial management in poor urban and rural households in South Africa. The project was run by the Centre for Social Science Research at the University of Cape Town and funded by the Ford Foundation and several private sector enterprises. Available at www.financialdiaries.com.

Assessing water quality and quantity

Water and sanitation needs can be identified through rapid participatory approaches, key informant interviews and direct observation.

Field staff can quickly ascertain if waste disposal is a problem in the community, and interviews with key informants indicate the access of the community to water points, and any obstacles in acquiring adequate water. Group interviews using participatory approaches provide information on the opportunity cost of access to water – who collects the water? how long does the trip take? – and fluctuations in water supply – is water available at all times of the year? do households ever pay for water? who receives the payment?

Water quality is of particular importance to food security, and assessments must seek to compile information on quality as well as quantity. Laboratory tests may not be available, but local communities will almost always know whether or not their water is of good quality. Assessment teams should observe water sources when possible and collect specific information on them. Teams should ascertain whether the water is stagnant or flowing, is gathered from standing surface water and has any discernible odour or other defining characteristics. Assessments should include questions for all population groups on their impressions of water quality. Teams should ask women if consumption of water has any negative health effects, especially on children. When analysing data, teams should check for correlation between the prevalence of diarrhoea and seasonal fluctuations in water supply.

Water for livestock and irrigation

Water rehabilitation projects in emergencies can also address livelihood-related water needs, such as water systems for livestock, irrigation or kitchen gardens. The urgency of saving lives in emergencies means that these interventions are less common than rehabilitating water sources for human consumption, but organizations that adopt a livelihoods approach sometimes promote them. Oxfam GB, for instance, recommended using a food-for-work programme to build structures to harness surface runoff water after the 2001 Gujarat earthquake. This water was to be used for livestock and planting needs (Ippadi, 2001: 14). While meeting basic standards for human consumption should be the priority in emergencies, water interventions to support livestock strategies are critically important for households seeking to protect assets in emergencies.

Physical capital: rehabilitating water infrastructure

Water supply infrastructure

Emergency interventions frequently include projects to rehabilitate damaged or inefficient water points, or to build new systems from scratch. For instance, a joint assessment and intervention by the Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS) and IFRC in

West Harerghe and South Wollo, Ethiopia sought to improve existing sources, while also developing new water points.[30]

Other assessments recommend upgrading existing water sources or improving access to water points. For instance, an assessment carried out by ICRC and WFP in Columbia found that improved water and sanitation facilities were a priority for IDPs as facilities that were not functioning properly had high user costs. Children were particularly prone to illness caused by unsanitary living conditions. The joint assessment report recommended promoting "labour-intensive public works that aim to rehabilitate sewage and sanitation systems" (WFP and ICRC, 2004:57). This non-food intervention had the specific aim of improving or protecting the health of households and communities through improving the sanitation and water system. As discussed, better health links directly to better food security owing to both physiological (food utilization) and productive (food access) factors at the individual and household levels.

Sanitation infrastructure

The improvement or construction of sanitation systems appeared in assessment reports in which overcrowding and associated diseases existed or were expected to arise in the future. For instance, an ACF assessment of vulnerable urban populations in Kabul found high susceptibility to disease owing to rapid population increase and the collapse of the sanitation system. The assessment recommended either the rehabilitation of the traditional system of "night soil" collection or the construction of pit latrines in urban areas (ACF, 2004: 33). Working in Gujarat, India after the 2001 earthquake, Oxfam GB staff members raised concerns about the likelihood of health problems owing to overcrowding and poor sanitation in temporary camps. Oxfam headed up the inter-agency water and sanitation committee to spearhead the reconstruction of water and sanitation systems in these areas (Ippadi, 2001: 11). Assessments also called for improvements to sanitation systems in areas where disease was known or predicted to be a problem owing to droughts, floods and overall poverty. This was the case in the South Wollo and West Harerghe project of ERCS/IFRC (2004/7).

Livestock interventions to support and protect financial capital

Livestock interventions support financial capital because they target the savings base – i.e. the animals – of pastoralists and agropastoralists. Livestock are essential assets for pastoral and agropastoral communities, whose livelihood strategies they underpin. Livestock interventions take a wide variety of forms, depending in large part on the characteristics of the beneficiary population.[31] Emergency responses should aim to support and enhance the existing livelihood strategies and traditional coping systems.

[30] According to the evaluation, the water and sanitation aspect of the emergency intervention was poorly managed and had not been successfully implemented at the time of the evaluation (ERCS/IFRC, 2004: 14).

[31] Aklilu and Wekesa (2002: 1) point out that the livestock interventions appropriate for pastoralists are likely to be very different from those for settled communities. For instance, water interventions can lead to concentrations of pastoralist herds, which in turn contribute to environmental degradation and overt conflict over water resources. Appropriate interventions for pastoralists are those that work to preserve their livelihoods, such as community-based animal health care and market interventions to support the terms of trade between livestock and cereal products.

Interventions that do not support traditional structures for livestock management have the potential to bring long-term negative effects. The detreminental effects of some interventions are not always obvious or apparent to the implementing agency.,The simple provision of free veterinary services, for example, can undermine the customer and market base of community animal health workers (AU/IBAR, 2004: 6).

Assessments of livestock sectors should seek to understand the local strategies and processes of animal management. Such assessments should be broad-based and examine not only the role of livestock within the local and household economy, but also the institutions and processes that support livestock rearing, such as relations with traders and transporters, the role of animal health workers, and political agreements with neighbouring groups – including cross-border relations – that allow for seasonal transhumance. Assessments can gather this information through participatory methods in group interviews and through key informant interviews with community leaders, transporters, traders, animal health workers and staff of organizations with long-running programmes in the area. Other livestock-specific tools that provide field staff with more thorough information include herd structure profiling and reproductive and productive calendars (Oxfam GB, 2005a: 21).

The following are some possible livestock interventions.

Destocking and restocking

Destocking and restocking programmes often generate a high degree of community interest. Such interventions create markets, mitigate against death or distress sales, alleviate pressure on scarce water and grazing resources, support relief efforts by providing fresh or dried meat, and salvage capital that would otherwise be lost owing to death or price collapse. Implementing organizations purchase animals before the price collapses, thereby providing cash, food or fodder for livestock-owning households (Akilu and Wekesa, 2002). Households can use the income for basic needs, household expenses or support of remaining herds.[32] Restocking programmes frequently replace destocking once conditions improve, such as when a drought lifts. Female animals are provided, along with fodder if pasturelands have not yet recovered.

Based on case studies with pastoralists in Kenya, destocking/restocking programmes can improve the nutritional status of beneficiary households and bolster the health of remaining herds. These interventions appear to be most effective when they are localized and community-based and when the donor is flexible, such as allowing the transfer from destocking to restocking at short notice (Akilu and Wekesa, 2002: 11–12).

Destocking and restocking programmes can run into problems if they are not implemented in a timely and participatory manner. For instance, if destocking begins too late the animals may not be fit for human consumption, or too many animals may be offered for sale, overwhelming the budgeted resources and exceeding the meat processing capacity. Advance work with communities should establish clear criteria

[32] Aklilu recommends that veterinary programmes be operated in parallel with destocking programmes so as to ensure household access to veterinary services if desired (Aklilu, 2003: 2).

for distributing meat to the most vulnerable households. Agencies should also establish and convey limits on the sale of livestock per household or group, as well as the total number of livestock that will be accepted for slaughter. Communities should select local committees to work with the implementing agency and oversee the process.

Supplementary livestock feed

Supplementary feed for livestock can be provided as part of a destocking/restocking programme or as a separate intervention. When provided in conjunction with a destocking programme, feed assists the survival of remaining animals. Feed may also be provided when animals are restocked in order to ensure their survival until ecological conditions or land access improves. A review of programmes in pastoral areas during a drought in Kenya found extremely positive results when concentrated livestock feed was provided for small livestock as part of a destocking programme. Keeping a core breeding stock of animals alive by providing supplementary feed proved to be more cost-efficient than replacing the animals once the drought was over. Such projects are most likely to be effective when combined with veterinary support, and may run into difficulties if the local source for the feed is inconsistent (Akilu and Wekesa, 2002: 18).

In some supplementary feeding programmes, such as a DFID-funded project in the Marsabit region of Kenya, field staff round up animals left to die by their owners and rehabilitate them. Animals that recover are later used in restocking programmes (Akilu and Wekesa, 2002: 27).

An emergency fodder programme recommended by Oxfam GB in Gujarat, India following the 2001 earthquake did not seek to link fodder with destocking. Following an assessment of livelihood needs, Oxfam recommended a five-month intervention to provide fodder to subsistence pastoralist and agropastoralist families with small herds. This was designed to produce existing capital stocks, reduce mortality rates and prevent distress sales of livestock. Such support helps prevent the outmigration of residents from the affected area (Ippadi, 2001: 18–19).[33]

Emergency veterinary programmes

Vaccination and treatment programmes aim to help livestock owners prevent the deaths of important animals such as breeding females, milking cows, camels and draft animals. Emergency interventions such as deworming can extend the life of vulnerable animals by several months, even when other conditions, including access to pasture and water, remain unchanged (Akilu and Wekesa, 2002: 18).

Practitioners working with pastoralist communities caution against providing free inputs for livestock interventions. Such inputs can undermine the existing market system, and the free goods often end up in the hands of elite groups, particularly if the interventions are poorly timed (AU/IBAR, 2004: 5). Organizations can avoid this

[33] Unfortunately, we were unable to locate any documents describing the implementation of the programme.

pitfall by working through and in support of local systems, such as community-based animal health workers (CAHW) who receive payment in kind for their services.

Seeds interventions to promote regeneration of physical capital

Seed security assessments

Emergency seed interventions are a prevalent form of non-food agricultural intervention in times of food insecurity. Such interventions frequently follow an assessment indicating insufficient access to food among households that produce all or part of their own food needs. A review of emergency interventions in the Great Lakes Region found that although seed distributions were conducted in each of the seven cases reviewed, none of the distributions followed an assessment indicating a crisis in *seed* security. Rather, seed insecurity was presumed to accompany food insecurity, which itself was not always clearly indicated through the use of assessments (Levine and Chastre, 2004: 15). Studies from elsewhere in Africa show that emergency seed interventions sometimes have little impact compared with their high cost of implementation (Jones *et al.*, 2001; Longley *et al.*, 2001).

Seed agronomists and field practitioners reached similar conclusions at an international meeting on seed aid and germplasm restoration in 2005. Relief agencies frequently presume that disasters, including natural disasters and conflict, result in the need for seed aid, but analysis is rarely carried out to determine the nature of the seed problem, if any. Practitioners point out that problems with seed security in emergencies are more likely to be caused by *access* than availability, calling into question the efficacy and appropriateness of seed distributions except in cases in which assessments have indicated both a need and a preference for external seed interventions.[34]

Just as agencies often infer seed insecurity from the existence of food insecurity, seed interventions – often combined with tool distributions – are considered an integral part of emergency agricultural interventions. Once again, evidence for the effectiveness of such interventions in promoting improved food security is lacking.[35]

Seed assessment tools

Relief organizations and practitioners make efforts to develop assessment methodologies that focus specifically on seed security. Assessment methods include the seed security assessment framework (SSAF) (Remington *et al.*, 2002) and the seed systems profile (SSP) (Longley *et al.*, 2002). The SSAF focuses on examining the three fundamental aspects of seed security: availability, access and utility, including quality and variety. Based on evidence that seed insecurity is usually caused by problems of access, this tool examines the different methods through which affected populations acquire and manage seed supplies. For instance, a crisis of access may exist if social networks that facilitate seed exchange have collapsed, if households

[34] Bill Fiebig, Save the Children US, personal communication, September 2005. The workshop was funded by the International Development Research Center (IDRC) of Canada; its report is forthcoming.
[35] For instance, the review of emergency interventions in the Great Lakes Region found no studies that compared the agricultural production and ensuing changes in household food security of beneficiaries of seed distributions with those of non-beneficiaries (Levine and Chastre, 2004: 14).

lack the capital to barter or exchange for seed, or if markets that usually supply seed have ceased to function (Remington *et al.*, 2002: 319). When these aspects are present, a response that seeks to improve access to seeds will be more appropriate than one aimed at bolstering availability through seed distribution.

Authors from ODI and the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) promote the use of an SSP prior to any seed intervention. Ideally, field staff develops an SSP as part of disaster preparedness in advance of an emergency, but staff may also use this tool following the onset of a crisis. An SSP seeks to understand how farmers, households and communities maintain, manage and obtain seed and planting materials, and how these aspects change over time. The SSP addresses both agro-ecological and socio-economic aspects of seed production and management, including labour variables and differences by gender.

Seed sector interventions

Practitioners stress that the seed systems of farmers are very resilient in emergencies and have the capacity to recover quickly after a disaster (Longley *et al.*, 2002: 349). This resilience is largely attributable to the informal mechanisms of seed exchange used by farmers for generations. Even in a disaster, a household is likely to have connections or contacts with other households that were not affected or that did not experience damage to seed stocks. If seeds are not available through kin or village networks, they are likely to be available elsewhere in the immediate region, and long-established systems of barter, purchase and exchange enable seeds to be moved to where they are most needed. The tendency of donors and relief organizations to overlook this resilience contributes to the prevalence of seed distributions as emergency responses.[36]

As assessment mechanisms have improved, emergency interventions specifically addressing problems of seed access have increased. One such intervention is the system of seed vouchers and fairs, which aims to improve household access to seed through the use of local market systems. Drawing from the example of traditional seed fairs, CRS developed a model for seed vouchers and fairs as an emergency intervention in 2000, and piloted it in Uganda in 2002.[37] This method proved to be popular with both donors, including FAO and USAID's OFDA, and beneficiaries; other organizations, including CARE, are experimenting with seed voucher programmes. CRS has implemented voucher and fair programmes in countries across Africa and in Afghanistan and west India.

To implement vouchers and fair programmes, field workers provide vouchers in small denominations to households or farmers in need of seed, and notify potential suppliers that a fair will be held on a given date. Suppliers of all sizes have an opportunity to participate in the fairs. Suppliers may be farmers with small quantities of surplus, local shop owners with a small range of local varieties, or commercial companies with

[36] Interview, Bill Fiebig, Save the Children US, 10 October 2005.
[37] For more details on the seed vouchers and fair approach of CRS, see Bramel, Remington and McNeil, 2004.

larger quantities of certified seed.[38] Farming households exchange the vouchers for the seeds of their choice at the fair. The seed sellers then cash in the vouchers with CRS or partner organizations. When implemented as planned, this intervention can achieve positive results at multiple levels, including allowing beneficiaries to select their own products and supporting local markets and seed producers. The proceeds from seed fairs stay within the community or extended area, and seed fairs are relatively easy to plan and implement (Remington *et al.*, 2002: 322). Some theorists have questioned the value of providing beneficiary households with vouchers as opposed to cash, but the voucher system ensures direct benefits for the seed providers and the targeted households. Organizations that are hesitant to distribute cash may also feel more comfortable with voucher programmes, regardless of the extra logistics involved (Harvey, 2005: 16).

Seed interventions often include the distribution of tools. An assessment of seed security could also collect data on loss of or damage to tools owing to conflict or disaster. As pointed out by an agronomist at Save the Children US, new tools are often helpful for farming households, but should be of the preferred and appropriate local variety. Such tools can be made by local blacksmiths, and organizations should aim to acquire tools for distribution from local sources, rather than importing them in bulk from other countries.[39]

Interventions targeting PIPs

Households pursue livelihood strategies based on the assets they own, control or have access to, but "all individuals and households live within, shape and are shaped by a set of informal and formal practices, norms and rules that constitute the institutional environment" (Pain and Lautze, 2002: 15, referring to North, 1990: 4). According to Pain and Lautze, these norms and rules mediate access to resources, shape the context of vulnerability and set opportunities or constraints to pursuing different livelihood strategies. "Customary practices related to marriage, gender roles, inheritance, ownership, management of and access to resources (land, water) and 'real' markets all fall within the sphere of informal institutions" (Pain and Lautze, 2002: 15). Interventions that seek to influence these formal and informal PIPs in support of livelihoods take many forms. They may aim to change formal policies, such as trade restrictions or land law, or negotiate an adjustment in an informal practice, such as early marriage of young girls.

In an emergency, interventions targeting PIPs may aim to bring immediate, short-term change in support of livelihoods or address an underlying factor over the longer term. OFDA describes one category of such interventions as "emergency political adjustments". These are policy or advocacy interventions undertaken in an emergency that aim to have a direct effect on the livelihoods of a specific population. The following are some examples:

- Following Hurricane Beulah in 1966, OFDA worked with the Mexican authorities and the United States immigration and naturalization authorities to

[38] The experience of CRS in five African countries indicated that most small farmer seed sellers attending fairs are women, market grain traders are both men and women and larger commercial suppliers are likely to be men (Remington *et al.*, 2002: 323).
[39] Interview, Bill Fiebig, Save the Children US, 10 October 2005.

open the United States–Mexican border to the free movement of relief goods and disaster-affected populations. This policy intervention had an immediate impact.

- During the Kosovo crisis, OFDA spearheaded a "Buy Macedonia" campaign to encourage all relief organizations to buy supplies and goods made in Macedonia rather than further afield. This was explicitly to support livelihoods in Macedonia, as the country had absorbed a large number of refugees and was experiencing economic effects of the war.[40]

These two interventions differed in time frame and urgency. Although there do not appear to be any reports on the effects of opening the United States–Mexican border, it is presumed that it helped to save lives, allowed the continuation of social networks that might otherwise have been severed, and enabled relief and recovery goods as well as financial assets to move back and forth across the border. The "Buy Macedonia" campaign had less visible effects on the lives and livelihoods of beneficiaries, but sought to introduce market demand to promote trade and commerce within an economically depressed region. Both of these interventions were undertaken in an emergency and were likely to have an impact on the food security of vulnerable or disaster-affected beneficiaries.

There are many possible emergency interventions that aim at the PIPs within a livelihoods framework. The following are brief descriptions of some of these possible interventions.

Land access for pastoralists

Land tenure polices can both exacerbate and mitigate against food insecurity and conflict. Livestock interventions must take land tenure into account, particularly – but not exclusively – for pastoralist populations relying on access to grazing land and water resources. Settled communities and agropastoralists also depend on secure land access, and this policy area remains fraught with difficulty in many post-conflict regions and those experiencing protracted crises. Improving tenure security for rural populations is therefore an important intervention that often directly correlates to improved food security. Resolving land claims will ultimately lie with the State, but international and civil society organizations can take steps to improve tenure security. Such steps include documenting traditional tenure practices in legal codes, translating policies and laws into local languages, and promoting the involvement of local communities, including pastoral communities, in decision-making processes (AU/IBAR, 2004: 13–14).

Conflict mitigation

Conflict mitigation interventions can directly increase food security. For example, where natural resources directly related to food security, such as land and water, are at the heart of the conflict, negotiation or mitigation can increase access to them. In other instances, the conflict may involve or affect access to economic and livelihood resources, such as markets, forests, minerals or gems, borders or farmland. In these

[40] For further details and additional examples of this type of emergency livelihood intervention, see Lautze and Stites, 2002: 20.

instances, the continuation of conflict inhibits the access of households or individuals to the assets needed for pursuit of their livelihood strategies, and this can have a negative effect on household food security. The African Union's (AU) Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (IBAR) continues to work on this issue.

Protection

Protection can be critical to improving food security in many conflict situations. The presence or threat of armed groups, government soldiers or bandits can impinge on the pursuit of livelihood strategies and hamper food security. Measures to protect those who seek to engage in livelihood strategies, such as animal husbandry, farming, taking goods to markets and collecting fuel, food and water, can make a pronounced difference on the overall status of food security. Although the responsibility of providing protection falls primarily on national governments, there are many instances – such as in Darfur since 2003 and in northern Uganda since the late 1980s – where the government is unable or unwilling to meet this expectation. In these instances it falls on the international community to decide how far to go in providing or enforcing protection for populations at risk. Although politically complicated, these interventions can go a long way in supporting or improving food security.

ANNEX III: AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS SAMPLED IN COLLECTION OF MATERIAL

International NGOs and agencies

Action by Churches Together (ACT)
Action Contre la Faim (ACF)
Catholic Agency for International Development (CAFOD)
Catholic Relief Services (CRS)
Concern
Cooperation for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) US
CARE Canada
German Agro Action (GAA)
International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)
International Rescue Committee (IRC)
Lutheran World Federation (LWF)
Médicins sans Frontières (MSF)
Mercy Corps
Oxfam GB
Save the Children UK
Save the Children US
World Vision US

Donor agencies

European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO)
United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID)
United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

United Nations Agencies
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF)
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)
World Food Programme (WFP)

Independent consultants (6)

ACRONYMS

ACF	*Action Contre la Faim*
AU	African Union
CAHW	community-based animal health worker
CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CBT	community-based targeting
CFS	Coalition for Food and Livelihood Security (Ethiopia)
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CMR	crude mortality rate
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
DFID	Department for International Development (United Kingdom)
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ECHO	European Community Humanitarian Office
EFSA	emergency food security assessment (WFP)
EMOP	emergency operation (WFP)
ERCS	Ethiopian Red Cross Society
EWS	early warning system
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FEWS-NET	Famine Early-Warning System Network
FIFC	Feinstein International Famine Center
GIEWS	Global Information and Early-Warning System
HEA	household economy approach (Save the Children UK)
HIC	humanitarian information centre
IBAR	Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICRISAT	International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics
IDP	internally displaced person
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IHD	integral human development
MSF	*Médecins sans frontières*
NGO	non-governmental organization
NPDPM	National Policy for Disaster Prevention and Management (Ethiopia)
ODAN	Emergency Needs Assessment Branch (WFP)
ODI	Overseas Development Institute (United Kingdom)
OFDA	Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID)
PIPs	processes, institutions and policies
PRA	participatory rapid appraisal
PRRO	protracted relief and recovery operation (WFP)
PSNP	Productive Safety Nets Programme (Ethiopia)
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SENAC	Strengthening Emergency Needs Assessment Capacity (project)
SSAF	seed security assessment framework
SSP	seed systems profile
U5MR	under-5 mortality rate
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAC	vulnerability assessment committee
WHO	World Health Organization