

1 Executive Summary¹

1. *Background: the evolution of Early Warning and Food Security Information Systems in Darfur*

- SC/UK has been involved in Darfur since the wide scale famine of 1984 and the resultant relief operations. Following the famine the first SC information systems in Darfur focused on food aid monitoring and ad hoc nutrition and health surveys, but by 1993 a more typical food security 'early warning' system was established.
- Phases I and II (1993-2000) of the DFIS saw an evolution from an indicator based approach (crop assessment, nutritional surveys and market monitoring), to one supported by an increasingly sophisticated understanding of local livelihoods and local economies, and thereby an ability to interpret accurately the impact of a shock/s and trend indicator data (whether commodity price trends and/or production failures). The basis for this change, which is still the analytical framework for the DFIS, was the development of the Household Economy Analysis (HEA) approach. This approach, originally developed by SC UK, has been increasingly adopted by other agencies².
- The basic output and process of the system is focused around a seasonal (Sep/Oct) village and household survey, which collects and combines production, price and coping strategy information, and thereby produces a prediction of food needs for the following year. Ongoing market collection and specifically timed nutritional assessments (in most vulnerable areas) are additional components of the system.
- The project now covers IDPs in South Darfur and vulnerable populations in North Darfur and northern West Darfur.
- The current funding period is 3 years from 2002 to 2004. Since early 2003, the DFIS has had to adapt to the changing political-security environment in Darfur, which has affected the ways in which information has been gathered as well as the underlying livelihood base of many populations. At the same time this review was undertaken with an eye towards a potentially greatly changed funding environment, in the event of a peace agreement being signed within the country.

2. *Project Strengths*

- The DFIS has been able to maintain its core outputs and quality, in terms of early warning and food needs assessments, in spite of a significant turnover of staff in the last two years. With limited external support, the project has been able to train and bring on new staff to a good standard through its own planning and resources.
- The DFIS remains very much at the center of information sharing, joint analysis and joint planning in Northern Darfur. The degree of support for the project and its outputs is exceptional in El Fasher. All agencies consulted stress the importance and usefulness of the outputs and most agencies contribute staff to the assessment missions as and when they occur.

¹ The format and content of this report has borrowed heavily from the 2000 Evaluation – the 2000 report provides very useful descriptions of many aspects of the DFIS, which remain unchanged and therefore are relevant here.

² The Food Security Analysis Unit, run by the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation, and funded by the EC, uses HEA as the basis of its early warning and emergency needs analysis; FEWSNET, funded by USAID, uses HEA/food economy as its vulnerability analysis tool; the HEA has been at the heart of the Technical Support Unit of WFP, in southern Sudan, for many years.

- The project has been able to expand its coverage in to (northern) West Darfur, using the North Darfur model. New baseline information has been collected, rainfall and market data has been established, and the annual needs assessment process now includes West Darfur³.
- To date, in the face of a changed operating environment, namely the insecurity and political tensions in Darfur, the DFIS team appear to have adjusted admirably. The basic analytical approach (the HEA) can and is still being applied and combined with the team's local knowledge, to assess ongoing developments in the State.
- The ability of the team to express the situation and needs of the State, on behalf of the local communities, in the face of a much more tense relationship with the authorities, is still strong. This is demonstrated by SC's continued role in representation of the food security and emergency conditions in the State. SC is often asked by the Food and Water Emergency Committee (FWEC) to present situation updates to visiting high level delegations (at least 20 in 2002 & 2003). Although this role does give SC an overly strong role, it does guarantee some independence of expression, allowing for controversial messages to be expressed where local government staff may be reluctant to speak out.

3. Project Weaknesses

- Although all the evidence suggests that the quality of the analysis, in terms of early warning and food needs assessments, is good, the project has been weak at assessing the impact and accuracy of its own work. For example, the team have not conducted another food aid impact assessment study since one was carried out in 1999. Addressing this area would carry a great deal of weight with donors, who, to this mission, expressed their uncertainty or lack of understanding about HEA analysis and the predictive accuracy of the DFIS. Similarly, while the targeting workshops appear to have been well designed and implemented a thorough assessment of the lessons learned has not been conducted.
- The organisation and documentation of data and information could be much improved. Data and information, particularly HEA baseline information, is held on too many different computers and software packages. There is an urgent need to consolidate and organize the many years of knowledge built up by the project.
- HEA baseline information needs to be updated. Many existing HEA baselines are several years old and in some cases significant changes will have taken place to the underlying livelihood base of populations of concern.
- There is also much room for improving the integration of cross-sectoral analysis. The DFIS project itself contains a strong nutrition element, and the Darfur programme has capacity and activities in education, health and water. Although efforts have been made to stimulate a deeper analysis of, for example, the underlying causes of malnutrition, through short technical visits, this has proven insufficient for the project.
- Limited success has been achieved in improving national level co-ordination. This is partly the result of the particular circumstances of other organisations and partly SC's own capacity constraints at national level. For example, although a training exercise was undertaken with Oxfam in the Red Sea Hills in early 2003, their CSI project ran out of funding shortly afterwards. In addition, while relations and prospects for collaborative work with WFP were looking promising around 2001/2002, some changes in staff and strategy have made collaborations difficult in practice since. More success has taken place with the expanding Food Security Department of the MoANR, where technical engagement has been developing.

³ Due to security constraints, it was not possible to visit West Darfur but telephone interviews were conducted with the HAC representative and the Minister of Agriculture there. The DFIS project staff from that area were consulted in El Fasher.

4. Sustainability

- Given the potentially huge change in the funding and operating environment apparently imminent in Sudan, this review was conducted with an eye towards how the DFIS may become more sustainably run within government. In reality, while the principle of a 'handover' to government at some stage is recognized by SC and its staff, the uncertainties at the Darfur level (conflict, political tension, displacement etc) as well as at the national level (fact and nature of peace agreement), limit the ability to envisage, let alone plan for such a handing over.
- However, in this regard the DFIS is considered by many, from within and outside of Government, to be an excellent model of State level collaboration and planning around a sound information base. The FAO, who are conducting a review and planning exercise on behalf of the EC, for future information system/s in Sudan, see the DFIS as one of the most positive and impressive examples to draw upon. During the period of this review, a small presentation and seminar was conducted in Khartoum of the DFIS, on request of the Food Security Director within the MoANR. A representative from the EC also attended this seminar.
- In reality, the DFIS has played a major and long-term role in the transfer of skills to the government, through the regular activities of the project. However, it must also be mentioned that many of the staff that have joined the project (and many other UN and INGO projects) moved over from government positions, particularly from the APU of the MoAg.

5. Value of DFIS in North and West Darfur

- The project gives an early warning of approaching food crises, thereby providing the opportunity for timely intervention.
- The project provides a reliable estimate of food needs in North and West Darfur, and for IDPs in South Darfur. While the GoS/WFP Annual Needs Assessment was conducted separately to the Village and Household Survey in 2003, the results of the survey were influential in the final figures developed by WFP.
- The estimate takes into account the degree to which households themselves can make up the food deficit.
- The project ensures a degree of disaster preparedness by having information at hand for targeting, survey teams ready for rapid appraisal, and institutional systems established for coordinating a response.
- The project has developed an important information and experience base on Darfur, although as mentioned this still needs to be fully documented and organised.
- The project has built up a cadre of Sudanese SC/UK staff, as well as staff in partner agencies, who are trained in all aspects of survey work. These skills can be applied not just in relief planning but also planning other food security interventions.

2 Overview of the Recommendations

This mid-term review was carried out in the expectation that a consultant would be hired for an extended period of time to follow-up on the following recommendations – ToR in Annex II

1. Impact Monitoring and Evaluation

- The DFIS must incorporate in to its regular activities an assessment of its food needs predictions and any resultant food aid deliveries that took place. The 1999 food aid impact assessment exercise provides an existing and familiar model that could be replicated. This need only be done in one or two food economy zones per year.