

The humanitarian response in Niger in 2005 is thought to have saved more lives than that in 1984 in Ethiopia, largely through the availability of new technologies, specifically high-energy biscuits (HEBs) that can be easily distributed in the most remote areas and given to mothers to take and feed their children at home (Bradol, 2006). However, the strength of the antagonism between long-term development workers and humanitarian workers in the aftermath of the Niger crisis is shocking. Development experts are concerned about how humanitarian responses, which are by definition designed to be implemented as rapidly as possible and over a short time, undermine long-term development efforts and weak local and national government institutions.

In their haste to respond to a disaster, humanitarian efforts in emergency situations tend to bypass local government structures, providing relief directly to local people and paying scant regard to local or national level representatives, undermining the role that these institutions play outside emergencies. Bypassing locally accountable institutions in favour of a more rapid impact also allows for enterprising individuals to “hijack” the process to their own benefit, and reduces the confidence of local communities in the capacity of the structures that are meant to represent them. Taking time to invest and strengthen existing local institutions may take longer but will act to reduce vulnerability in the longer term.

The role of humanitarian assistance is generally to save lives and help populations get back to where they were before disaster struck. This is less clear in slow-onset disasters such as those seen in the Sahel, where it is generally considered insufficient to leave people as exposed to risk as they were when the shock occurred. For their part, humanitarian organizations felt that long-term development failed to recognize the scale and severity of the crisis facing Niger and Burkina Faso and were negligent in allowing levels of acute malnutrition to become so high without raising international concern. The “slowly, slowly” approach to participatory development, it is argued, was practically immoral in accepting what were by international standards intolerable levels of acute malnutrition and potential mortality among children in particular.

Although this divide has been seen as a barrier to good development work for years, and has been the focus of some discussion, it remains unresolved. The divide is reinforced by separate budget and administrative systems but more importantly by different cultures and strong personal identification with one side or the other. Most people involved see themselves as either development experts or humanitarian experts. The examples of attempts to marry the two approaches are not well known and observers express scepticism that the experiments in social-transfer work in Ethiopia, Malawi or Zambia could be made to work in the Sahel. Nevertheless, there is an important realization that the two approaches need to be made to work together at the same time. This realization is found principally among NGO personnel, and is not yet widespread.

There is an awareness that the model of moving from development work to emergency methods and back to development work over time, as a crisis arrives and is overcome, has not been seen to work and is no longer appropriate to the situation of vulnerable people in the Sahel. The Livelihoods Framework may offer opportunities for common work between humanitarian and development institutions and between these departments within institutions. The divisions between humanitarian and development work are very deep and very serious, and must not be underestimated.

Essentially, it is necessary to accept that the basis for any planning in the Sahel is that drought *will* happen at some stage of any initiative, during planning, implementation and after completion. It follows that projects and programmes should aim to reduce vulnerability, and reduce the impact of drought, instead of more conventional development objectives.

Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 - Conclusions

4.1.1 - The current situation

Continuous decline in assets has increased vulnerability

The populations of the Sahel have suffered continued shocks and stress to their livelihoods and are now dangerously vulnerable. Material goods have been given up to obtain food, and financial debts have been incurred. The ability to survive stress and shocks for some populations is now so low that new measures of support are required.

Pastoralism

Mobile livestock production is a major feature of production in the Sahel, and demonstrates the flexibility and opportunism that is crucial in managing the uncertain environment. However, the essential element of mobility is being dangerously restricted and the production method is under great threat. The threats come from the expansion of arable farming and the loss of access to dry-season grazing, but mostly from a lack of understanding and a lack of sympathy for the pastoral means of production.

Most commonly proposed approaches to livestock rearing do not address the issues facing pastoralism – the loss of access to resources, and the need to improve access to services while maintaining mobility. Instead, they focus on methods of animal production that are not appropriate in the Sahelian context, where mobility is essential for success.

Successes

There are some important success stories in the Sahel, and despite the largely negative tone of the findings of this study there are genuine reasons for hope. Civil society organizations across the Sahel are growing in status and importance and are increasingly being heard in national and international debates (e.g. Sidibe et al, 2007). Agro-forestry and soil-conservation techniques that are labour- rather than cash-intensive are being adopted and adapted by local communities once their effectiveness has become clear. A “regreening” has been described for millions of hectares in Niger and on the central plateau in Burkina Faso. The successes however are built on long-term commitment, good communications, dialogue, flexibility and trust. Where development agencies are able to listen, and design their interventions on the basis of local understanding and analysis, there have been sustainable changes in production methods, and more secure livelihoods are developing.

4.1.2 - Causes of vulnerability

Dependence on natural resources

The populations in Sahelian countries are predominantly rural, and their livelihoods depend on natural resources. Rural production systems, whether cultivation or pastoralism, are well adapted to the erratic Sahelian climate, but increasing population pressure and increasing frequency of drought is placing ever greater strain on these systems. Potential for Intensification of production is limited in a drought-prone environment and **current development models** focus on costly inputs that carry high risks for poor farmers and herders.

Depletion of asset base

With increasing pressure on productive assets, vulnerable people are forced to rely on unsustainable coping strategies. Coping strategies among the most vulnerable rural households are oversubscribed. Economic migration is bringing fewer returns, and while it reduces the number of mouths a household needs to feed in times of stress it carries significant

costs and risks. Female-headed households rarely have this option and must rely on poorly paid work that reduces production in their own fields. Wild foods for household consumption or for sale are increasingly unavailable due to neglect of common property resources. The growing **landless and stockless poor** have few if any assets, and alternative sources of income are extremely limited. These households are highly vulnerable in times of drought.

Dismal access to services

Citizens of Sahel countries receive very poor government services. Health and education provision is among the worst in the world, and health, literacy and education statistics reveal scandalous deprivation. Part of the reason for the low level of services is the poverty of national budgets, although conditionalities of donors (such as the privatization of services) have also resulted in reduced access.

Restricted markets

International commercial procedures tend to pressurize Sahelian states to liberalize their markets, although the management of markets within the countries is often subject to informal forms of monopoly or restricted trading opportunities. Internationally, the Sahelian countries are very weak and suffer from unfair practices. While they are unable to force the abandonment of subsidies to production in other countries, they are also prevented from protecting their own producers and imposing measures that would increase their food sovereignty. Poor infrastructure restricts the functioning of internal markets and depresses the earning potential of many producers who cannot access markets easily.

4.1.3 - Challenges

The needs in the Sahel are not matched by the support offered

The landlocked countries of the Sahel are among the very poorest in the world. They have little to offer of strategic importance, as a source of raw material or as a market for exported goods. The total amounts of aid and debt relief are tiny compared with the needs.

Developing economic alternatives

All analyses point to the lack of economic alternatives as part of the fundamental problem for Sahel populations. Economic growth may bring relief in the longer term but there is little evidence that growth alone will help the vulnerable in the short to medium term. Welfare programmes are necessary to support the most vulnerable in the short term, and to help them achieve viable livelihoods.

Drought happens

Droughts happen and will continue to happen. The nature, extent, location and timing of droughts will vary, but there is no doubt that they will be a feature of life in the Sahel for a long time to come. Climate change is likely to make droughts and rainfall patterns more extreme and variable. Current planning methods do not deal with drought as a necessary element of the situation of the Sahel, but as an unfortunate event that causes a setback in normal progress.

Decentralization is weak

The decentralization of government functions from central to local structures is underway in all the Sahelian countries although the models are different. Currently the processes are not providing new means for the populations to access services or make claims on their governments.

Analyses are ineffective

Many analyses of the situation of vulnerable populations in the Sahel do not examine the root causes and tend to

divide causes into immediate and structural issues, allowing the structural issues to be largely ignored. The situations of vulnerable people in the Sahel are complex and nuanced. Vulnerability can be influenced by gender, ethnic group and generation issues, and by contemporary and historical social processes that are often not analysed and not explained. The short-term nature of many contracts in international development makes it difficult for staff members to develop profound and detailed understanding of the situation, and the management systems in development agencies do not demand such understanding.

Too much aid is inefficient

Many aid initiatives are based on the shallow analyses mentioned above and are almost always driven by externally imposed ideas of development. Notwithstanding the lip service paid to “participation”, the majority of aid organizations develop their programmes on the basis of their own priorities and their own visions. In most cases there is an external analysis of what local people lack, and plans are designed to address this lack.

Use programme support to enhance budget support

Budget support restores the centrality of national governments in the provision of services to the people. However, it does not represent new money; rather, it is a new way of spending the old money and expectations appear unrealistic. At the same time, there are no adequate systems in place to evaluate how budget support is being spent and targeted towards the poorest and most vulnerable. For budget support to work, it requires much greater commitment on the part of donors in terms of magnitude, innovation, sustainability and systemic monitoring.

Incompatibility of humanitarian aid and long-term development

- The divide between emergency and development work is a major barrier to successful development initiatives in the Sahel. This applies to administrative and financial systems, and more importantly also to the personal approach and understanding of personnel in the two disciplines.
- The livelihoods framework is a powerful meeting point for both approaches, and can offer improved understanding of the root causes of vulnerability and effective means of measuring and monitoring changes.
- It will be necessary to overcome the divides between the disciplines, as the situation in the Sahel requires a new integrated approach that allows welfare and development to work alongside each other in flexible and variable configurations.

Population trends

Rapid population growth is putting additional pressure on livelihoods, but it is possible that higher numbers of people will be necessary to implement changes in production methods. Rapid urbanization means that people are likely to be entering new forms of vulnerability in towns and cities. Development support will need to change to address urban issues in the near future.

Looking for a quick fix for a long-term issue

- Programme and project support is often short term, and designed and managed in ways that are not sufficiently flexible to cope with the uncertainty of the Sahelian situation. There is a tendency to apply simplistic attempts to increase productivity that are not appropriate to the high-risk environment of the Sahel.
- The need to develop a long-term approach is made obvious by the observations and the need to invent new ways of working in the future. The old approaches are not going to be appropriate in the future. Vulnerability will remain for a long time and cannot be reduced by quick fixes, and has not been reduced by the repeated use of food aid and other emergency measures.
- The sums of money used in emergency work are unnecessarily huge and much more impact can be achieved by the delivery of regular smaller sums. However, this will require a change of approach that values local ownership and accepts the need for real long-term commitment.

4.2 - Recommendations

These recommendations call for a different approach to how vulnerability is analysed and incorporated into development, as well how development and humanitarian responses are planned, financed and monitored. As such they apply to governments, donors and development agencies alike. No one group can take this forward alone. For example, NGOs cannot change the way they work unless donors are prepared to change financing mechanisms, and many NGOs will not change the way they work unless donors require it of them.

A new Sahel strategy

The following recommendations go together. The commitment to understand the situation, to invest for the long term, to expect droughts, to be responsive and to provide a range of supporting initiatives are all linked to by the need to respond to the new situation in the Sahel. A new strategy for the Sahel is required, and a piecemeal approach will be ineffective.

- Negotiate with decision-makers' head offices and regional centres for new criteria for assessing and designing interventions that address the need for new approaches.
- Insist that new country strategy documents or policy statements address the issues of chronic vulnerability.

Increase long-term assistance; stay the course

All these recommendations require greater and longer-term commitment, and this requires a willingness at high levels to attempt new approaches. Meanwhile, long-term commitment can be generated by commitment to a consistent series of short-term engagements. All interventions should be over at least ten years, even if this has to be made up of many different steps and phases.

- A new strategy for the Sahel will require significant increases in funding levels.
- Lobby for longer-term budgets.
- Create funding baskets (pools) so that funding can be extended beyond individual grants.
- Produce project proposals with long durations.
- Support the climate of opinion that accepts that significant changes take ten years to achieve.
- Link short-term budgets into a sequence of funding that allows longer periods of support.
- Manage hand-over mechanisms so that new staff members can support projects that are longer than their contracts.

Accept that the situation has changed

The people of the Sahel are more vulnerable now than at any time. The type of support they require and deserve is different from most common development approaches. It is necessary for development organizations to look at innovative ways of supporting communities that are extremely vulnerable.

- Set aside a proportion of budgets for new ways of working.
- Form a working group on vulnerability to review assessments of vulnerability in the region.
- Insist that the situation analyses in the revised PRSPs contain understanding of the dire situation of many more vulnerable households, and that measures will be required to address their vulnerability.

Understand the detail

Invest in a deeper understanding of the situation. This requires effective methods of participation and a genuine desire to learn. It also requires an acceptance that development is essentially a political process, and that politics have to be explicitly examined. Staff members must also have a commitment to pass on and share learning to counter and replace the current culture of forgetting and reinvention. Local circumstances should be used to define policy and strategy to reduce the tendency to impose thinking from outside.

- Commission local studies and demand to hear the voice of the most vulnerable in local analyses.
- Arrange for project work to include continuous learning and reviews of understanding of the local context.
- Insist on analyses that are detailed and nuanced – do not accept simplistic reviews that contain vague generalisations about ethnicity, gender or politics.

- Start analyses from the realities of the local situation and not from institutional directives, strategies and policies.
- Make arrangements for staff overlap and invest in briefing and induction in-country.

Plan for drought

All development initiatives should be based on the certainty that drought will occur during the initiative, and plans must include methods for reducing the impact of drought and building resources to increase resilience. This awareness of the hazards and acceptance of the need to plan for drought – and susceptibility to drought – is a key element for reducing vulnerability. Development work should support methods for improving water management and social transfers so that populations are less susceptible to droughts when they occur (DFID, 2005). This will require building up the resources of many who do not currently have the resources to manage a viable livelihood. A mixture of methods will be necessary and should be explored.

Plan to improve capacity to resist and recover

The use of emergency approaches in discrete episodes will need to be replaced by continuous welfare and work to reduce disaster risk. The rebuilding of livelihood assets needs to be adjusted according to the severity of the situation, with more support (in terms of amounts of support and the numbers of recipients) provided in bad years and less in better years. Relief aid should no longer be provided in isolated short-term events but should be linked to ongoing work and should be prolonged to improve the possibilities of recipients establishing viable livelihoods.

Build on successes

Incorporate learning from studies and long-term development projects that are showing signs of success into strategic planning. There are important examples in the region, and there is useful learning that can be drawn from these experiences.

- Develop and finance forums (e.g. workshops in the area of projects and in the capital city) to share successful interventions.
- Fund the production of simple reports.
- Arrange exchange visits (for local people and development agency staff) to sites of relative success.
- Develop a code for successful community development.
- Study and share results of experiments in other parts of dryland Africa (e.g. Ethiopia, Zambia, Malawi).

Believe in flexibility

Although lip service is paid to flexibility, most development management systems are used in narrow and inflexible ways. Interventions should include methods for including change and an expectation that changes will be necessary. Flexibility should be included in project and programme proposals, with uncertainty being expressed as a positive element of management. The acceptance of real flexibility has to be at high management levels but must be driven by the practitioners in country-level initiatives.

- Introduce reviews that welcome changes to programme activities coupled with the longer-term commitment described above.
- Introduce management methods that include an expectation of changes; this might include open sections of planning which can be filled in only after some time in operation.
- Where Log Frames are required, insist that the entire framework can be modified in the light of new learning and changes in the situation.
- Insist that programme and project plans contain “break points” where the initiative can be reassessed and redirected.
- Do not accept detailed plans that presume knowledge of the future that cannot be assured.

Support pastoralism

The role of pastoralism is important for the future of production in the Sahel, but is under serious threat. Pastoral means of production will not achieve their potential unless there are significant changes in support from donors and governments. Where mobility is possible it seems that the flexible use of natural resources offers the best chances of successful production. It is necessary to reassess the contribution of pastoralism and introduce new approaches that will make the most of its potential.

- Form a pastoral working group to support study, funding and lobbying.
- Create a funding basket for pastoral work.
- Commission national and local workshops on the future of pastoralism, to include NGOs, donors and government departments.
- Insist that pastoralism is included in the revisions of the PRSPs.
- Support the participation of pastoral groups in consultation on the PRS.

Integrate humanitarian and development work

The reduction of vulnerability requires continued flexible support to different parts of the populations, and this requires the skills and techniques of both development disciplines. Development agencies should experiment with small projects that oblige a joint analysis and joint working of personnel from humanitarian and development sections. The attempts at social transfer in other parts of dryland Africa should be examined, and new models developed for the situation of the Sahel.

- Set aside a budget for experimental work in joint emergency and development work.
- Build teams that contain personnel from both emergency and development backgrounds.
- Allow the teams to explore new ways of building relationships with communities that allow different types of support, for example:
 - examine with communities new methods of providing different types of support to different groups within the same community
 - examine with communities how support to different sectors can be modified and adjusted as situations change.
- Monitor in detail how the experiments work, and develop new, more effective methods.
- Share results and findings through working groups or workshops.

Integrate different approaches to aid delivery

Project support should be developed alongside particular budget-support initiatives, so that the two approaches can inform each other. Project work will provide donors with ground-level observations of the reality of work in the sector, and serve to provide insight on the effectiveness of the budget support in the same sector.

- Form a donor and government study group to examine how budget support can be improved.
- Carry out a trial of budget support and other aid approaches by focusing on a particular sector and combining and comparing results from the different delivery methods.
- Assess how budget support can be successfully combined with other methods.
- Examine how budget support is compatible with the Paris Declaration.

Support decentralization and civil society

The landlocked countries of the Sahel are committed to a process of decentralization. Donors and development agencies need to support this process. Decentralized municipalities and councils require support in terms of finances and skills and capacities if they are to be expected to understand the issues faced by their constituents and respond. Even if they find it expedient to bypass these institutions during crises, humanitarian responses must engage with these nascent institutions if they are to be able to respond to the needs of their constituents and reduce vulnerability in the long term. Support must be extended towards civil society responsible for holding elected officials to account.

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