Slow-onset disasters: drought and food and livelihoods insecurity

Learning from previous relief and recovery responses

This briefing paper provides a synthesis of key lessons learnt from evaluations[1] of relief and recovery responses to past slow-onset disasters – particularly drought, and food and livelihoods insecurity. The paper is intended for people working in relief and recovery operations for slow-onset disasters – those who have to decide if, when and how to intervene. It is part of a series focusing on lessons learnt in relief and recovery, developed by ALNAP (www.alnap.org) and the ProVention Consortium (www.proventionconsortium.org). Evaluations concerning the Americas, Africa and Asia were reviewed, but evaluations from Africa predominate, especially those from East and Southern Africa. This reflects disaster trends during the period covered, from 1985 to 2007.[2] For further reference, a listing of key resources and a bibliography of the evaluations reviewed are included at the end of the paper.

SLOW-ONSET DISASTERS AND HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION

By definition, there is more time to plan and implement an appropriate response in a slow-onset disaster such as drought. Yet evaluations still criticise the apparent lack of learning and the repetition of mistakes, including the fact that the humanitarian system often does not intervene until the crisis stage. One reason for this is while it is known in advance there will be an impact – on water availability, crop and livestock production and prices – it is not always clear how well people will manage.

Slow-onset disasters don't always demand humanitarian intervention, particularly where governments and communities work together to reduce the impact on affected people. Even when intervention is necessary, it is important to remember that many communities have been living with periodic or cyclical drought their entire lives. Consequently, they have developed ways to cope -- strategies which differ between groups (pastoralists, agro-pastoralists, farmers) and within groups from richer to poorer. Particularly during the early stages of drought, humanitarian efforts should try to support these coping strategies, thereby strengthening a community's resilience.

At the same time, drought events often occur with such frequency that people have no time to recover before another drought hits. This results in increasing poverty and chronic[3] food insecurity – with households year after year finding it hard or impossible to get the food they need. It is difficult during a humanitarian crisis to distinguish between people suffering from chronic and acute food insecurity. In the absence of other assistance, people experiencing chronic food insecurity will need humanitarian assistance. For more on guiding principles in food and livelihood insecurity and emergencies, see Sphere Project (2004), *Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response*.[4]

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1 The main sources of the evaluations reviewed were ALNAP's Evaluative Reports Database, ODI's Humanitarian Practice Network, ENN's Field Exchange, Relief Web, and UN- and NGO-specific websites. This review found very few published evaluations done by national NGOs and governments in affected countries, which is a limitation of the paper.

2 Between 1985 and 2007 drought occurred most frequently in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, Mozambique and South Africa. Drought also occurred frequently in China, Brazil and the US; however, there was rarely an international humanitarian response in these countries (CRED, 2007).

3 Chronic food insecurity is a long-term or persistent inability to meet minimum food consumption requirements, while acute food insecurity is a short-term or temporary food deficit. A discussion of terms is presented in WFP (2006f), wherein Devereux proposes using 'transitory' in lieu of acute so as not to confuse the time dimension with the severity. In this paper, the term acute food insecurity is retained to describe the time dimension, while the term 'crisis' is used to describe the severity.

4 www.sphereproject.org

SUPPORTING LIVELIHOODS

Lesson 1 – Understanding and protecting people's livelihoods is integral to saving lives and reducing future vulnerability.

When it is known early enough that severe food insecurity is a threat, the most effective way of saving lives is by protecting how people get their food. People acquire their food (and income) differently – through production or purchase, by harvesting or hunting wild foods, through gifts, or in exchange for work. To do this they rely on their 'livelihood assets'[5] : their labour and skills, land and other natural resources, livestock, tools, facilities (health, education, banks, markets and roads), savings, social networks and political representation. By protecting people's livelihoods in times of crisis, the humanitarian response can save lives. When a person is livelihood secure, they are food secure.

It takes time, skill and commitment to understand people's livelihoods. As a result, agencies with longer-term development programmes are often more likely to implement a livelihoods-based emergency response. An agency with more knowledge of the communities it works with is more likely to make best use of local traditions and practices. For example, in Mauritania in 2002/03, Oxfam worked with a local partner to intervene in two drought-affected areas. Where the partner had an ongoing livelihoods development programme, the partner understood community use of food markets. Relief efforts of scaling up loans to shop-owners, to keep food prices down, contributed to reducing food insecurity. In the neighbouring community, efforts were less successful because interventions focused on food production without understanding the dynamics of ownership of land and harvests by local elites (Oxfam, 2004).

Box 1: An example of livelihoods-based humanitarian response – Kenya in 2000/01

A large programme of intervention related to livestock took place in Kenya in 2000/01, targeting drought-affected pastoral areas. Thirteen agencies were involved in a total of 21 projects implemented across ten districts of Kenya. Here are some of the activities included, and reasons for their success.

- De-stocking was the most successful intervention due to strong community interest and involvement. Pastoralists were willing to sell animals in times of hardship, and sales directly benefited the local economy. Fresh meat was easier to handle and was preferred by beneficiaries, providing a source of protein for distribution more cheaply than beans. Because of donor flexibility, left-over funds for de-stocking were used for re-stocking when conditions allowed.
- The livestock-feed programme was successful where agencies had previously implemented the activity. Providing feed concentrates was more cost-effective than re-stocking after the drought was over.
- The transport subsidy was effective where traders had been undertaking this activity during non-drought years, and where the implementing agency worked closely with the traders. However, there were problems of fraud with traders. Lessons learnt include the need for strong, credible and transparent community-based institutional structures for a transport subsidy to be successful, and for community members and representatives to manage the operation themselves.
- The animal-health component was successful because of the involvement in both planning and implementation of local communities, the Kenyan government veterinary department and the community-based workers on animal health.
- The border operation enabled pastoralists to use resources across international borders as a result of an ongoing initiative that was stepped up during the drought. Movement and migration, including cross-border utilisation of water, pasture and markets, was the key to the survival of pastoralists (Aklilu and Wekesa, 2001).

Livelihood interventions are a combination of responses that require a wide range of technical skills and experience and flexible funding (Box 1). While some agencies can implement an effective multi-sectoral response, most do better by staying focused on what they do well, and not overstretching themselves

[5] See the DFID livelihoods framework at www.livelihoods.org for more in-depth explanations and examples.

(CARE et al, 2005; Aklilu and Wekesa, 2001). Coordination and partnership then become essential (USAID, 2003; DFID, 2006c).

For more on how to support livelihoods in emergencies, see Jaspars (2006), *From Food Crisis to Fair Trade: Livelihoods Analysis, Protection and Support in Emergencies*.[6]

ASSESSMENT

Lesson 2 – Knowing whether and when to intervene depends on objective needs assessments that contribute to an understanding of the immediate and underlying causes of the crisis and their impacts.

A baseline analysis is important in understanding how people are vulnerable, the risks they face and how they cope (C-SAFE, 2007). One type of baseline is useful for understanding livelihoods for better programme design – often called a vulnerability analysis. Another type identifies indicators that can be monitored over time to understand changing conditions. This second type is useful for early warning and for programme monitoring and evaluation. Because baseline studies can be time consuming, costly and require a certain technical expertise, agencies tend to neglect them (CARE, 2000). However, in some cases, baseline information may exist already. Or, better, agencies can choose to support or participate in government efforts to create baselines with longer-term benefits for humanitarian and development programmes (LIU, 2006).

Needs assessments should be coordinated, preferably multi-agency, and based on sound methodology using empirical evidence. If different stakeholders share an understanding of a situation, they are more likely to agree on which interventions are most appropriate. The rolling assessments of the Vulnerability Assessment Committees (VACs) in Southern Africa are a good example of what is possible and what still needs to be improved. In 2002 the VACs coordinated over 36 agencies with multi-sectoral expertise (government, local and international NGOs, UN and donors), in six countries. Because agencies, including donors, perceived the results to be reliable, the response (in this case largely food aid) was rapidly resourced and implemented, contributing to the prevention of widespread human suffering (DEC, 2004; WFP, 2003a). However, later evaluations observed that the assessment methodology (specifically focusing on food- rather than livelihood-security) overstated the impact of drought. The methodology also underestimated the impact of underlying factors causing increased chronic food insecurity – poor economic performance, bad governance and the impact of HIV/AIDS. Evaluations suggest that this led, at least initially, to the choice of inappropriate interventions (SADC, 2005; DEC, 2004).

Assessments must consider groups that have specific needs, and should draw attention to them when necessary. Vulnerable groups in slow-onset disasters have included pastoralists, poor women and children, the elderly, the disabled, internally displaced persons and their host communities, people living with HIV/AIDS and their families, and the food-insecure living in urban areas. In Borana, Ethiopia in 1999/2000, HelpAge International found that older people were forgoing meals to save the lives of other members of the family, either refusing food, eating last or preferring to be left behind when families migrated. Because nutrition surveys measured only children under 5 years old, the real extent of malnutrition was under-represented. HelpAge successfully advocated for older people to be included in nutrition surveys. As a result, the government's appeal mentioned older people for the first time as a priority for supplementary food, and at least five interventions were carried out to address older people's needs (HelpAge International, 2001). Other evaluations indicate that women's needs are more likely to be represented if women are included in the assessment team (Islamic Relief, 2002; Concern, 2002).

The impact of high food prices on livelihoods continues to be underestimated. Assessments need to analyse markets, and not just collect data – cereal markets, wage markets, local and regional markets, international markets for major cash crops (e.g. coffee, cotton and livestock), and informal cross-border trade. The analysis should also cover obstacles to accessing markets, such as tariffs,

[6] www.ennonline.net/fex/27/supplement27.pdf

export/import bans and conflict. Markets are dynamic and must be monitored over time and space. Evaluations of Niger in 2004/05 and Malawi in 2002/03 observed that underestimating the impact of high prices on poor households led to a late response (IRAM, 2006; SCUK, 2003). Agencies have responded by putting economists and market analysts on their staff (WFP, 2003a; WFP, 2006d). Oxfam, ODI and WFP are developing tools for market analysis.[7]

Over the past two decades, methods for assessing nutritional status have become highly standardised, probably more so than for any other crisis indicator. Malnutrition is an objective measure that can be compared across populations. As a result, **acute malnutrition can be one of the most reliable indicators of severity of a crisis. However, if not properly understood, it can misinform a humanitarian response** (Collins, 2001). Malnutrition reflects the wider situation: not only food security, but also public health (access to services, water and sanitation) and social environment (how children are cared for). [8] Some technical knowledge is needed to interpret the results of nutritional surveys. A useful reference on this subject is Young and Jaspars (2006), *The Meaning and Measurement of Acute Malnutrition in Emergencies: A Primer for Decision-Makers*.[9] For more on nutrition and health see Lesson 5 below.

Box 2: Initiatives to watch... classification systems

Classification systems are being developed to help interpret the findings of early warnings and assessments, to link findings with a particular response, and to facilitate comparison both within and across countries. These systems can help to determine when food insecurity is chronic or acute, when it is developing into a crisis or famine, when to conduct needs assessments, when to implement mitigation, relief or recovery operations, and when to end an intervention. These systems use benchmarks, thresholds or cut-offs to describe a situation, usually in relation to changes in crop and animal production, health (specifically nutritional status) and coping strategies. Here are some useful sources of further information.

- *Integrated Food Security and Humanitarian Phase Classification* (Haan, 2006).
- 'Famine intensity and magnitude scales: a proposal for an instrumental definition of famine' (Howe and Devereux, 2004).
- Food security classification systems (Young and Jaspars, 2006: Table 14).
- *Identification of Factors that Trigger Emergency Needs Assessments in Slow Onset Crisis* (WFP, 2005a).
- *Measuring Mortality, Nutritional Status and Food Security in Crisis Situations: The SMART Protocol* (SMART, 2005).
- Criteria for decision-making on interventions to address food crisis (Jaspars, 2006: Table 3).
- Identifying food security impacts of shocks and appropriate policy responses (WFP, 2006f: Annex1).

The ProVention Consortium has compiled a toolkit on risk assessment that includes manuals for engaging communities in assessment and analysis including livelihoods-based methodologies at: www.proventionconsortium.org/CRA_toolkit. Another resource specifically focused on food and livelihood security is Young et al (2001), *Food Security Assessments in Emergencies: A Livelihoods Approach*.[10]

CHOICE OF INTERVENTIONS

Lesson 3 – Interventions must be based on a thorough understanding of the problem, clear programme objectives and an analysis of response options and associated risks.

Food security has often been thought of as the result of production deficits, and food aid has been the standard humanitarian response. However, as the understanding of food and livelihood insecurity evolves, evaluations indicate that food aid is not the only possible response and sometimes not the

[7] See Oxfam (2006d), Adams and Harvey (2006); and at WFP, contact henk-jan.brinkman@wfp.org and see the ODAN website at www.wfp.org/operations/Emergency_needs/.

[8] Based on the UNICEF conceptual framework of the causes of malnutrition (UNICEF, 1990) and described in the Sphere Guidelines www.sphereproject.org.

[9] www.odihpn.org/download.asp?id=2112&ItemURL=documents/gpr4.pdf

[10] ODI/HPN Network Paper 36, available at www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/emergencies/how_we_work/downloads/Food-security-and-livelihoods.pdf.

most efficient (Harvey, 2007; WFP, 2007a; World Bank, 2005a). **The decision to provide food, cash, a combination, or something else entirely should be based on an objective problem analysis and clear objectives** and not on what resources are available, what the agency has the capacity to distribute, or the donor's preferences. For more on the relationship between objectives and response options, see: Jaspars (2006),[11] Table 3, 'Criteria for decision-making on interventions to address food crisis'; and WFP (2006f),[12] Annex 1: 'Identifying food security impacts of shocks and appropriate response options'.

Food aid

Food aid can save lives (Steering Committee, 2004; WFP, 2006c; C-SAFE, 2007), particularly when general distribution rations are adequate in both nutritional quality (including micronutrients) and caloric quantity (greater than 2000kcal) (Duffield et al, 2004).

Food aid can also support livelihoods. School feeding, food for work, even free food distribution, can be used to protect or create the livelihood assets people rely on: educated children, fertile soil, good roads and so on. Free food distribution should start early, last long enough, and be reliable and plentiful enough (like other livelihood support) to serve as an income transfer during food crisis (DFID, 2006a).

There is a concern that food aid can have negative impacts on markets, causing a decline in prices. One result may be to deter farmers who would otherwise sell their crops at a higher price. The private sector may also be affected as it would, without food aid, import, process, trade and sell more food. However, there is not yet enough evidence to settle this point (Maunder, 2006). It is clear that **it matters how food aid is programmed and where it is purchased**. Food aid distributions need to be well targeted – to the right people in the right way – and well timed so as not to coincide with harvests (Jere, 2007; Hammond et al, 2002). Local and regional purchase of food aid reduces the cost and delivery time, and may also help local producers. Coordination reduces the risk that local purchases will drive up prices (REDSO, 2004 WFP, 2003a).

When there are delays in a livelihood response and the situation deteriorates, the humanitarian system tends to fall back on what it knows works to save lives – food aid. This will change if the humanitarian system gets better at protecting livelihoods during an emergency and as experience with other types of assistance increases. Regardless, **debates about the appropriateness of food aid should not preclude a response (food aid or other) that is necessary to save lives**. This was one of the reasons cited for the delayed response in Niger in 2005 (WFP, 2006c; CARE et al, 2005).

For more on food aid in emergencies see: WFP (2003b), *Food Aid and Livelihoods in Emergencies*[13] and World Bank (2005), *Food Aid and Food Security in the Short- and Long Run: Country experience from Asia and sub-Saharan Africa*.[14]

Cash

The use of cash in emergency responses is increasing. Examples of cash-based responses include cash grants, cash for work, providing cash to microfinance institutions for low-interest loans, and vouchers for goods such as seed and livestock. Here are some key findings from evaluations of cash-based responses particularly relevant to slow-onset disasters and food insecurity.[15]

- **Where markets can provide enough food, and food insecurity is a result of lack of purchasing power, cash can work.** During the crisis stage of an emergency, cash is most often spent on food, often with the nutritional benefit of increasing variety in the diet (Oxfam, 2006b; Concern, 2006). After the crisis, cash is more likely to be spent on recovery, e.g. re-stocking for

[11] www.ennonline.net/fex/27/supplement27.pdf

[12] documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ena/wfp085331.pdf

[13] www.wfp.org/policies/Introduction/policy/

[14] Siteresources.worldbank.org/SOCIALPROTECTION/Resources/SP-Discussion-papers/Safety-Nets-DP/0538.pdf

[15] This section draws on Harvey (2007), WFP (2007a) and WFP (2006a), which are reviews of evaluations of cash-based emergency interventions. Other references are included here for specific information.

pastoralists, repaying debts, or investing in income-generating activities to provide an alternative source of income (CARE et al, 2005).

- **The combination of food plus cash can provide all the benefits of both while avoiding the limitations of each.** In Malawi in 2005/06, providing food aid met subsistence needs while providing cash allowed beneficiaries to meet important non-food needs, such as for soap, medicine, and school fees (Concern, 2006).
- **Cash may be more appropriate for certain groups such as pastoralists.** Pastoralists have a well-developed relationship with markets for barter and sale of livestock products and purchase of food. Cash is also simply easier to carry (Oxfam, 2006a; ECHO, 2002b).

While the obstacles to using cash aid appear to have been exaggerated, agencies are still learning about when and how to use it. The following are key points to consider when considering cash-based responses.

- **Accurate market analysis and monitoring is crucial** to ensure that cash provided will meet needs as intended (Oxfam, 2006b; World Bank, 2006a). The food equivalent – how much food the cash will buy – can vary considerably between seasons and places, and particularly between urban and rural areas (Oxfam, 2005). This applies to other commodities as well, such as seed and livestock.
- **There must be realistic assessment of the capacity to distribute cash, and sufficient funds for capacity building.** This includes the management and administration of cash, accounting, logistics of transport and distribution, supervision and monitoring (SCUK, 2005a). This has been a challenge in Ethiopia, Zambia and Malawi (World Bank, 2006a; Oxfam, 2006b; SCUK, 2005a). The choice of how to distribute cash must reflect a programme's objectives, targeting strategy, existing infrastructure for managing cash and security conditions.
- **Monitoring the impact of cash distributions requires gender sensitivity,** as decisions about how cash is spent and who makes that decision may create conflict within households. In their cash programme, Concern in Malawi used gender-specific techniques to discover how men and women spent the funds, including sometimes not in the best interests of their families (Concern, 2006).

For more information on cash programming, see: Harvey (2007), *Cash-based Responses in Emergencies*;[16] Oxfam (2006d), *Cash Transfer Programming in Emergencies*;[17] SDC (2006), *Cash Workbook*[18] and WFP (2006a), *Cash and Food Transfers: A Primer*.[19]

Cash for work and food for work

Food transfers in slow-onset disasters are often made in exchange for work. The pros and cons associated with cash for work (CFW) are more or less the same as for food for work (FFW) (Harvey, 2007). Factors needed for success include high levels of community participation at all stages of design and implementation, appropriate technical guidance and quality assurance. Necessary relief cannot be withheld just because the quality of work is not up to standard. Therefore, **any activity requiring a high standard of work is probably better as a complementary activity than as a pre-condition for receiving relief** (URD, 2007; WFP, 2007b).

Work programmes also risk preventing poor households from pursuing their own productive activities. This is particularly difficult for women who often provide labour for CFW/FFW and are still required to do household chores, including caring for children. Because of this, an evaluation of CFW/FFW in Ethiopia strongly recommended limiting the required number of hours per day and days per person for an individual to work in order to receive their ration (DFID, 2006b). For more on implementing programmes of cash or food for work, see Lesson 7 below.

[16] www.odi.org.uk/hpg/cash_vouchers.html
[17] publications.Oxfam.org.uk/Oxfam/display.asp?isbn=0855985631
[18] www.sdc-cashprojects.ch/en/Home/SDC_Cash_Workbook
[19] www.wfp.org/policies/Introduction/other/Documents/pdf/OP18_Cash_and_Food_Transfers_Eng%2007.pdf

Market-based responses

Market interventions aim to remove obstacles to people using markets effectively to acquire their food. This can mean increasing people's purchasing power, creating demand by providing vouchers, selling subsidised food or other commodities, or providing incentives to the private sector to make food more affordable. **If they are done on time and at a large enough scale, market-based strategies can reduce the need for other interventions.** In Namibia and Botswana in 2002/03, food aid required by the government was procured and distributed through normal commercial suppliers, mitigating the need for these countries to issue an international appeal for assistance (Mano et al, 2003). Here are some key considerations.

- **On a large scale**, **market-based interventions demand government support...** for regulating prices and markets, movements of food and subsidies or tariffs/taxes. For an overview of market-based interventions in India, and lessons learnt, see World Bank (2005a).
- **...and private-sector involvement.** For example, coordination with grain-marketing boards and associations of producers, millers, traders and retailers is important to assess capacity, willingness to cooperate and mechanisms for distribution (C-Safe, 2004). The private sector has to see a benefit too (Mano et al, 2003).
- **They require time to plan and implement** (WFP 2007a). Sometimes food needs to be moved from local surplus markets to deficit markets, or imported where there are national shortfalls. In Zimbabwe in 2004/05, Oxfam's voucher intervention was delayed as local traders searched for food (Jaspars, 2006); Oxfam (2006d) now recommends planning some two months in advance.

For more on large-scale market-based responses, see: World Bank (2005a), *Food Aid and Food Security in the Short- and Long Run: Country Experience from Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa*;[20] on smaller-scale interventions using vouchers, see Oxfam (2006d), *Cash Transfer Programming in Emergencies*.[21]

Box 3 Initiatives to watch... Insurance

Weather insurance is being piloted in India, Mongolia, Mexico, Ethiopia, Malawi and Kenya, insuring small farmers and governments against failure of crops due to drought. Insurance pays out directly to farmers (Malawi) or to governments and/or humanitarian agencies who in turn support the affected farmers (Ethiopia). Insurance schemes require coordination and communication with all the stakeholders, from the donors who subsidise it to the farmers who buy it. In Malawi, farmers' associations have organised and coordinated farmers, ensuring local involvement and making sure that the schemes are relevant to the local situation (Hellmuth 2007). It is too early to know if these schemes will work on a large scale. However experience in Ethiopia has shown that rainfall data can be reliable enough to trigger a payout and private insurance companies are interested. Insurance also gives governments an incentive to put into place or update contingency plans or other risk reduction measures (WFP 2006d). For more on weather insurance see Hellmuth (2007).

Seed and feed, water and fodder

Fewer and fewer seed interventions involve direct distribution, given the problems of ensuring seed appropriateness and quality. Instead the focus is on **approaches that allow for greater beneficiary participation**, specifically seed fairs, seed vouchers and cash for seed. Assessments should determine whether there is a real (not assumed) need for seed, and analyse the capacity of local markets to meet it (FAO, 2005; Levine and Chastre, 2004). Agencies should monitor the utilisation of seed. In Kenya in 2000, CRS organised 14 seed fairs in three weeks, providing preferred seed for timely planting to over 8000 families. Other organisations, relying on seed ordered from companies, failed to receive supplies in time for planting (CRS, 2004). See Longley (2006) and Jaspars (2006), for more on seed vouchers and fairs.

[20] Siteresources.worldbank.org/SOCIALPROTECTION/Resources/SP-Discussion-papers/Safety-Nets-DP/0538.pdf

[21] publications.Oxfam.org.uk/Oxfam/display.asp?isbn=0855985631

In addition to affecting crop production, drought also reduces water supplies for people and livestock. However timely water interventions are rarely sufficiently funded or successfully implemented (URD, 2007; COOPI, 2002).[22] In Afghanistan, water projects were of poor quality due to weak methodologies for needs assessment and implementation, lack of adequate resources (technical and financial), and lack of time (URD, 2007). Here are some key points to remember when implementing water projects.

- **Water needs assessments must be participatory.** Assessments should include potential environmental impacts on water tables, settlement patterns and use of surrounding resources such as pasture (C-SAFE, 2007; COOPI, 2002). Assessments should also determine whether it is more appropriate to rehabilitate old sites before constructing new ones.
- **Community participation is essential to ensure appropriate site selection, design, sustained management and maintenance of water infrastructure,** in addition to determining meaningful complementary health and sanitation activities (Oxfam, 2004; COOPI, 2002).
- **Successful water projects require the involvement of water technicians from beginning to end, and the use of locally produced technologies.** Agencies considering implementing water projects should either have the relevant technical expertise themselves or be prepared to form partnerships to achieve this. Short-term hiring of technical consultants is not enough.

See Chalinder (1994), *Water and Sanitation in Emergencies,* for more good practice;[23] and ODI (1996), *Seed Provision during and after Emergencies*.[24]

Humanitarian interventions still largely fail to address the needs of pastoralists (USAID, 2003; WFP, 2006c). More than with other livelihood system, pastoralism challenges standard ways of providing assistance during a disaster. Pastoralism in drylands has evolved specifically to cope with variations in rainfall from one year to another. **When drought hits, the best way to help pastoralists is to support them in doing what they normally do for themselves.** This includes protecting core breeding stock, encouraging diversification of herds and ensuring the migration and mobility of animals, and access to water, pasture and markets (Jaspars, 2006). Interventions need to adapt to changing conditions. Collection and storage of fodder and rehabilitation of water points may be appropriate at the early stage of a crisis. Later, emergency veterinary care, de-stocking and fodder distribution will be needed, followed by re-stocking and livelihood diversification at the recovery stage. Evaluations of the 1999/2000 drought in Kenya provide a wealth of learning on livestock interventions (see Box 1).

Advocacy

Humanitarian operations are occurring more often in pastoralist areas. This is partly because of the increasing frequency of drought, resulting in declining herd sizes, and reduced availability of water and pasture, but also because of policies unfavourable to a pastoralist way of life. **Advocacy for better policies that support pastoralist livelihoods is essential in the short and long terms,** to lift livestock bans, facilitate conflict resolution, enable internal and cross-border movement, and support trade in livestock and other goods (USAID, 2003; REDSO, 2004).

A livelihoods assessment also analyses the political and institutional factors affecting vulnerability to a slow-onset disaster. Yet, even when these factors are known, rarely do emergency interventions include advocacy strategies for change. And when they do, there is little or no evaluation of the result. The DEC agencies have acknowledged that opportunities for advocacy were missed in the Southern Africa crisis of 2002/03 (DEC, 2004). **Advocacy requires both good analysis – knowing who to lobby, and what for – and a coordinated strategy involving different stakeholders, such as civil society, local and international NGOs, the UN and donors.** This is so important that the DEC evaluation team recommended that advocacy be on the job description of any DEC facilitator sent to the field in an emergency (DEC, 2004). For more on advocacy in relation to disaster management and development policy, see Lesson 10 below.

[22] This section draws on a series of ECHO evaluations in Sudan (ECHO, 2003), Zimbabwe (ECHO, 2004), Central America (ECHO, 2002a) and Cambodia (ECHO, 2002c). Other references are included for more information on specific points.

[23] www.odihpn.org/download.asp?id=2115&ItemURL=documents/gpr1.pdf

[24] www.odihpn.org/download.asp?id=2112&ItemURL=documents/gpr4.pdf

EXIT STRATEGIES

Lesson 4 – Without an exit strategy, the shift from crisis to recovery activities is more difficult. Exit strategies should be based on an understanding of changing conditions and not on artificial timelines.

Knowing when to end an emergency response can be as important as knowing when to begin one (WFP, 2004b). This is particularly true where a relief response may end, but the underlying causes of vulnerability persist (DEC, 2004). Many emergency interventions do not include exit strategies (ECHO, 2004; DFID, 2004). Here are some key points for successful exit strategies.

- **Link to objectives.** If recovery is an objective, it is important to be clear from the outset what this means.[25] Recovery can be a return to the same degree of food or livelihood security experienced before the crisis, or to an improved capacity to cope.
- **Choose indicators that reflect changes in livelihoods, and include these in regular monitoring.** The choice of indicators must reflect the programme's objectives, requiring significant commitment to baseline studies and monitoring.
- **Begin at project inception and involve communities.** A late start risks haphazard implementation of the exit strategy. Involving communities in the design, implementation and monitoring of the strategy helps them understand from the beginning the conditions for exiting. Participation also contributes to the selection of more relevant indicators.
- **Map out a strategy for the development of local partnerships** to facilitate the shift to longer-term programming when the agency leaves (ECHO, 2005). C-SAFE Zimbabwe (CARE) developed strong links with traditional leaders and action committees to continue support to families affected by HIV/AIDS. Government services on agricultural extension continued technical advice on vegetable and fruit production, provision of seeds and basic tools after CARE phased out (C-SAFE, 2005).
- **Be coordinated.** During transition from relief to recovery activities or phasing out, it is important to coordinate with others and not implement exit strategies in isolation. Agencies can analyse together what activities become less important over time. The agencies implementing those activities can then phase out (DFID, 2006c).

For more on exit strategies, see: C-Safe (2005), *What we Know about Exit Strategies: Practical Guidance for Developing Exit Strategies in the Field*;[26] and WFP (2004b), *Exiting Emergencies: Programme Options for Transition from Emergency Response*.[27]

NUTRITION AND HEALTH

Lesson 5 – Improving acute malnutrition requires an integrated response, based on a sound understanding of the local causes of malnutrition, and not just food aid.

Recent slow-onset emergencies in Niger, Ethiopia and Southern Africa have been characterised by crisis-level rates of severe acute malnutrition. These nutritional emergencies have been dealt with predominately by provision of emergency food aid. However, evaluations highlight that **improvements in nutritional status are best achieved through an integrated response based on a sound understanding of the local causes of malnutrition**, and not on food aid alone (DEC, 2004; USAID, 2003). This is particularly true where poor nutrition is a structural or chronic problem attributed not only to inadequate food consumption but also to low levels of public health, access to health services, and

[25] In the case of safety nets in Ethiopia, the objective is 'graduation' to food security; yet there is no agreement on what this actually means, or on the indicators to measure it (DFID, 2006c).

[26] www.c-safe.org

[27] www.wfp.org/policies/Introduction/policy/

caring practices as was the case in Niger (IRAM, 2006; CARE et al, 2005). See: SCUK (2004a), *Emergency Nutrition Assessment: Guidelines for Field Workers* for guidance; or Young and Jaspars (2006), *The Meaning and Measurement of Acute Malnutrition in Emergencies: A Primer for Decision-makers*[28] on the causal analysis of malnutrition.

Early warning systems and needs assessments should include health indicators. Otherwise, complementary non-food health and nutrition interventions are often inadequate.[29] In Ethiopia in 2002/03, agencies were ill-prepared to provide life-saving health interventions such as measles vaccinations, vitamin A distribution, malaria prevention and treatment, and clean water (REDSO, 2004). Interventions should focus on public health, and on increasing access and utilisation of health services. In Niger, the humanitarian community advocated for health care to be provided to malnourished children free of charge by the government (MSF, 2005).

The choice to implement supplementary feeding programmes (SFPs) is at best based on nutritional survey results, but rarely on an analysis of the causes of malnutrition. As a result, **supplementary feeding has been used to the near exclusion of other complementary and necessary interventions** (USAID, 2003). However, **there is little evidence that supplementary feeding actually works** (WFP, 2007b; Duffield et al, 2004; USAID, 2003). SFPs must include complementary health and education activities. Evaluations must measure coverage,[30] including default rates, and nutritional impacts to justify its continued use as a cost-effective means of preventing or reducing acute malnutrition. It may be better just to focus on improving the general distribution (WFP, 2007b). In the absence of a general distribution, SFPs are not recommended except as a stop-gap measure until a general distribution can be implemented (Shoham, 1994). Tearfund found in Ethiopia 2005/06 that SFPs had limited effect because rations were usually shared within families, and there was usually little other food to 'supplement' (Tearfund, 2006). For more on SFPs, see Shoham (1994), *Emergency Supplementary Feeding Programmes; A Good Practice Review*.[31]

Community-based therapeutic care (CTC) is now the recommended way to treat uncomplicated severe acute malnutrition in emergencies, while clinic- or hospital-based care according to WHO guidelines is still recommended for those with complications (WHO et al, 2007; Collins et al, 2006). Evaluations of CTC in Ethiopia, Sudan and Malawi indicate that, in the absence of medical complications, it is effective in terms of both cost and clinical outcomes to treat severely malnourished children at home. This approach reaches more children and minimises the need for mothers (or other family members) to travel to therapeutic feeding centres or hospitals. Community participation and mobilisation is key to successful CTC. For more information, see CTC Research Programme (2006), *Community-based Therapeutic Care: A Field Manual*.[32]

PARTICIPATION

Lesson 6 – Even in slow-onset disasters, participation continues to be traded off against other programme demands.

Evaluations point out that **community participation is compromised throughout the programme cycle, particularly when there is a need to respond rapidly** (ECHO, 2004; IFRC, 2002). **Agencies can do better at consulting communities earlier in a slow-onset crisis, identifying interventions that build on community priorities and capacities.** In Southern Africa in 2002/03, beneficiaries reported that agencies did not ask them what they wanted but merely made assumptions (DEC, 2004). The choice of activities for programmes of cash or food for work did not reflect community priorities (C-Safe, 2007). Yet, with the introduction of cash-based responses, agencies are increasingly consulting beneficiary communities about whether their preference is for cash or food (WFP, 2007a).

[28] www.odihpn.org/download.asp?id=2112&ItemURL=documents/gpr4.pdf

[29] This paragraph draws on USAID (2005), REDSO (2004), Steering Committee (2004) and USAID (2003).

[30] SFP should cover at least 50 per cent of the target population to meet minimum standards, which is rarely achieved (Duffield et al, 2004).

[31] www.odihpn.org/download.asp?id=2114&ItemURL=documents/gpr2.pdf

[32] www.fantaproject.org/ctc/manual2006.shtml

Communities can provide valuable 'inside information' and resources during programme implementation, especially during community-based targeting and distribution (CBTD) and monitoring and evaluation (see Lessons 4 and 7). '**Downward' accountability is more likely when the community has a role and a responsibility.** Action Aid in Southern Africa in 2002/03 had communities co-sign on the bank transactions required to implement the response (DEC, 2004). To exercise their rights, everyone in the community should know what their entitlement is, who is to receive it and why, and for how long (IFRC, 2005; CARE, 2004).

Traditional community structures are being used, with longer-term benefits for local ownership, participation and sustainable impacts. At the very least, agencies need to be aware of existing community-based organisations and self-help mechanisms. Interventions should take care to not undermine these. Seed banks set up by SOS Sahel during the 1997 drought emergency in Ethiopia were still in operation after the drought of 2004/05 (SOS Sahel, 2006). SOS Sahel facilitated traditional funeral associations to design, implement and evaluate the project, increasing local ownership. Importantly, as well as the initial seed stock, SOS Sahel provided training and capacity building, including in book-keeping and community reporting systems to increase accountability.

Participation also carries risks and costs (and see Lesson 7, below).

- Poorly facilitated participation can reinforce existing power structures that marginalise certain groups (Concern, 2006; SCUK, 2005a). In Zimbabwe in 2002/03, local leaders influenced targeting in relief distributions, excluding people belonging to the political opposition (IFRC, 2003; WFP, 2003a).
- People who benefit from a project can talk from first-hand experience regarding project outcomes and impacts. At the same time, they may have a vested interest in seeing the project continue and be less likely to criticise the project or discuss problems. Developing monitoring systems that seek information from less biased sources can be a way around this. SCUK in Zimbabwe involved children in the monitoring of the use of distributed relief (SCUK, 2005b).
- Participation requires time and commitment from both agencies and communities. Communities take on extra work, for which they are rarely compensated (DEC, 2004). Community-based targeting and distribution worked in Malawi because the process was iterative, taking over six months to get right (C-Safe 2007).

To minimise and correct negative outcomes, participation needs to be monitored. Beneficiary surveys, complaint mechanisms and other feedback systems in post-distribution monitoring and evaluation are useful here (DEC, 2004; Oxfam, 2006b; Concern, 2006). Finally, the use of cash in emergencies is one of the clearest examples of transferring decision-making to beneficiaries, allowing them to decide for themselves what they need most. Lessons learnt about using cash – develop capacity first, monitor the impact particularly on those more vulnerable, remain flexible and recognise the limitations – apply also to shifting decision-making to communities and partners. For more on participation, see the ALNAP guide (2006), *Participation by Crisis-affected Populations in Humanitarian Action: A Handbook for Practitioners*.[33]

TARGETING

Lesson 7 – A combination of targeting strategies works, but not all strategies work under all circumstances. Targeting outcomes need to be monitored.

Targeting can be by area (geographic targeting), or by group (administrative targeting). It can mean letting an individual or family decide themselves if they want to participate (self-targeting), or letting the community decide who will benefit from an intervention and who will not (community-based targeting). **The best approach is often a combination of targeting strategies, depending on the information available and on an agency's resources of time and money** (WFP, 2006b; WB/IFPRI, 2002). Done

[33] www.alnap.org/publications/gs_handbook/index.htm

well, geographic targeting (GT) correctly identifies the largest number of needy households. Done badly, it can lead to the inclusion of a large number of less needy households. However, GT often relies on secondary data that do not represent individual villages and households and so can hide pockets of food insecurity, as happened in Malawi in 2002/03 (WFP, 2006b).

Programmes of cash or food for work (CFW/FFW) in the early and recovery stages of an emergency can be very effective if the wage is set at a level that will only attract those in genuine need (WB/IFPRI, 2002). However, care must be taken not to compromise the nutritional value of the cash or food. CFW/FFW can also exclude labour-poor households who are often disproportionately affected by drought, including female-headed households, the elderly and disabled. Either work that is appropriate for these groups should be available, or they should simply be provided with free relief. See Lesson 3 above for more on CFW/FFW.

Community-based targeting and distribution (CBTD) has certain advantages. Communities often have more information about their members than external agencies can gather, which can be used to target those in need. By involving communities in decision-making, there may be better ownership and monitoring of the process and results (Concern, 2006). CBTD can reduce agency costs associated with administrative targeting and food distribution (WFP, 2006b; WFP, 2004a). However, **there are cases in which CBTD does not work, and agencies need to be willing to abandon the method when necessary** (see Box 4). This was potentially the case in the Joint Emergency Food Aid Programme (JEFAP) in Malawi, when community committees had to decide who would (and would not) receive assistance. The communities felt that this undermined their coping strategy of sharing available resources (WFP, 2004a; SCUK, 2003). At the same time, sharing may contribute to stronger social cohesion, which may in turn help to save lives and protect livelihoods (WFP, 2006b; Oxfam, 2002). For more on participation in slow-onset emergencies, see Lesson 6 above.

Box 4: Lessons learnt on community-based targeting and distribution (CBTD)

In Indonesia after the 1999 drought related to El Niño, WFP worked with local NGOs to implement a formal survey and CBTD to target urban slum dwellers affected by high food prices and difficulty accessing enough food. CBTD worked best in relatively homogeneous slums, while unregistered slum dwellers risked being overlooked – living nearby didn't mean that they were considered 'community' by others in the neighbourhood (WFP, 2000).

CBTD works best:

- in stable, non-conflict situations; where communities are cohesive and well defined;
- where relatively large wealth differentials exist within communities;
- where not all wealth groups are equally affected by food insecurity;
- when targeting a fairly large proportion of the community;
- when agencies can identify reliable community representatives accountable for targeting the most vulnerable; and
- when agencies prioritise monitoring and capacity building.

(Adapted from WFP, 2006b; SCUK, 2004b; WB/IFPRI, 2002)

Regardless of the targeting strategy used, more successful targeting outcomes are associated with the following.

- A multi-agency structure and inter-agency dialogue, including government and non-government organisations, for making targeting decisions.
- An appeal process communicated clearly to communities: who to appeal to, how appeals should be carried out, and how appellants can expect to be treated (DFID, 2006b). Women's access to the appeal process is very important, as women are often under social pressure not to complain. Appeals need to be documented in order to track individual cases and to monitor whether certain groups are systematically excluded or favoured.

- Adjustments to the targeting process to make it more responsive to local realities. Adaptation of guidelines should be encouraged (not penalised), and well documented to promote transparency (DFID, 2006b; Oxfam, 2002).
- Effective monitoring of the outcomes of targeting after distribution.

The same targeting structures used for settled communities may not be appropriate for nomadic pastoralist populations (Steering Committee, 2004). Pastoralists often resist targeting for a variety of cultural and sociological reasons (WFP, 2007b). Best practice for targeting pastoralists has not yet been identified, although a combination of geographic, administrative and self-targeting has been suggested (Devereux, 2004). Cash for work may be appropriate for internally displaced persons, who are often destitute pastoralists.

For more on community-based targeting practices, see SCUK (2004b), *Community-Managed Targeting and Distribution of Food Aid: A Review of the Experience of Save the Children UK in Sub-Saharan Africa*.[34] For more on targeting practices in general, see: WFP (2006b), *Full Report of the Thematic Review of Targeting in WFP Relief Operations*;[35] and Taylor and Seaman (2005), *Targeting Food Aid in Emergencies.*[36]

COORDINATION

Lesson 8 – Coordination and partnership require commitment and a recognition of their benefits.

Coordination and partnership are vital to an effective humanitarian response. **Coordination will be more effective if it includes government, international and national organisations.** Coordination structures are often created by international agencies to meet their own coordination needs, neglecting national government and non-government partners (USAID, 2003; DEC, 2004). It then becomes difficult to obtain a coherent and consistent interpretation of the situation ('it makes sense and we agree'). This can lead to a lack of agreement on the most appropriate response, and so to delays in implementation. In Sudan in 1999 and Niger in 2005, agencies failed to advocate collectively for the right response due to a lack of shared analysis and understanding. In the absence of a coherent message, the media portrayed the crises inaccurately, which put pressure on agencies to respond, probably inappropriately (DEC, 1999; CARE et al, 2005). The Sphere standards are particularly useful in this regard (Sphere Project, 2004).

Coordination demands staff, time and commitment and therefore a recognition that it is to an agency's advantage to participate. Coordination needs to be prioritised in work plans and funding proposals (GOK/KFSM, 2001). In Kenya in 1999/2000, the Oxfam programme manager spent more than 50 per cent of his time on coordination. As a result, Oxfam was able to influence policy and programming in early warning, coordination and emergency response (Jaspars, 2006).

Coordination and partnership are essential to the success of programmes for protecting livelihoods, addressing pastoralists' needs and reducing malnutrition. These interventions must be integrated, cover multiple sectors, be technically sound and attain good coverage without sacrificing quality. Success is more likely with local government and non-government partners, who can use their networks, knowledge and experience (Aklilu and Wekesa, 2001). This has implications for capacity building, improving short- and long-term outcomes (ECHO, 2004; Duffield et al, 2004).

[34] www.savethechildren.org.uk/scuk_cache/scuk/cache/cmsattach/2008_CMTD_for_web.pdf
[35] www.wfp.org/policies/Introduction/policy/
[36] www.ennonline.net/fex/22/supplement22.pdf

LEARNING

Lesson 9 – Learning is more likely when it is programmed, facilitated and funded.

In a slow-onset disaster, there is more time to develop the right response. Yet evaluations still criticise the apparent lack of learning and the repetition of mistakes (IFRC, 2002; USAID, 2003). Learning is more likely when an organisation makes it an objective, allocating personnel and funding. C-SAFE's Learning Spaces, using web technology, periodic workshops and commissioning action research, were considered 'path-breaking' by participants. However, when the facilitation stopped, so did the shared learning (C-Safe, 2007).

RISK AND VULNERABILITY REDUCTION

Lesson 10 – A disaster response should build on national strategies for disaster management and longer-term strategies for food security and poverty alleviation.

Disasters are still seen by many as an interruption to development rather than a reality which must be planned for (World Bank, 2006b). This is particularly problematic in countries that experience recurrent drought. One result is the creation of parallel structures and programmes to address emergency needs. This may save lives in the short term, but the disconnect between relief and development means that emergency responses often contribute little to addressing the conditions behind the disaster in the first place (REDSO, 2004; World Bank, 2006b). Slow-onset emergencies rarely happen in isolation from underlying processes of impoverishment and chronic food insecurity.

Box 5: An answer to the 'chronic emergency'?

Until 2005, the standard response to food insecurity in Ethiopia was an annual appeal for emergency food aid. This was intended to meet the consumption needs of households affected by both acute and chronic food insecurity. Although this assistance was substantial and saved many lives, it did little to protect livelihoods, generate community assets or preserve household assets of physical or human capital. In 2005, a new Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) was implemented, with the following key characteristics: multi-annual funding, a move from food towards cash (or cash and food), improved predictability for beneficiaries, improved multi-donor coordination, increasing focus on community-led decision-making, and **strategic and operational coordination with other components of a wider national strategy for long-term food security and sustainable poverty alleviation.**

Emergency responses should build on national strategies, engaging in dialogue when these strategies are inappropriate or ineffective (World Bank, 2006a; CARE et al, 2005). How agencies design their interventions – for example the degree to which they will engage with local communities, organisations and government – will either help or hinder the development of more resilient communities and more capable and accountable government.

In the case of 'chronic emergencies' (Horn of Africa, Southern Africa, the Sahel), repeated 'short-term' emergency responses have saved lives but generally not protected or rebuilt livelihoods. The **introduction of safety nets, providing a reliable transfer of resources and services to the chronically food insecure, may be a step in the right direction** (Box 5) (WFP, 2007b; SCUK, 2005a). At the same time, while safety nets may prevent an increase in chronic food insecurity, they won't reduce it without being linked to programmes explicitly aiming to reduce long-term vulnerability (DFID, 2006c).

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