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Food-security assessments in emergencies: a livelihoods approach

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the theory and practice of Oxfam GB's livelihoods approach to assessing food security in emergencies. A livelihoods approach simply means emergency programming aimed at supporting livelihoods, as well as saving lives. In terms of food-security assessments, a livelihoods approach involves assessing the longer-term risks to livelihoods, as well as short-term nutritional or life-threatening risks.

The first part of this paper describes the key concepts that make up food-security theory, and relates them to a livelihoods approach. These elements are availability and access to food (entitlement theory) and the severity of food insecurity in relation to meeting food needs, vulnerability, risk and coping strategies.

The second part of the paper describes how Oxfam assesses food security. The purpose of a food-security assessment is to determine the need, if any, for a food-security intervention. The type of intervention is influenced by the severity of food insecurity. This may be determined from two perspectives: first, by assessing whether people are able to meet their immediate food needs (the risks to lives); and second, the vulnerability and risks faced by different livelihood groups and their coping strategies (the risks to livelihoods). On this basis, appropriate interventions are identified, ranging from free food assistance to a wide array of livelihood-support initiatives, such as cash-for-work and de-stocking.

The third part of the paper uses case-studies to illustrate how Oxfam has applied its livelihoods approach in practice, and how that approach has been adapted depending on the types of livelihood in question, and the nature of the external shock. These case-studies comprise an emergency assessment of the impact of cyclone and floods in Orissa (India) in 1999; a monitoring visit for Oxfam's response to drought in Wajir (Kenya) in 2000; and a review of Oxfam's programme for conflict-displaced people in Uraba (Colombia) in 1999.

The paper ends by highlighting the key challenges posed by a livelihoods approach to assessing food security in emergencies. These challenges include deciding on the right quantities of food aid, and choosing which categories of people to target; how to combine food and non-food interventions effectively, and when to shift from a food to a non-food approach; and issues to do with neutrality and impartiality, particularly, but not exclusively, in complex political emergencies.

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Executive summary

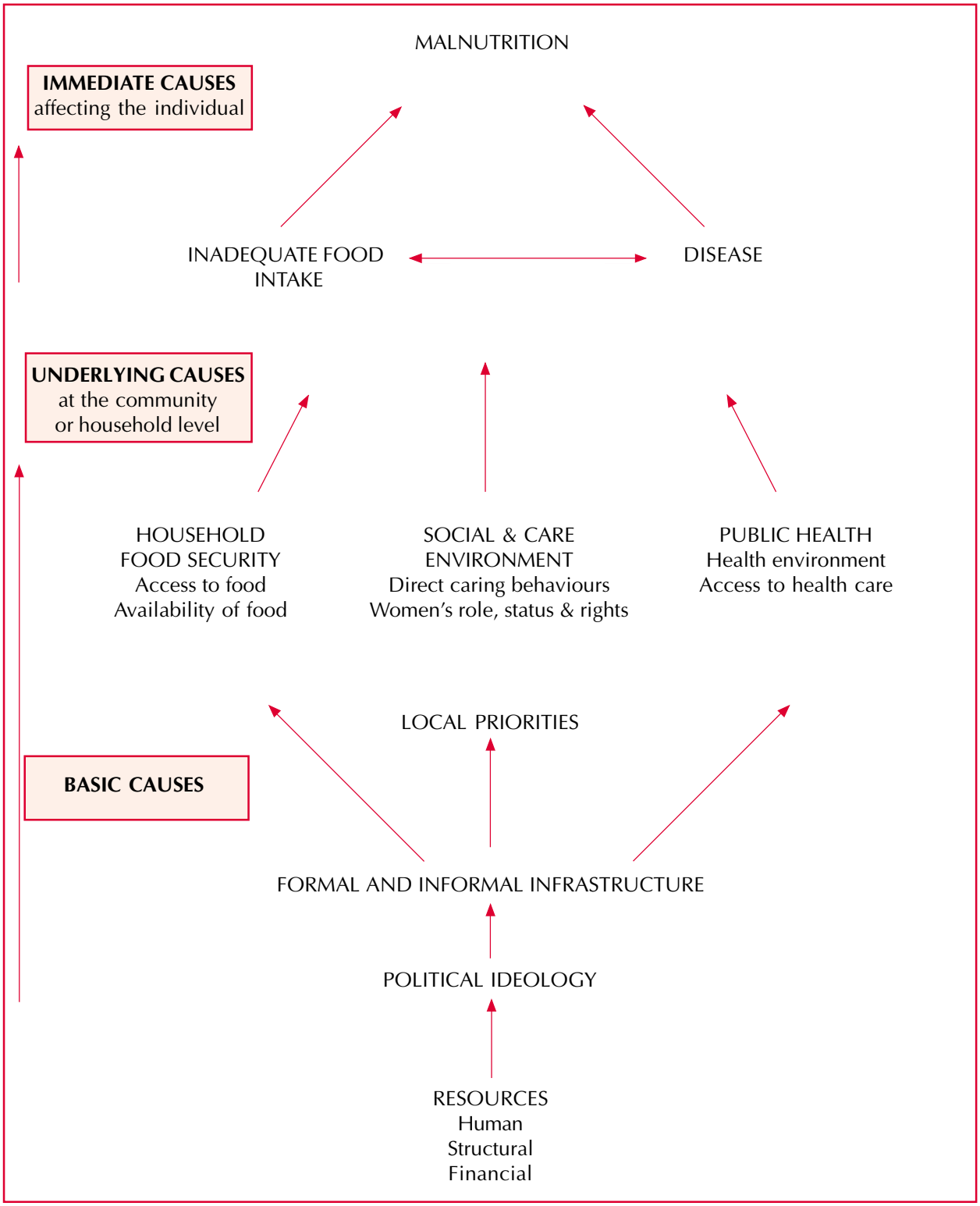
Food security, or rather insecurity, is at the heart of food crises and food-related emergencies. It is an underlying cause of malnutrition and mortality (see Figure 1 overleaf), and a significant factor in longer-term livelihood security. Food insecurity may cause irreparable damage to livelihoods, thereby reducing self-sufficiency. It is therefore part of the *process* leading to malnutrition, morbidity and mortality. In addition, the *state* of being food insecure directly contributes to destitution and damaged livelihoods in the long term. In other words, if there is acute food insecurity, there is a nutritional risk.

Depending on their mandates and the aims of their assessment, different agencies have developed different approaches to assessing food security in emergencies. However, the theory behind each approach is based on the same underlying concept. This concept incorporates issues of availability and access to food, and acknowledges that, in an emergency, people may adopt a variety of coping strategies in response to food insecurity. The concept also includes issues around vulnerability, and sees famine as a process, comprising distinct stages (MSF-H, 1997). Methodologies are also similar, and largely depend on secondary information sources and rapid-assessment techniques, such as interviews, focus groups and proportional piling (MSF-H, 1997; UNHCR/WFP/ENN, 2000; on these terms, see the Annex, page 32).

The main differences between agencies' approaches stem from their different objectives, and the different ways the information is analysed to determine whether the population in question is food insecure. For Oxfam, the main aim is to assess risks to *livelihoods*, as well as to *lives*. In its food-security assessments, Oxfam seeks to identify a variety of interventions that protect livelihoods. These may include food aid, but other measures range from de-stocking and fodder distribution to cash-for-work and seeds and tools distributions. This contrasts with Save the Children (SC)-UK's food-economy approach, which is commonly used to estimate food-aid needs (Boudreau, 1998). To estimate the severity of food insecurity, Oxfam analyses shifts in food entitlements, coping strategies and nutritional status. The food-economy approach, by contrast, judges severity by the size of the food deficit.

The livelihoods approach to assessing food security operates at a conceptual level. It does not constitute a methodology, nor is it unique to Oxfam. Taking a livelihoods approach simply means emergency programming with the aim of supporting livelihoods, as well as saving lives. This has implications for assessments, analysis and interventions. Assessments need to incorporate an analysis of the food security of different livelihood groups, and the risks they face. This often means doing a more in-depth assessment than would be the case if lives alone were in question. An analysis of the food security of different livelihood groups will lead to the identification of different interventions for each group. Finally, a livelihoods approach to food-security assessments has implications for food-aid recommendations, because the proportion of the population targeted will increase, and more rations will be required.

Figure 1: A conceptual model of the causes of malnutrition in emergencies



Adapted from the UNICEF Framework of Underlying Causes of Malnutrition and Mortality

1

Understanding food security

The concept of 'food security' has developed over the past three decades. Concerns about food security up to the end of the 1970s were directed more at the national and international level, and concerned the ability of countries to secure adequate food supplies. Only later did the level of analysis shift to include a focus on food security at local level, even down to households and individuals. This chapter explains the key elements of food-security theory, and describes how they relate to a livelihoods approach to assessment.

Box 1: Oxfam's definition of food security

Oxfam defines food security as:

when everyone has at all times access to and control over sufficient quantities of good quality food for an active healthy life.

Within this definition, the two elements of food security are:

- availability (the quality and quantity of the food supply); and
- access (entitlement to food through purchases, exchange and claims).

Access and availability

Amartya Sen's entitlement theory of famine (Sen, 1981) forms the conceptual basis of all agencies' approaches to assessing food security. Sen explained that famines occur not because there is not enough food, but because people do not have *access* to enough food. Of course, the availability of food near to the household is a prerequisite of food security. Availability is influenced by factors such as a community's proximity to centres of production and supply, or by market forces, restrictions on trade and international policies that affect food supplies. All of these are key to food-security analysis. Sen's work was nonetheless a radical breakthrough; before him, the availability of food was thought to be the *overriding* determinant of famine.

According to Sen, people's 'exchange entitlements' (or their livelihood sources) reflect their ability to acquire food. Sen sub-divided these entitlements as follows:

- production-based entitlements (crops and livestock);
- own-labour entitlements (waged labour and professions);
- trade-based entitlements (trading artisan products and natural resources like forestry products); and
- inheritance and transfer entitlements (from the state, or private gifts and loans).

Famine occurs when a large number of people suffer a complete collapse in their exchange entitlements.

Crucial though Sen's work is, it has its limitations. First, the entitlement approach views famines and other food-related emergencies as economic disasters. However, as Sen himself pointed out, his approach 'concentrates on rights within the given legal structure in that society, but some transfers are illegal acts, and therefore not accommodated by the entitlement approach nor can they be measured easily' (Sen, 1981). From recent experience, especially in Africa, the association between violence and famine is so close that no widely-applicable famine theory can disregard the role of violence, and the way that resources like food are illegally acquired by some groups, at the expense of others (de Waal, 1990; Macrae and Zwi, 1994). In Sen's terms, the violent access of food by one group removes

another's exchange entitlements. Famine may bring important benefits for some, particularly in political emergencies characterised by violence (African Rights, 1994; Jaspars, 2000). Famine among the Dinka of Bahr El Ghazal in Sudan, for instance, was the result of their exploitation because of their wealth (Keen, 1991).

Entitlement theory has been criticised on two further counts. First, it implies a straightforward sequence of entitlement failure leading to hunger and then to malnutrition, starvation and death. Second, it implies that people's actions are largely determined by their need to consume food (de Waal, 1990). But research into people's responses to famine, often referred to as 'coping strategies', has shown that their priorities in times of food stress are to preserve productive assets to protect livelihoods, rather than to meet immediate food needs (see, for example, Corbett, 1988). Coping strategies are discussed more fully in the next section.

The severity of food insecurity

Understanding the severity of food insecurity is essential for determining the best type of response. In a livelihoods approach, the severity of food insecurity is gauged by its impact on people's ability to feed themselves in the short term (risk to lives), and its impact on livelihoods and self-sufficiency in the longer term (risks to livelihoods). These two perspectives allow the severity of food insecurity to be judged (see Box 2).

Risks to lives: meeting immediate food needs

The most direct measure of people's ability to feed themselves is food consumption, but given the methodological difficulties involved in directly measuring food intake, even during stable situations, this is impractical during emergencies. Consequently, less direct measures or indicators must be used. These include:

- significant shifts in the major exchange entitlements or sources of food, which cannot be compensated for adequately by other sources; or
- the impact on nutritional status.

Shifts in nutritional status among children can reflect changes in the underlying food-security situation. Nutrition surveys can therefore be extremely useful in assessing the wider impact of food insecurity at the population level. In the absence of a health crisis or other significant underlying cause of malnutrition, levels of acute malnutrition and nutritional status in children under five years of age have been shown to be a sensitive indicator of food security at the local level (Young and Jaspars, 1995). It is vital, however, that other causal factors bringing about change in nutritional status are also considered, especially those underlying causes related to health and care (see Figure 1). Changes or falls in nutritional status may be a result of disease or major shifts in caring behaviours, rather than as a result of food insecurity.

Nutritional status must be compared with expected seasonal patterns (taking account of the impact of infectious disease and caring behaviours). Seasonal stress on food security is often reflected in seasonal weight loss, which is regained following the resumption of food supplies, for example after the harvest (see the Wajir case-study, page 18).

Risks to livelihoods: vulnerability, risk and coping

Understanding the effects of food insecurity on livelihoods and self-sufficiency in the longer term requires an analysis of vulnerability and risk. Vulnerability to food insecurity has two aspects, one external to the household, and the other internal to it (Chambers, 1989). The external shock or stress might be drought, market failure, conflict or forced migration. The internal aspect of vulnerability is to do with people's capacity to cope with these external shocks. Sen analyses external shocks in terms of their impact on people's exchange entitlements. He defines the following types of external shock:

- production-based shocks (loss of crops or livestock);
- own-labour shocks (loss of jobs, fall in wages);
- trade-based shocks (hyper-inflation, or over-supply leading to a collapse in prices); and
- inheritance and transfer shocks (the collapse of a welfare system, or the contraction or collapse of social networks).

Box 2: Judging the severity of food insecurity

A population or livelihood group is considered acutely food insecure if:

- people experience a large reduction in their major source of food and are unable to make up the difference through new strategies;
- the prevalence of malnutrition is abnormally high for the time of year, and this cannot be accounted for by either health or care factors;
- a large proportion of the population or group is using marginal or unsustainable coping strategies;
- people are using 'coping' strategies that are damaging their livelihoods in the longer term, or incur some other unacceptable cost, such as acting illegally or immorally.

Livelihoods are made up of a combination of exchange entitlements. A massive change in a particularly important entitlement may be decisive in causing entitlement failures, leading to loss of livelihood and starvation. The impact of the external shock on livelihoods depends on the household's vulnerability, which is a combination of the intensity of the external shock, and the household's ability to cope.

Vulnerability is not the same as poverty, although underlying poverty contributes to increased vulnerability in most emergencies; the effects of emergencies are made worse where they are superimposed on a situation of widespread structural poverty. Vulnerability is often related to social or political status. The threat may be exacerbated when the national government is reluctant to act, or where the international community responds slowly, or not at all. Famine rarely occurs where leaderships are accountable or representative.

In response to a decline in their exchange entitlements, people actively try to protect their livelihoods. Davies (1993) defines these coping strategies as 'short-term, temporary responses to declining food entitlements, which are characteristic of structurally secure livelihood systems'. These strategies encompass a wide range of economic, social, political and behavioural responses to declining food security. They need to be understood in terms of strategies whose effects are easily reversible, versus those that incur unacceptable costs.

While the strategies people adopt vary with their livelihoods and the type of disaster they face, there are nonetheless distinct stages of coping. Early coping strategies are reversible, and cause no lasting damage to livelihoods; later ones, however, may cause permanent damage. This is crucial for food-security assessments, because the types of strategies that people use and numbers involved in particular activities, tell us what their priorities are, and indicate the severity of food insecurity.

Examples of coping strategies adopted in the early stages of famine include the migration of household members to look for work; searching for wild foods; and selling non-productive assets. A common early strategy is to reduce food intake, or to change the diet (Corbett, 1988; Fleuret, 1986; Rahmato, 1988; see also the case-study on Orissa (page 13)). People may switch to cheaper, less desirable and perhaps less nutritious foods, or they may reduce the number or size of meals. They may choose to go hungry in order to preserve their productive assets and future livelihoods (Corbett, 1988).

When food insecurity is prolonged, more and more people will be engaged in these early strategies. Eventually, these strategies become unviable, and people are then forced to adopt others that damage their livelihoods. Once all options are exhausted, people are faced with destitution and the adoption of crisis strategies, such as mass migration or displacement in search of charity (Corbett, 1988). A key objective of a livelihoods approach is to prevent people from having to take such damaging steps. This means intervention at an early stage.

Outsiders sometimes perceive coping strategies as synonymous with economic activity. However, the social and cultural dimensions of coping strategies are often more important. For example, the case-study of Uraba in Colombia (see page 22) shows that the capacity for social mobilisation was one of the main determinants of food security for war-displaced people. Farming was safer for groups than for individual households. In many pastoral societies, there are extensive networks of giving and sharing between and within extended families. An evaluation of an Oxfam emergency intervention in Turkana in Kenya, for instance, found more than ten types of sharing (Jaspars *et al.*, 1996). In famines or emergencies, survival might be more a matter of 'who you are' and 'who you know', than of 'what you have'.

Box 3: Coping strategies, livelihoods and conflict

The term 'coping strategies' – and indeed the terminology relating to livelihoods as a whole – was developed primarily in natural disasters, particularly drought. In conflict-related disasters, or in situations of protracted political instability, belligerents may deliberately block coping strategies for tactical reasons, and there may be less scope for protecting or rebuilding livelihoods. Homes are destroyed, crops and livestock looted, and transport networks destroyed or disrupted. Insecurity may force people to migrate, thereby separating them from their means of livelihood (see the Colombia case-study, page 22). Internal conflict may last for years, inflicting such permanent damage on people's livelihoods that they might be unable to rebuild them. The very fact that interventions designed to support livelihoods are intended to have a long-term impact may make them suspect in the eyes of belligerents, because building the capacity of one livelihood group could imply strengthening one side in a conflict at the expense of another.

2

How Oxfam assesses food security

This chapter describes how Oxfam assesses food security using a livelihoods approach. The starting-point for any assessment of food security is to clarify the aim, and specify the objectives. The goal of assessing food security in emergencies may be related to minimising nutritional risk and saving lives in the short term, and/or supporting livelihoods (Young, 1992). Both of these aspects are related to the severity of food insecurity.

A livelihoods approach to food-security assessments considers both the severity of food insecurity (in terms of people's ability to feed themselves and the impact on nutritional status), and the processes that generate food insecurity (vulnerability, risk and coping), and that have a long-term impact on livelihoods.

Whether the focus is on short-term food needs or long-term livelihood issues, the same assessment principles apply:

- find out about food availability;
- find out about the ability of people to feed themselves, and how different groups of people gain access to food;
- gauge the severity of food insecurity in terms of its impact on entitlements and nutritional status (risks to lives); and
- analyse the severity of food insecurity in terms of livelihood vulnerability and risk (risks to livelihoods).

Assessing impact on livelihoods in the longer term requires more detail and in-depth analysis than when the goal is to assess immediate needs.

The type of information collected

Information on the context

An Oxfam food-security assessment includes a review of basic information about the emergency context (Table 1 overleaf).

In an acute emergency, where people may be at risk of starvation, decisions must be made quickly. The main questions and decisions relate to:

- whether food assistance is needed;
- if so, how much and what type;
- who needs assistance, and why;
- how long food aid is required, and/or the point at which the situation must be reviewed; and
- whether there are locally-available resources and capacities to transport, store and distribute food.

Assessing risks to livelihoods requires a more in-depth analysis of the severity of food insecurity. In addition to assessing people's ability to feed themselves (assessing shifts in entitlements and impact on nutritional status), it must also include the wider aspects of vulnerability (see Table 2 on page 9).

Box 4: Gender and food security

Oxfam is frequently concerned with the gender dimension of food security, as there are usually clear gender roles to do with the purchase, management and preparation of food, as well as gender divisions in terms of access to food outside the home, and general access to and management of resources.

An analysis of gender relationships is often central to Oxfam's work. The Public Health Assessment Tool (PHAT), for instance, emphasises the importance of having women as well as men as key informants, and interviewing women as heads of households. However, gathering information on differences within the household is not necessarily a priority during an initial rapid assessment of a situation of acute food insecurity, as interventions are usually targeted at communities or population groups as a whole.

Table 1: Information about the emergency context

Checklist/key areas	Sources/methods
Geographical location Climate Environment Access by road/rail/sea/air Physical infrastructure *Political context* Local political commitment to disaster mitigation International relations Government infrastructure and services Political commitment to addressing the emergency *Security and stability* Source and nature of internal conflicts and war Security of affected population Access for relief personnel Security risks to relief personnel Access for bulk relief commodities *Affected population* Numbers Demographic breakdown Origins (history of displacement) Ethnic and social divisions, including gender relations Social cohesion/leadership structures	Gathering secondary information Interviewing key informants (representatives from government, NGOs, academics, journalists, local 'experts' and respected individuals) Mapping Population estimates

Information on availability, access and severity of food insecurity

Table 2 gives a checklist of key areas where information may be needed regarding the availability of food, and a population's access to it. The table also gives the indicators of severity of food insecurity in terms of ability to meet immediate food needs, and risks to livelihoods.

This checklist will vary depending on people's livelihoods, the nature of the external shock and people's ability to cope.

Information on nutritional status

The prevalence of acute malnutrition and the nutritional status of children in a population can be used to judge the severity of food insecurity, as long as the health and care determinants of nutritional status are taken into account. As a rule of thumb, unless there have been reported outbreaks of either measles or acute diarrhoeal disease it is unlikely that a sudden decline in nutritional status has occurred as a result of disease. Similarly, the major care factors to look out for are significant population displacements, which might affect care-giving behaviours such as bottle-feeding. Interactions between the three groups of underlying causes (household food security, social and care environment and public health) may also affect the prevalence of malnutrition.

In the early stages of an acute emergency where people have obviously been cut off from their normal sources of food, as in the early days of a refugee emergency and other rapid-onset emergencies like earthquakes and floods, measuring nutritional status is not a priority. In slow-onset or protracted emergencies, a nutritional survey may be useful to confirm the severity of food insecurity. When time and resources allow, it is useful to monitor nutritional status to gauge changes in food security. For example, in Wajir (see page 18) the Kenyan government monitors various food-security indicators, as well as arm circumference, as a measure of nutritional status. SC-UK carries out periodic random-cluster nutrition surveys based on the weight-for-height nutritional index. In Uraba in Colombia (see page 22), a rapid arm-circumference assessment was done to confirm that all displaced people were meeting their immediate food needs.

Sources of information

In rapid assessments, Oxfam GB uses a combination of 'secondary' information from existing sources, and new or 'primary' information, which is collected during field visits. The type of primary data collected (quantitative or qualitative) depends on where the gaps in the secondary information are, and on the constraints on fieldwork, particularly to do with time, access and the availability of resources.

Table 2: Examples of potential information needs in a livelihoods approach

Elements of food security	Checklist/key areas	Sources/methods
Food availability	Describe and characterise the food supply: • mechanised agriculture • subsistence farming • imports • proximity of food production/supply to the affected population Market mechanisms and prices: • access by gender/ethnicity • proximity of markets to affected people • government policies affecting markets • market prices of key commodities • terms of trade (for those with pastoral or fishing incomes)	Secondary sources, particularly Early Warning Systems (EWS) and local Food Information Systems reports Food and crop assessments Interviews with key informants Field visits to examine agricultural conditions
Access/ entitlements	Identify the different livelihood groups according to the main means by which people acquire food: • subsistence farmer • agro-pastoralist • waged labourer • those dependent on welfare or relief handouts For each livelihood group, identify how people acquired food prior to the crisis, and how they do so now: • subsistence farming • herding livestock or fishing • casual or regular waged labour • sharecropping • trading of artisan production or natural resources, such as forestry products • rent • remittances, gifts or loans • theft Examine gender differences and gender relations	Secondary sources Primary sources: • key-informant interviews • household visits • walkabouts • direct observation • proportional piling • ranking exercises • mapping • time trends
Severity of food insecurity (risks to lives)	Assess people's ability to feed themselves Identify major shifts in entitlement, and assess the viability of alternative food sources Assess the impact of food security on nutritional status: determine whether the prevalence of malnutrition is unusual in relation to normal seasonal patterns, taking account of health- and care-related causes of malnutrition	Secondary sources Primary sources: • key-informant interviews • household visits • transect walks • direct observation • proportional piling • ranking exercises • mapping • time trends • seasonal calendars Anthropometric surveillance or surveys, particularly sentinel sites[1]
Severity of food insecurity (risks to livelihoods)	Assess the vulnerability of livelihoods: 1. The nature of external shocks and intensity of impact on people's livelihoods. Identify the livelihood group most affected 2. People's ability to cope with shocks: • the type of strategy used (strategies that are not damaging to livelihoods or well-being, versus ones that are) • the proportion of people engaged in marginal/non-sustainable activities	

Secondary sources of information

Secondary sources of information encompass existing knowledge among local government, UN and NGO representatives, academics, journalists and other experts. These sources form the backbone of any assessment, particularly in relation to the historical context and trends in food security over time. For example, Oxfam often uses crop-assessment reports as a source of important secondary data. A desk study of this existing information is a vital first step in any rapid assessment.

Primary sources of information

In rapid emergency assessments, time rarely permits an in-depth household survey, nor is one necessarily appropriate. Rapid-appraisal techniques provide a preliminary understanding of the situation, which allows for quick decisions about the initial response. If a response programme is planned, follow-up investigation could be incorporated into programme activities, for example by including a food-information system, or regular monitoring or review visits.

The rapid-appraisal techniques most useful in collecting the types of information shown above include direct observation, walkabouts and semi-structured interviews with people directly affected by the emergency. (For more on these assessment techniques, see the Annex.) If nutritional surveys are done, Oxfam generally recommends a two-stage cluster survey. Experienced personnel are needed to design and implement nutritional surveys, and considerable time is involved in training staff, doing the fieldwork and analysing the results. For a survey to produce valid and reliable results, it must be appropriately designed, use standard methods and procedures, and be managed by qualified personnel.

There are many practical constraints to doing nutritional surveys in emergencies. People may be scattered over a large area, access may be limited and accurate population estimates may be unavailable. Some of these problems may be solved by sampling smaller areas, reducing cluster size or doing purposive sampling (Young, 1992). In a purposive sample, areas, villages or population groups are selected as being representative of the population or area of interest. This is done only where anthropometric data is complemented with qualitative information on food security and the health environment. Data cannot be extrapolated to give a malnutrition prevalence for the population or area as a whole.

Identifying appropriate interventions

Food aid

If people are unable to meet their immediate food needs and their lives are at risk, the first task is to increase their access to food and rehabilitate the malnourished (as well as addressing disease and access to healthcare as underlying causes of malnutrition). In acute emergencies, where people are cut off from their normal food sources, the initial response is usually food aid and feeding programmes.

In general, agencies decide 'how much' food is needed on the basis of either an estimate of the overall food deficit, or an estimate of the number of people affected, multiplied by an individual daily ration. The latter is common practice among refugees and displaced populations. In these situations, it can easily be demonstrated that people have lost their major source of food entitlement through displacement and are therefore almost entirely dependent on external assistance (Jaspars and Young, 1995).

If Oxfam undertakes food distribution, this tends to be an initial response to an emergency. Initial food-aid estimates are usually based on numbers of people affected and the minimum energy requirement recommended for emergency-affected people. This is 2,100 kcal per person per day (WHO, 2000). In time, Oxfam may reduce rations. In Colombia, for example, rations were gradually scaled down as the food-security situation improved (see page 24). In Orissa, free food distribution was quickly replaced by food-for-work and cash distribution (see page 16).

The food-economy approach of SC-UK assesses food deficits among different wealth groups at the household level. This information is used to rationalise the use of food aid, and often informs the work of the World Food Programme (WFP) and the UNHCR (Boudreau, 1998). Therefore, where Oxfam has been WFP's implementing partner, food-economy assessments have influenced the ration size.

In some cases, Oxfam also estimates food deficits to determine ration sizes. This is much less rigorous than in the food-economy approach. Oxfam usually relies on its local knowledge to determine the proportion of food needs that a household is able to meet without external assistance. This is followed by close monitoring, and ration levels are adjusted if necessary. Because Oxfam often carries out emergency programmes in areas where it already has development programmes, it often has good knowledge of people's different sources of food.

Food aid may also be a form of livelihood support. When provided at an early stage of a slow-onset emergency, food aid can prevent the sale of assets

Table 3: Examples of livelihood-support programmes in the case-studies

Income-support programmes	Food-for-work (Orissa) Cash-for-work (Orissa) Distributing potters' wheels and materials for rebuilding kilns (Orissa) Distributing bamboo poles to basket-making households (Orissa) Livestock off-take (Wajir) Buying up surplus food production (Colombia)
Agricultural-support programmes	Distributing seeds and tools (Colombia and Orissa) Distributing saplings and fertiliser (Orissa)
Livestock-support programmes	Re-stocking (Orissa) De-stocking (Wajir) Fodder distribution (Wajir) Borehole maintenance and water for livestock (Wajir)
Fishing-support programmes	Distributing fishing nets (Orissa)

to buy food. It also means that people can save money that would otherwise be spent on food, and use this to maintain their livelihoods. Similarly, food aid can assist in the rebuilding of livelihoods following a crisis. As part of the rehabilitation of drought-affected pastoralists, for instance, this would allow them to build up their herds, rather than sell livestock to buy food. Using food aid to protect livelihoods leads to higher estimates of needs.

Non-food interventions

Food aid alone is, however, not sufficient to support livelihoods. A range of livelihood interventions is shown in Table 3. These interventions are described in greater detail in the following chapter.

Market interventions are another type of livelihood intervention. They may include providing subsidised food, food-voucher systems or fair-price shops (Young and Jaspars, 1995). Oxfam GB has implemented these interventions in other contexts, and in some circumstances they may be implemented by the local authorities. In Orissa, for instance, the local government intervened to stabilise food prices, which enabled Oxfam to focus on income-support initiatives.

3

The livelihoods approach: case-studies

Oxfam carries out food-security assessments in many emergencies, and for different purposes, including initial assessment immediately after a disaster, in-depth assessment of the impact on livelihoods, and monitoring and evaluation. This chapter presents three different food-security assessments:

- an emergency assessment of the impact of the Orissa cyclone in 1999;
- monitoring Oxfam's response to drought and food insecurity in Wajir, north-east Kenya, in 2000; and
- a review of Oxfam's food-assistance and food-security programmes for people displaced by conflict in Uraba district, Colombia, in 1999.

Despite clear contextual differences, Oxfam's programmes share common characteristics which are relevant to how it does food-security assessments, and how it identifies appropriate responses. Oxfam usually has an established presence and long history of operating in the areas where it undertakes emergency work. Many staff have long experience of the areas in question, which is helpful in understanding the local context and the background to the emergency. Oxfam often works with a range of local partners, both in the initial assessments, and in implementing the emergency response. Oxfam's commitment to working in both development and humanitarian response means that staff are frequently exposed to both types of programme.

Additional support is available to local Oxfam staff from the members of the Oxfam Humanitarian Department, in particular the Food and Nutrition Advisors and Humanitarian Support Personnel (HSP). The Advisors and HSPs pose the questions particularly related to the impact of a disaster on food security and nutrition. In-country Oxfam staff and local partners often already have knowledge of local livelihoods, and how they have been affected by the disaster. Primary information is gathered to fill in the gaps. Some Oxfam development staff have been trained in Participatory Rural Appraisal, which is the main method used in Oxfam's food-security assessments.

Case-study 1: Emergency assessment of the impact of the Orissa cyclone

This case-study describes Oxfam's assessment of the impact of the Orissa cyclone on the food security and livelihoods of the state's coastal population.

The cyclone hit on 29 October 1999, with winds of up to 250km an hour battering a 200km stretch of coast. It lasted for over 36 hours, accompanied by heavy rain and tidal waves, and devastated much of the state. An estimated 10m people were affected in Orissa. The official death toll was around 10,000, although the media and some NGOs put it at double that, based on the number of applications for death

Box 5: Orissa: the context

Orissa is in eastern India, on the Bay of Bengal. According to the 1991 census, it has a population of around 33m people. It is the poorest of India's 25 states. Its physical infrastructure is not well developed, and roads are poor. Agriculture is the major source of employment.

Being a coastal state, Orissa is subject to between three and five cyclones a year, usually in October–November and April–June. In addition, the monsoon in July–September brings flooding. The last major cyclone to hit Orissa, in 1971, caused large-scale destruction and loss of lives and property. Three major floods occurred during the 1990s.

certificates immediately following the cyclone. Homes were destroyed, coastal and inland infrastructure was damaged and communications were disrupted. More than 800,000 livestock animals were killed, and crops worth an estimated $23m destroyed.

The affected population

Over 75 per cent of Orissa's population depends on agriculture for food and income. Other sources include animal husbandry (particularly small livestock such as sheep and goats); inland and marine fishing; and artisanry (weaving, basket-making and pottery). Three-quarters of the state's population live in villages.

Many wage labourers belong to the Scheduled Castes, which constitute around 15 per cent of the population. They are the lowest in the caste hierarchy. Their main occupation is to provide services like sweeping and cleaning, which are considered 'lowly' by the higher castes, although in Orissa most members are agricultural labourers.

Scheduled Tribes, the indigenous inhabitants of the Indian sub-continent, represent around seven per cent of the total population. Scheduled Tribes have only recently come into contact with wider society. They often lack access to resources such as land and water, and to basic services such as health and education. Some own land, but it tends to be of inferior quality and mostly rain-fed.

Women occupy a very low status in Orissan society; the female literacy rate in the state, for example, is just 25 per cent. Household work is largely shouldered by women, even when they have outside employment. The migration of men from rural to urban areas has become increasingly common, leaving women to take care of the home and family, often in a very vulnerable position.

Oxfam's programme

Oxfam has been present in Orissa since the 1970s. At the time of the cyclone, Oxfam GB was supporting around 45 Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) and NGOs in the areas of health, capacity-building, advocacy and agricultural policy. Immediately following the cyclone, a major relief operation began, providing food through 45 local organisations, targeting 50,000 households across all affected areas. Emergency relief items were also supplied, including food, water-purification materials, blankets and

Table 4: Rural livelihood groups in Orissa

Livelihood group (% of population)	Main livelihood sources
Land-owning farmers (20%)	Crop production and sale. Hire wage labourers and sharecroppers.
Sharecroppers (20–25%)	Crop production. If sharecropper provides inputs, 25% of production goes to landowner. If owner provides inputs, sharecropper repays 50–60% of harvest.
Wage labourers (est. 50–55%)	Mainly agricultural wage labour, but also services like sweeping and cleaning. Daily wages or year's employment contract.
Fishermen (5%) Marine fishermen Inland fishermen	Marine: fish only. Inland: Fish, crop production, wage labour.
Artisans (est. 1%) (potters, weavers, bamboo artists, sculptors)	Sale of craft products.

Table 5: Framework for assessing food security in Orissa

Elements of food security	Checklist/key areas	Sources/methods
Food availability	Impact of cyclone on: • agriculture (level of destruction and crop loss) • markets (changes in food availability and price) • access to government relief (quantity, quality, target groups and areas)	Secondary sources: • government relief committee • ODMM (a local NGO consortium) • UN: OCHA/FAO/WFP • other INGOs • co-ordination meetings Primary sources: • field visits to observe destruction to crops and fishing villages • interviews with key informants • visits to markets; interviews with traders
Access/ Entitlements	For different livelihood groups: • sharecroppers (availability of work, changes in arrangements made with landowners, debt) • wage labourers (availability of work and wages) • fishermen (ability to fish, access to nets and boats, market for fish) • Artisans (demand for products) Within these, changes in access to food for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes	Primary sources: • interviews with key informants from different groups • household visits/visits to communal shelters • proportional piling/ranking to assess changes in main sources of food and income
Severity of food insecurity	Coping strategies adopted by various livelihood groups Access to alternative sources of food	Primary sources: • household and key informant interviews • direct observation

plastic sheeting. This was done through local NGOs and relief committees. The emergency assessment followed this initial response.

The food-security assessment

Oxfam's food-security assessment during the initial emergency response in Orissa was part of a multi-sectoral assessment looking at nutrition, water/sanitation and public health. Table 5 summarises what Oxfam assessed to analyse the food-security situation of people affected by the cyclone, along with the sources of information used. As well as the sources listed, secondary sources included internal Oxfam documents, and external documents from the government, the UN and other agencies.

As the cyclone hit an extremely large area of coastal Orissa, sites to visit had to be carefully selected. The following factors were taken into account.

- Type of damage. Some areas suffered only wind damage, others only flood damage, and still others suffered both.
- Severity of damage. The team visited those areas considered worst-affected by the cyclone.
- Minority representation. The assessment team also made sure that it visited areas where members of the Scheduled Tribes lived, as well as marine fishing households and artisan communities.
- Coverage by other agencies. Oxfam assessed areas which had not received much attention, either from the media or from other agencies. This included an area hit by an earlier cyclone, but overshadowed by the second.

In each area, the main assessment methods included semi-structured interviews with key informants, and direct observation. Key informants included:

- representatives from the local authorities, clinics and local NGOs and CBOs;
- village representatives, including both men and women, and representatives from the Scheduled Castes; and
- traders, who were asked about the prices of basic commodities.

The team directly observed the effects of the cyclone, including livestock loss (scattered carcasses), crop damage (especially in paddies), damage to boats and nets, infrastructure damage, damage to or complete loss of homes and workshops, and the availability of cooking utensils and food.

The findings of the food-security assessment

Food availability

Agriculture. Rice is Orissa's major crop. It is grown on almost 90 per cent of the agricultural land (both rain-fed and irrigated). It is planted during the monsoon in June–July, and harvested from October until January. In irrigated areas, a second crop of rice is planted in February, for harvest in May. Other crops are oilseeds, millets and pulses. Some vegetables are also cultivated during the monsoon and in the irrigated areas. The cyclone occurred before the majority of the paddy crop was harvested; approximately 60 per cent of the anticipated harvest in affected areas was lost.

Village scene, Orissa

Markets. Immediately following the cyclone, basic food items like rice, pulses and vegetables were scarce on local markets. The limited food that was available – rice, puffed rice, jaggery, oil, vegetables, fruits and pulses – had increased in price, often by 200 or 300 per cent. This was too expensive for the poorest in the community. Households in areas which had been cut off due to flooding and other damage often had no access to local markets.

Relief. Food assistance was erratic, particularly in the most isolated areas. A lack of capacity and preparedness at local-government level and the inaccessibility of some villages meant that food assistance was slow to reach some communities, and never reached others. Lower-caste people – the most vulnerable and marginalised groups – were often last in the queue for assistance.

Impending state government elections meant that political bias may have influenced the targeting of some relief assistance. In addition, co-ordination between UN agencies and NGOs was poor, which led to a concentration of resources in areas with high media coverage.

The government declared a food-relief period of only three weeks following the cyclone. Following this, all food assistance (from the government, the UN and NGOs alike) was to be on a food-for-work basis only. This did not take into account the most vulnerable groups, which would be unable to participate in such schemes.

Access/entitlements

Sharecroppers. Sharecroppers enter into various arrangements with land-owning farmers to cultivate their land, and pay the owner a proportion of the harvest. Normally, sharecroppers also take out loans at the beginning of the cultivation season, repaying them after the harvest. The widespread loss of crops such as paddy and betel vines deprived landless sharecroppers of a vital source of income, and many were unable to repay their loans to landowners. In some cases, debts were waived, but generally they were extended for another two or three years, albeit without interest.

Wage labourers. Wage labourers were left with practically no source of income. In general, no work was available immediately after the cyclone, not least because the disaster had also affected those who normally paid wages. Selling firewood (a normal income supplement) was impossible because, with the number of fallen trees caused by the cyclone, firewood was freely available. Migrants to Orissa's towns faced stiff competition for work.

Fishermen. Fishing boats and nets were either lost or badly damaged, and many marine fishing households suffered a complete loss of their livelihood. Even after boats and nets had been repaired, the situation did not significantly improve because the market for fish had been badly affected. Traders were unable to buy and, because roads were badly damaged or washed away, trading vehicles could not reach landing sites. These factors, combined with government health warnings about consuming fish issued because water sources were contaminated, meant that prices fell by about 70 per cent. Any fish caught were either eaten by the catcher and their household, or dried to be sold later.

Artisans. Artisans depend on sales of their products, and cultivation/wage labour on farms. Many artisans in cyclone-affected areas lost their tools, workshops and raw materials. Even where craftsmen could still work, there was no demand for their products following the cyclone.

Scheduled Castes and Tribes. The livelihoods of Scheduled Castes and Tribes also suffered. For these groups, the main ways of earning an income normally include agricultural waged labour, the sale of coconuts, firewood and cashew nuts (collected from government plantations), and the collection and sale of non-timber forest products, such as leaves, flowers and fruit. The cyclone destroyed large swathes of standing paddy crops ready for harvest, coconut palms and cashew plantations. Large areas of forest were lost or damaged, and the loss of significant numbers of small livestock such as poultry, goats and pigs meant the destruction of a major livelihood source.

The severity of food insecurity

All livelihood groups lost their major sources of food and income. Everyone was affected by loss of assets and high food prices. Because the impact was so widespread, there were few alternative opportunities for gaining an income or finding food.

Household food stores and cooking equipment were lost during the cyclone, and cooking fuel such as wood was lost or damaged. Kinship ties, an important source of food and other support for the most vulnerable, became extremely strained. The cyclone was so severe that normal coping mechanisms were inadequate. People's responses were thus limited to changing their diet, relocating in search of work, and begging and prostitution. Many households consumed fewer meals, or less food at each meal. Food was of much poorer quality and of a more limited variety than normal. In some households, men started to migrate in search of work, mainly to cities such as Bhubaneswar and Cuttack. The workload of women increased as a result, and children were more likely to be left without a carer. In the worst-affected areas, particularly on the coast, families and whole villages migrated in search of shelter, food and water. Many moved into communal buildings, such as schools and clinics, and relied on relief assistance. Street begging increased, and there were reports of village girls travelling to cities and becoming prostitutes to provide income for their families.

Oxfam concluded that the majority of the rural population suffered a period of acute food insecurity. The most affected were the Scheduled Tribes and Castes. The socially marginalised were worst off because of their limited access to resources in 'normal' times. Their political vulnerability reduced their access to relief, and they were often excluded. The assessment indicated the need for immediate response to prevent acute malnutrition and loss of lives, as well as interventions to help rebuild livelihoods.

The emergency response following the assessment

The assessment identified the need to distribute food, generate employment and restore livelihoods. The main objectives of the emergency response were to meet immediate and medium-term food needs and to restore or protect the livelihoods of vulnerable and marginalised groups.

A food/cash programme was recommended to replace lost employment, mainly for agricultural labourers. The programme design took into account the government's ruling that relief assistance should stop after three weeks, and that typical food-for-work schemes are not always accessible by those most vulnerable to food insecurity. The programme targeted households that would not be able to participate in other food-for-work schemes, in areas which had received little or no assistance.

Pulses and oil, as well as cash, were given as payment for work on community projects. The total was equivalent to the daily minimum wage, and was distributed for three months. Projects were chosen by the community, and included building or fortifying river embankments, clearing or digging ponds, repairing roads and rebuilding or repairing homes. People who were less able to work took care of children or animals, prepared food or supervised the work. Free food was provided to the estimated five per cent of households that could not provide labour.

Oxfam also provided livelihood support for those who had lost assets as a result of the cyclone. This support included:

- winter vegetable seeds for 15,000 sharecropping households, given out directly after the relief distribution;
- potters' wheels and materials for rebuilding kilns for 200 potters' households, and bamboo poles for 1,000 basket-making households;
- cashew saplings and fertilisers for 5,000 tribal households, and coconut saplings and fertilisers for 4,000 Scheduled Caste households;
- fishing nets for 2,500 fishing households; and
- a female goat for 500 households headed by women.

In addition, the programme had a strong advocacy component, as Oxfam could only target a very small proportion of vulnerable cyclone-affected people (approximately 30,000 households, out of an estimated 10m affected people). Oxfam placed great emphasis on targeting the socially vulnerable, and encouraged other agencies to adopt the same targeting criteria.

Case-study 2: Monitoring drought response in Wajir, north-east Kenya

This case-study describes Oxfam's analysis of the impact of drought on food security and livelihoods in Wajir, north-east Kenya, and of Oxfam's emergency interventions.

The most recent drought started in late 1999, with the failure of the short rains in many parts of Kenya. Food insecurity worsened with the failure of the long rains in April–May 2000. With further rain failure in late 2000, the district is facing prolonged and severe food insecurity.

The affected population

In May 2000, the Kenyan government, WFP and Oxfam estimated that 256,800 people in Wajir – approximately 80 per cent of the district's total population – were affected by drought. However, as the drought continued and food insecurity worsened, Oxfam registered about 300,000 people in need of relief. WFP's food allocation remained at 256,800 in October 2000.

In 1998, Oxfam and WFP divided Wajir into five 'livelihood zones'. The same zones were used in 2000 to assess the impact of drought. The majority of the population in Wajir depends on pastoralism, but the type of herd depends on location within the district. Households which have lost livestock in previous droughts, and which can no longer depend purely on pastoralism, move closer to 'town' to benefit from the possibility of petty trading.

The order in which the livelihood sources are presented reflects their importance. Thus, people in the north-east are more dependent on camels than on cattle, and in the west and south, they are more dependent on cattle.

The emergency response prior to the monitoring visit

Oxfam has been present in Wajir since the mid-1980s, and has frequently responded to drought in the district. It started a pastoral-development programme in 1994. On-going programme activities include water supply, animal and human health and credit schemes.

In response to the current drought, Oxfam started water interventions in September 1999. These aimed to ensure that all boreholes were working to meet livestock as well as human needs. In June 2000, Oxfam started a small livestock off-take project through a local partner NGO.

Oxfam is the implementing partner for the Kenyan government and the WFP for emergency food distribution. Oxfam is also the lead agency for food distribution in Wajir. Other agencies include SC-UK, ICRC/KRC and World Vision International.

On a national level, the government has contributed between 20 and 50 per cent of the cereal supplied by the relief operation. Government and WFP food is channelled through a single supply system.

The government, WFP and NGOs initially agreed on general rations for 250,000 people (80 per cent of the population of Wajir). In addition, Oxfam provided supplementary food for 50,000 children under five years of age, and other physiologically vulnerable groups. The objectives of this food distribution were to meet immediate food needs, and to protect livelihoods. Eighty per cent of the population was assumed to include a large number of pastoralist households with some livestock. The intention was to exclude only those with large herds, businessmen, traders, and salaried people. The food aid is distributed through locally elected relief committees, which are supported by an Oxfam food monitor.

The food-security assessment

The food-security analysis described here used the drought-monitoring programme (DMP) of the Kenyan government's Arid Lands Resource Management Project (ALRMP) and nutritional surveys done by SC-UK as secondary sources of information. The DMP has four stages of warning: normal, alert, alarm and emergency. When the system shows alarm or emergency, a rapid multi-

Box 6: Wajir: the context

Wajir district is in north-east Kenya, bordering Somalia and Ethiopia. Its people are Somali. Clans include the Ajuran (north and west); Gare (north), Degodia (west and east), and Ogaden (south). Wajir is highly prone to drought. Severe ones occurred in 1984, 1987 and 1991–93, and in 1996–97 drought was followed by floods.

Wajir is one of Kenya's least-developed regions; basic services like health and education are poor, access is limited and the pastoral economy largely isolated from the wider economy. This situation has improved with the focus on pastoralism in the national Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) and the establishment of a parliamentary group on pastoralism. However, persistent banditry (see Box 7, page 20) means that the district is perceived more as a security issue than a development target. The Somalis' distinct identity leads them to think of 'downcountry' Kenya as a different country.

agency assessment may be organised by a number of agencies. Such an assessment took place in May 2000. Oxfam's food and nutrition advisor visited for five days in October 2000, and collected primary information during field visits to east and west Wajir.

The ALRMP's drought-monitoring system collects data monthly on:

- environmental conditions: rainfall, the condition of pasturage and water sources, and livestock concentrations and migration;
- economic indicators: births and deaths, the slaughter and sale of livestock, and prices of cereals, meat and milk;
- welfare indicators: percentage of households purchasing grain, percentage consuming milk, and nutritional status; and
- migration and displacement: qualitative information on livestock and population movements.

In addition, the Oxfam team in Wajir has in-depth knowledge of the situation of pastoralists in the districts. Almost all of the team members are from Wajir, and some own livestock themselves. Many have worked for Oxfam in Wajir for several years.

SC-UK's nutritional surveys were done in central and west Wajir. When the Advisor visited in October, she interviewed camel owners in east Wajir, and cattle owners in the west of the district. Places were selected based on their geographical location, the degree to which they represented the 'livelihood zone', and the security situation. Owners of large herds were interviewed at boreholes to ask about livestock conditions. Informants, who were selected by the Oxfam Wajir team, were often nomadic community workers trained as part of Oxfam's development programme. Relief committees were

interviewed about the impact of drought on the community as a whole.

The findings of the food-security assessment

Food availability

Pasture. Western and northern Wajir received no significant rainfall following the floods of 1998. For most of 1999, the district was at the DMP's alert stage. In 2000, both the long rains expected in April–May and the short rains expected in October failed. The district had reached the 'emergency' stage by April 2000. By the end of the year, pasture in west Wajir was seriously depleted or non-existent. The women and children of livestock owners congregated close to boreholes with their weak livestock. The

Table 6: Livelihood zones in Wajir

Zone	Area	Livelihood
A	North (Bute sub-division, Ethiopian border)	Cattle, camels, agriculture, border trade with Ethiopia
B	North-east (border with Mandera District in Kenya and Somalia)	Camels, cattle, gum arabic, border trade with Somalia
C	West and south (borders Isiolo and Garissa in Kenya, and Somalia)	Cattle, goats, camels, farming, border trade with Garissa
D	Area around towns	Sheep, goats, petty trade (milk and firewood)
E	Wajir town and bullas (peri-urban settlements)	Petty trade, casual labour, dependence on relatives

Table 7: Framework for assessing food security in Wajir

Elements of food security	Checklist/key areas	Sources/methods
Food availability	Impact of drought on: • pasture (harvest) • condition of livestock • levels of milk production • markets (changes in food availability and prices) • food aid	Secondary sources: • DMP reports on rainfall and pasture, herd growth index, market prices and households consuming milk • Oxfam distribution reports
Access/ Entitlements	For different livelihood groups: • agro-pastoralists in north Wajir • (mainly) camel herders in east Wajir • (mainly) cattle herders in west Wajir (For all of these groups, the main aspect of food security was the ability to sell their livestock and the price at which this was sold) • petty traders and goat owners in 4-mile radius of towns • petty traders and labourers within towns (change in income-earning opportunities)	Secondary sources: • DMP data on livestock sales and average price of meat • Terms of trade between cereals and meat Primary sources: • Interviews with pastoralists in village in West Wajir and in East Wajir · Interviews with Oxfam team
Severity of food insecurity	Shifts in entitlements for all groups Nutritional status Livestock mortality and sales (loss of assets) Coping strategies	DMP nutritional surveillance SC-UK nutrition surveys in central and west Wajir DMP data on livestock mortality Field interviews

lack of pasture has forced the migration of livestock to Ethiopia and Somalia, where rainfall has been better.

Livestock and milk. By October 2000, the condition of livestock was poor in all parts of Wajir. Prices dropped sharply; according to the ALRMP, the average price of cattle fell from 5,222 Kenyan Shillings (Ksh) in May 2000 to 4,112 in August. Many animals were in too poor a state to be sold. High mortality rates were reported for cattle and sheep in west Wajir, and milk production drastically declined throughout the district. The percentage of households consuming milk fell significantly from February 2000, reaching a low point of 1.6 per cent by August. Consumption has remained at this level ever since. Milk prices have been increasing since May 2000.

Crop production. Insecurity in northern Wajir means that crop production there cannot be assessed. Rainfall was better in this area than in the rest of Wajir, but anecdotal evidence indicates that farmers have not been able to plant because of insecurity. For the same reason, movement to grazing areas is restricted.

Box 7: Security in Wajir

The security situation in parts of Wajir is fragile because of theft and banditry – exacerbated by food insecurity – and also because of clan conflict in the northern division of Bute, on the border with Ethiopia. The police and courts are weak, and crimes often go unpunished.

As the government sub-divides administrative boundaries, more and more chiefs and sub-chiefs are created, around which clan alliances are built. At the same time, these divisions increase the pressure on water and grazing sources. Clan conflict over grazing rights is one of the main causes of food insecurity because it restricts movement, thereby worsening the impact of drought. The civil war in neighbouring Somalia has exacerbated insecurity in the district, in particular because of the increased availability of weapons. Insecurity and displacement resulting from the conflict significantly contributed to food insecurity in 1991–93.

Markets. The main livestock markets are in Wajir and Garissa towns, and most population centres have smaller markets. The price of maize remained fairly stable at KSh30 per kilo from late 1999 until mid-2000, at which point it began to fall with the start of the food distribution in June. For Bute, the main market is usually in Moyale (a neighbouring district), but this is inaccessible because of conflict.

Food aid. Emergency interventions began following the government's declaration of a state of emergency in May 2000. The government and the WFP have been the major food-aid providers. The planned ration provides maize (13.8kg per person per month), pulses (2.4kg/person/month) and oil (0.75kg). In addition, UNICEF and Oxfam have purchased blended foods for all under-fives (9kg per child per month).

The quantities of food aid required to provide these rations have not always been available. Between June and September, the recommended ration of oil was not given, while the recommended ration of cereals and pulses was available only once. In addition, total food aid is calculated on the basis of 256,800 people, but Oxfam distributes this amount of food to 298,627 registered beneficiaries, thereby reducing individual rations. Beneficiaries in turn share their food with those who have not been registered, further reducing their rations.

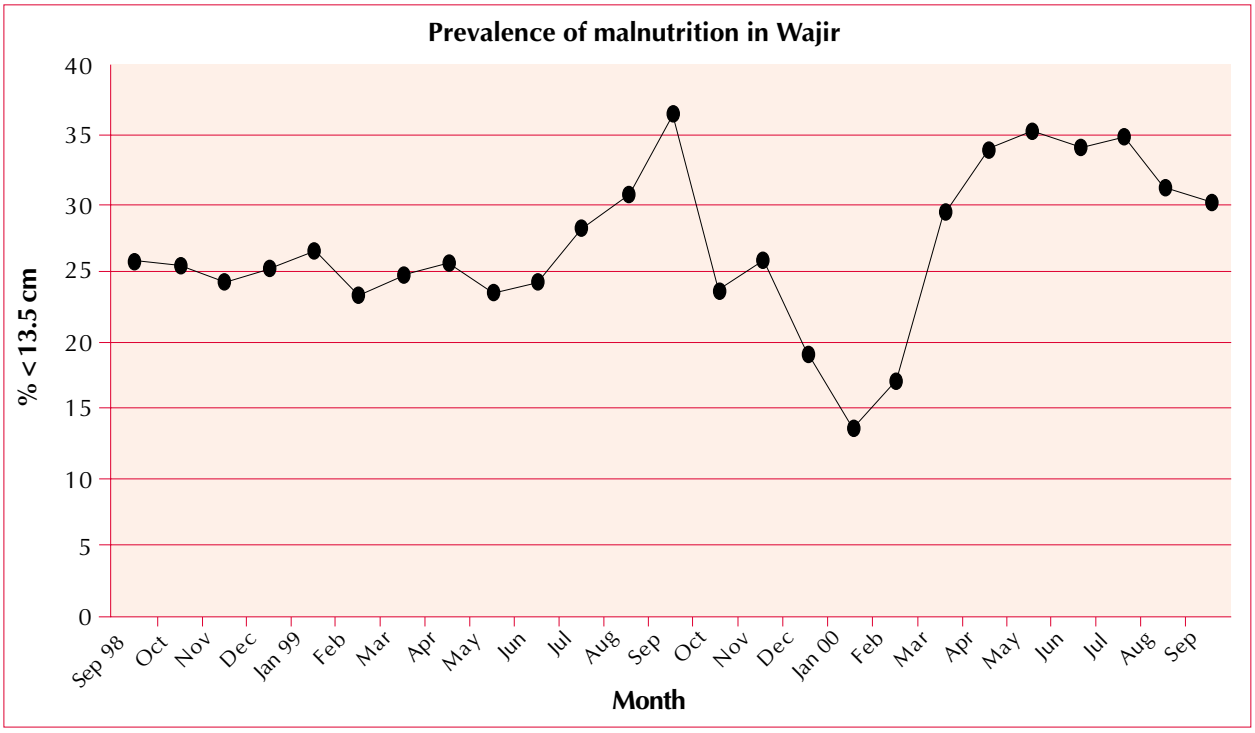
Access/entitlements

Zone A: Agro-pastoralists in the Bute area. The impact of inter-clan conflict on access to food is much greater than that of drought. The main sources of food and income for this livelihood group are usually milk, meat, sale of livestock, farming and trade with Ethiopia. Both milk and meat production are affected by the limited grazing because of insecurity, and sales are difficult because the main market is inaccessible. Crops have not been planted.

Zone B: (Mainly) camel herders in north-east Wajir. These pastoralists are largely dependent on milk, meat and sales of livestock to buy grain during the dry season. For some communities, harvesting gum arabic also provides a source of income. For camel herders, milk normally meets a greater proportion of food needs than for cattle herders. Interviewees reported that camels, although not dying, had not been producing milk. Animals were not sold because of their poor condition, and were not slaughtered once relief began.

Zone C: (Mainly) cattle herders in west and south Wajir. With minor variations, the main sources of food and income are normally the same as for north-east Wajir. However, cattle and sheep are more vulnerable to drought, and by September 2000 mortality had increased, and animals were too weak to sell. People were trying to keep their cattle alive by staying closer to boreholes, but this meant that they lacked pasture. Burden animals were becoming too weak to transport water to settlements, reducing food intake because water was insufficient to cook two or three meals a day.

Zone D: People trading and owning goats in areas around towns. Main sources of food and income normally



include income from petty trade, milk and gifts from better-off relatives. Demand for goods declined, and so did milk production. Wealthier relatives had less to give as they were also severely affected by drought.

Zone E: Casual labourers and petty traders in towns. In addition to income from labour and trade, these people also depend on gifts from relatives. All of these declined.

The severity of food insecurity

For all livelihood groups, the drought significantly reduced their main food sources. Those in west Wajir, where cattle had started dying, were worst-affected.

Few alternative food or income sources were available, apart from food aid and the slaughter of livestock. Interviewees reported that food aid had allowed them to reduce the number of livestock they slaughtered, thus protecting livelihoods. By late 2000, however, the lack of pasture meant that livestock were dying for want of food, particularly in west Wajir.

DMP nutritional surveillance data confirmed that the situation was worsening. Levels of malnutrition significantly increased from March to July, before falling. SC-UK nutritional surveys confirmed central and west Wajir as two of the worst-affected zones. In August 2000, the prevalence of acute malnutrition in central Wajir was 22.5 per cent (<-2 Z-scores), including five per cent severe malnutrition (<-3 Z-scores or oedema). Under-five mortality was 5.43/10,000/day in July 2000. Compared with an earlier survey in December 1999, this was a significant increase in severe malnutrition and under-five mortality. The increase in mortality and severe malnutrition was attributed to disease and inadequate access to health care, as well as food insecurity. In September, a survey in west Wajir found 21.6 per cent acute malnutrition, including 5.8 per cent severe. Under-five mortality was 7.1/10,000/day. About 70 per cent of the severe malnutrition was kwashiorkor (oedematous malnutrition), a form of severe malnutrition which had not previously been seen in north-east Kenya.

Recommendations of the monitoring visit

The food-security monitoring visit found that, with the prolonged drought, even owners of large herds were food insecure as they could not sell their livestock, and the only alternative food source would be slaughter. Following the monitoring visit, it was recommended that the proportion of the population targeted for food aid was increased from 80 per cent to 95 per cent, although in east Wajir, it was recommended that the proportion of the population targeted could remain at 80 percent if the short rains, expected in October–November, were relatively good. Lack of milk for all groups was sufficient justification to continue the distribution of blended foods for all under-fives and other physiologically vulnerable groups.

By September, food distribution and water programmes were no longer enough to protect the livelihoods of pastoralists in west Wajir. Oxfam Kenya proposed an additional intervention of fodder distribution for 7,000 animals for two months. This would allow about 3,500 families to keep alive selected animals – beasts of burden and breeding stock, for example. Beneficiaries were to receive feed through registration at water points and bullas.

An extension of the livestock off-take project was also recommended. Oxfam agreed to fund a local NGO to buy and slaughter about 5,000 animals, and distribute the meat to destitute communities and institutions that benefited poor people. Each pastoralist family would be able to sell two large animals or ten goats or sheep.

Case-study 3: Reviewing food programmes for conflict-displaced people in Uraba, Colombia

This case-study describes an assessment of the food security of displaced people in Uraba, northern Colombia, carried out in November 1999. It differs from the previous two studies in that, to assess food security, the affected population was not divided into different livelihood groups. This is because, in this situation of protracted displacement, people had lost their former livelihoods. Instead, the displaced were divided into groups according to their geographical location and type of settlement (see Table 8), which was considered the main overriding determinant of their food security.

The affected population

Prior to 1997, displacement in Uraba was small-scale, with families moving from rural to urban areas. In 1997, however, heavy bombing and fighting between left-wing guerrillas, government troops and militia in Uraba led to the mass displacement of over 10,000 civilians. These IDPs came from three communities: the Cacarica basin (3,240 people), San Jose de Apartado (1,300) and San Francisco de Asis (3,500). At first, they congregated mainly in three camps. A year later, displaced people were housed in 16 provisional camps. These were divided into five different groups depending on their location and settlement type, as shown in Table 8.

At the time of the assessment in November 1999, most of the displaced had been living in the camps

Table 8: IDP settlements in Uraba

Settlement	Description
'River homeland'	IDP settlements along the Atrato river, several hours' walk from the IDPs' original houses and farms. These are temporary settlements where IDPs live with the permission of the absentee landowner. They live here rather than on their own farms for safety reasons, but are able to farm their own land. IDPs in these settlements have formed a Peace Community (see Box 9, page 26). The river provides an escape route and allows Oxfam to deliver food. The area is far up-river and isolated from market towns.
'River camp'	These are intermediary IDP camps along the Atrato river, but about two days' walk from the IDPs' original farms. Sites along the river were chosen because this would allow the IDPs to fish. These are not Peace Communities. Some IDPs go individually to farm their land, some fish and some exploit river trading.
'Rural homeland'	This term connotes IDPs living in their original villages, but not necessarily in their own houses. They live clustered together for safety reasons, occupying houses in the centre of villages. These IDPs have formed themselves into Peace Communities.
'Rural camp'	These are IDP camps 300km from their inhabitants' original farms. These IDPs first crossed the border into Panama, and returned to Colombia following pledges (not kept) by the Colombian government that they would be able to return to their land. They are settled in a traditional logging and fishing area, and have no access to farmland. Whilst there is no significant insecurity, hostility from the resident population restricts the IDPs to the land allocated to them. Access to the nearest town is only by boat (a two-hour trip).
'Urban camp'	These camps are home to IDPs in the city of Turbo, camped in the football stadium or in peripheral slums. There is no access to land; IDPs are dependent on daily labour and charity.

Box 8: Uraba: the context

The Uraba region is made up of three administrative departments (Antioquia, Choco and Cordoba), further divided into municipalities covering an area of 1.23m hectares. It has 300km of coastline along the Pacific, an extensive network of rivers and a frontier with Panama in the north. The north of the region is mainly dependent on cattle ranching, the centre produces bananas and rice for export and the south is largely devoted to subsistence farming.

Colombia is ranked third in the world after Angola and Sudan for the size of its IDP population, estimated at 1.8m. Uraba's internal displacement is primarily the result of the conflict between leftist guerrilla groups on one side and, on the other, government forces and paramilitaries, financed by wealthy landowners.[2] Uraba's timber resources and close proximity to the Panama Canal give it strategic importance, and it is an important smuggling route. As a result of the violence, rural populations have been flocking to towns and cities in search of safety.

for almost two years, waiting for the government to declare it safe for them to return to their home areas. Over 80 per cent were originally subsistence farmers, with smallholdings of between two and ten hectares. The remainder were largely engaged in trade and logging and, before they were displaced, lived along the area's rivers. Heavy rains immediately prior to the assessment led to large-scale flooding along the Atrato river, seriously affecting about half of the provisional camps. This led to the migration of some displaced people to the city of Turbo. Others returned to their home areas before the official return date.

Oxfam's programme

Oxfam has been present in Colombia for over 25 years, implementing development programmes with national counterparts. In response to the mass displacements in Uraba in May 1997, it started a humanitarian programme for IDPs, and an office was established in Turbo. Oxfam's first intervention included distributing food aid, hygiene kits and household items to over 8,000 IDPs in the 16 camp locations.The programme also involved basic training in human rights, community management and agricultural skills, and covered issues to do with gender, including domestic violence.

Table 9: Selected settlements: location and population

Settlement type	Site visited	Population	Origin
'River homeland'	Buenavista	407	San Francisco de Asis
'River camp'	Montano	450	San Francisco de Asis
'Rural homeland'	La Union (San Jose de Apartado)	1,262	San Jose de Apartado
'Rural camp'	Cupica	211	Cacarica
'Urban camp'	Turbo – Alberges	700	Cacarica

The food-security assessment

The Oxfam assessment consisted of two weeks' fieldwork in Uraba using Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) methods for a comparative analysis of the five displaced groups.

As part of the assessment, discussions were held with representatives of organisations and government bodies working in Uraba. Oxfam team members were also interviewed informally, and technical information and first-hand observations on the changes witnessed during the cycle of the programme were collected from project staff, such as agronomists, gender specialists, distribution monitors and the programme coordinator and administrator. Detailed crop assessments were obtained from the team members involved in the agricultural component of the Oxfam programme.

This information was complemented with data collected during visits to the camps. Twelve camps were visited during the assessment, and information was collected in five of these, each of which was chosen as representative of one of the five types of settlement described above (see Table 9). Information was collected in key-informant interviews, through direct observation and via PRA tools. These included community history lines to trace important events; transect walks through the camps; household visits to conduct interviews with female heads of households; interviews with male household heads on agricultural, fishing, hunting and trading activities; and focus-group discussions with key informants. The nutritional status of children was assessed by measuring the Mid Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) of all children aged between 12 and 59 months present on the day of the visit.[3]

Table 10 summarises the areas investigated during the assessment for each group.

The findings of the food-security assessment

All IDPs were vulnerable to food insecurity because they had been cut off from their normal sources of food. Before their displacement, they had been accustomed to a varied diet of rice, plantain, beans, fish, meat and dairy products. For the income to buy non-food items, they had relied on cash crops such as maize and rice, and local markets. However, in the 30 months since their displacement, the IDPs were forced to adopt new lifestyles, the nature of which depended on the type of settlement they lived in.

Food availability

The only significant factor that affected crop production in the region was the flooding of the Atrato river in late 1999. Crop damage was estimated at between ten and 80 per cent in the river settlements. Vegetable gardening was also affected, with between half and all gardens destroyed, depending on location.

Only the displaced living in urban camps had access to a market, in Turbo. The other settlements depended mainly on river trade. Prices were not unusually high, and Oxfam bought food aid on the local market.

Access/entitlements

Access to food for the different displaced groups is summarised in Table 11. (Apart from access to land, the types of food sources available to the IDPs were similar. The following sections are therefore organised by food source, rather than by settlement type.)

Agriculture and vegetable gardening. The river camp suffered most from flooding, so crop and vegetable production there was limited. Those with better access to land enjoyed good production, and the river-homeland settlements produced a rice surplus. Oxfam supported home vegetable gardens on raised

beds in all river-based and urban camps where access to land was reduced. Oxfam also provided seeds, as well as training on seed selection and improved production methods for staple crops, such as rice, plantain and maize.

Fishing and hunting. For all river camps, steady supplies of fish were available for direct consumption and trade. The Oxfam programme had included distributing fishing equipment to IDPs new to fishing, and also providing training. In the rural homeland camps, which were some distance from the river, a pisciculture programme operated. Hunting was an important source of meat for rural camps.

Small livestock. Chickens, ducks and goats were reared in most camps outside urban areas, and served mainly as capital. Flood-affected camps lost their stocks. No IDPs recovered their cattle.

Food aid. The displaced were wholly dependent on food aid during the first phase of their displacement (May 1997–1998). After this period, the ration was gradually reduced as displaced people developed other food sources. At the time of the review, all camps were still receiving the Oxfam food ration. For a family of five (the average size), the monthly ration was:

Rice:	6kg
Beans:	2kg
Pasta:	1kg
Tuna:	6 tins
Oil:	1 litre
Sugar:	2kg

The energy content of this ration equals 340 kcals per person per day. The minimum recommended planning figure for energy requirements is 2,100 kcals/person/day. The ration therefore provided about 16 per cent of minimum daily needs. Twenty-four-hour recall interviews estimated the actual percentage of the food intake that the ration provided. In all the settlements, except for the river camp and the urban displaced, this was in fact lower than 16 per cent. The small contribution food aid made to overall intake was taken to indicate greater food security.

Income. Sources of income varied greatly between the camps. People in urban camps relied on wage labour at banana plantations to buy their food. Those in camps along the river relied on trading and selling. Rural camps built up regular income sources by growing cash crops, such as small bananas and maize. However, river-homeland camps grew surplus food, but had no opportunity to sell or trade because of their isolation.

Table 10: Framework for assessing food security in Uraba

Elements of food security	Checklist/key areas	Sources/methods
Food availability	Impact of floods in late 1999 on crop production Access to markets Market prices	Oxfam team discussions Oxfam monitoring activities Site visits to cultivated land Collecting market prices Household visits Key informant discussions
Access/ Entitlements	For the different groups (urban, rural-based, river-based, rural homeland, river homeland), the same sources of food were investigated: • access to land and crop production • home gardening • fishing/hunting • small livestock • food aid • trade and wage labour	Transect walks Household visits Key informant discussions
Severity of food insecurity	Ability to meet food needs: • strategies used to obtain food • nutritional impact • social/psychological impact of displacement and of survival strategies	Oxfam monitoring data Key informant interviews Direct observation Household visits Nutritional status of 1–5-year-olds

Social organisation. Community organisation was considered a particularly important factor in determining people's ability to access food. On their own land, people had been accustomed to living in dispersed homesteads, where they farmed their own land. In the Peace Communities (see Box 9), people organised themselves into working groups, which allowed them to use land in areas deemed unsafe. People shared land, tools, seeds and their own labour. One settlement shared the cash profits of the first harvest, and decided as a community how the money should be used. As access to homelands increased, people started working on their own, but in all settlements some collective crops and seedbanks were maintained. The Peace Communities were more formally organised and structured than the river camps.

The severity of food insecurity

The assessment showed that all groups were able to meet their immediate food needs, and very little acute malnutrition was detected (micronutrient malnutrition was not assessed).

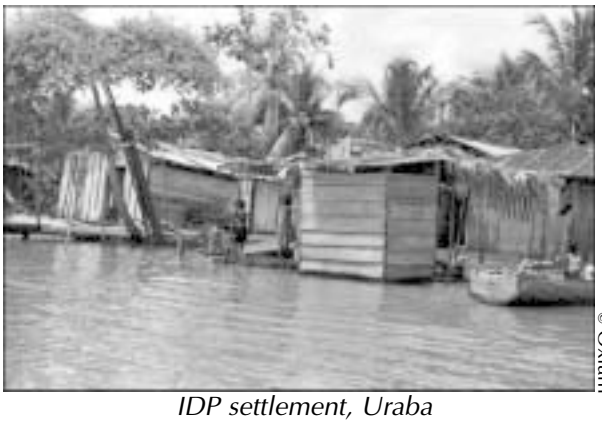
MUAC screening results of all children aged between 12 and 59 months showed no severe malnutrition (less than 110mm), and only seven per cent less than 130mm. Only the river camp had a substantially higher prevalence of malnutrition, at 13 per cent less than 130mm.[4]

Some communities were, however, considered more food secure than others. Food security was determined mostly by access to fertile land. Rural and river homeland areas were considered the most food secure, and urban communities the least. Whilst the rural homeland and river homeland camps had a variety of different food sources, income from waged labour represented the main source for the urban community. The Peace Communities were the most food-secure settlements, because their members lived close to their own land, and collective farming allowed them to work in relative security by adhering to the decisions of community leaders.

Recommendations of the food-security review

The food-security review showed that Oxfam had helped IDPs to develop sources of food other than food aid. With a small food ration, and a range of other food-security interventions, the displaced were not malnourished, nor were they engaged in damaging strategies to acquire food. The review recommended that Oxfam should:

- continue the remaining five months of the programme as planned, gradually diminishing the food ration;
- give flood victims in the river settlements a food ration of 2,100 kcals/person/day for three months, in order to allow them to recover from the floods and concentrate on rebuilding their homes;
- secure trade for isolated river-homeland settlements producing surplus food (mainly rice) by buying it from them, and using it as part of the monthly ration to distribute to the other camps;
- provide an extra food ration for IDPs doing agricultural work in lands some distance from their settlement, in order to see them through the planting season and their time away from the camp; and
- initiate income-generating activities for the urban site.



IDP settlement, Uraba

Box 9: Peace Communities in Uraba

In response to insecurity in Uraba, some IDP groups formed themselves into Peace Communities – organisations that proclaimed their active neutrality in an effort to prevent harassment from the various warring parties. In 1997, Oxfam began to advocate on behalf of the displaced, facilitating communication within the communities about the meaning of neutrality, and devising mechanisms to watch over and guarantee it. Oxfam also communicated the communities' position more widely within the conflict area. From the middle of 1999, however, the neutrality of these communities came under threat as guerrillas and militia forces stepped up their efforts to secure territorial control of Uraba. As guerrillas infiltrated the Peace Communities and offered promises of 'protection', militias responded with massacres, threats and assassinations. Since Oxfam could no longer vouch for their neutrality, it halted its advocacy work for the Peace Communities in 2000, although humanitarian assistance continued.

Table 11: Food-security levels of different IDP groups

	Rural homeland	River homeland	Rural camp	River camp	Urban
Access to land	Excellent	Excellent	Limited	Limited	Very limited
Crop success	Medium	Excellent	Limited	Very limited	Very limited
Garden crops	Medium	Medium	Limited	Very limited	Medium
Fishing/hunting	Excellent	Medium	Medium	Excellent	Very limited
Small livestock	Medium	Excellent	Medium	Very limited	Medium
Income/trade	Excellent	Very limited	Very limited	Excellent	Excellent
Food ration (% of total diet)	10%	8%	10–15%	10%	10–15%
Social organisation	Excellent	Excellent	Limited	Excellent	Limited
Food-security level	++	++	+	-	-

Conclusion

The case-studies in this paper show how Oxfam has applied its livelihoods approach to assessing food security on the ground, and how that approach has been adapted depending on the types of livelihood in question, and the nature of the external shock. The initial step in all the assessments was to divide the population into groups with a similar combination of exchange entitlements (or livelihood sources):

- in Orissa, the population was divided into different livelihood groups, living in the same area or village;
- in Wajir, the division was into livelihood zones, as people with similar livelihoods lived in the same area;
- in Colombia, displaced people were divided according to geographical location and type of settlement.

For each of these groups, food security was then assessed in terms of availability, access and the severity of food insecurity.

The scale and nature of the interventions recommended and implemented by Oxfam varied according to the severity of food insecurity, how different livelihood systems were affected, and the stage of the emergency. In all three case-studies, the interventions were a combination of free food aid and other measures to promote food security and support livelihoods. In Wajir, food aid was the over-riding response; in Orissa, free food aid rapidly became a minimal component of the overall response.

Despite Oxfam's long experience of undertaking food-security assessments, major challenges remain. These relate to the implications of using a livelihoods approach for:

- the quantity of food distributed, and the groups targeted;
- the balance between food and non-food interventions; and
- neutrality and impartiality, particularly, but not exclusively, in situations of conflict.

Quantities and targets

Taking a livelihoods approach to emergency food distributions involves a larger quantity of food aid than when the aim is only to meet immediate needs. Target groups tend to be larger, since they include people who still have assets, as well as the malnourished and the destitute. The Wajir case-study shows that taking a livelihoods approach involves targeting almost the entire population.

The quantities of food aid required are not always available; WFP Emergency Appeals are rarely met in full. This means that agencies have to work out how best to use the available resources. Options include narrowing the targeting criteria (for example by excluding certain livelihood groups or the better-off, or by targeting the malnourished); or lowering the ration for everyone. No option is easy, and none is perfect. However, it is important to distinguish between strategies based on a needs assessment, and strategies adopted because resources are in short supply.

It could be argued that food aid intended as livelihood support does not need to be designed according to nutritional principles (Wilson, 1991; Jaspars and Young, 1995). Current nutritional guidelines only cover rations for people who have been cut off from their normal food supply, and do not offer advice on food aid designed for livelihood support.

A larger question concerning the livelihoods approach has to do with when to stop distributing aid; or, in other words, what does 'livelihood support' really mean? In the Wajir example, does aid stop

only when herds have recovered to pre-emergency levels? Using a livelihoods approach, Oxfam undertook several food distributions in Wajir and Turkana in the 1990s. In both districts, decisions to phase out distribution were difficult given the tenuous livelihoods of different groups. Further work is needed on this question.

Combining food interventions with non-food interventions

All three of the cases looked at in this paper combined food interventions with non-food interventions. Food aid predominates in the largest responses, and in the acute phase of emergencies. For smaller responses, or in the less acute phases, other interventions predominate: cash-for-work and agricultural support in Orissa, for instance, and agricultural and fishing support in Colombia in the second year of displacement.

Key issues for a livelihoods approach include how the need for different interventions is determined, and what the most appropriate ways are of addressing the food crises in question. Important determinants appear to be the scale and stage of the emergency, the availability of resources, the government response and the management requirements of different types of interventions. For Kenya, it could be argued that food aid was appropriate because, in 2000, there was an absolute shortage of food in the country. In addition, a community-managed food distribution is not management intensive, and is therefore quicker to start up than other interventions. On the other hand, food aid was available through the WFP and the government, whereas cash for other interventions on such a scale was not. By October 2000, however, food aid could no longer fulfil its livelihood-support function as animals were beginning to die, but de-stocking and fodder distributions could only be done on a small scale.

The beneficiary numbers for Orissa and Colombia were much smaller, allowing for a greater variety of interventions. In Orissa, the government's provision of staple foods at subsidised prices enabled Oxfam to refocus its interventions on cash and food-for-work, to ensure immediate food security, as well as agricultural support to promote food security in the longer term. The relatively small scale on which this was done made it feasible. Similarly, in Colombia the small numbers of beneficiaries enabled Oxfam to implement management-intensive programmes to promote food security.

Neutrality and impartiality

Whilst food distributions are generally acknowledged to be vulnerable to abuse and mani-pulation in conflicts (Leader, 2000; Jaspars, 2000), much work remains to be done on the appro-priateness, feasibility and risks associated with livelihood-support interventions in such situations. In chronic conflicts, there may be less scope for protec-ting livelihoods. In internal wars, belligerents often specifically aim to destroy the livelihoods of per-ceived enemy supporters. Self-reliance or even food self-sufficiency will be difficult to achieve. The Colombia case-study shows that, while the IDPs very nearly reached food self-sufficiency by the end of 1999, their food security was still threatened by an esca-lation in violence by 2000. In addition, the long-term displaced may not be able to rebuild their livelihoods.

Warring parties may question the neutrality and impartiality of interventions to support livelihoods because their impact is intended to be longer-term. Building capacity or resilience among certain livelihood groups could be interpreted as strengthening one side in a conflict. On the other hand, there is also evidence that the 'harms' associated with non-food interventions can be less grave than those associated with food aid (Anderson, 1996). Many agencies, in particular US-based ones like CARE, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and WVI, have developed a framework to analyse the benefits and harms of particular interventions during conflict. The ICRC, while strictly adhering to the principle of operational neutrality, recognises that *all* humanitarian action to some extent supports warring parties, and can thus compromise impartiality. For this reason, assistance is limited to addressing only the most urgent needs.

The impartiality of livelihood-support interventions can also be questioned in stable situations. By its very nature, livelihood support is provided to people who still have livelihoods to support: those with land and livestock, for instance. These are not the poorest, the malnourished, or the destitute. Whilst a livelihoods approach may be in accordance with local people's aim of maintaining their way of life, this does not necessarily correspond to the principles of aid provision developed by the West. In most situations, a compromise will be necessary.

The major achievements of a livelihoods approach to food-security assessments have been a broadening of horizons. A livelihoods approach recognises the

co-existence of different risks, and consequently the need for simultaneously addressing life-threatening risks and the more insidious erosion of livelihoods in the longer term. A livelihoods approach explicitly acknowledges life before and after the emergency. Rather than waiting for an emergency response to evolve into rehabilitation and then preparedness activities, it has encouraged a more searching and detailed analysis of the impact of food insecurity on people's lives and livelihoods, and thereby has generated response options more in keeping with the diversity of local needs and operational scenarios.

Annex

Rapid appraisal techniques useful in food-security assessments

Direct observation

Direct observation assesses, among other things, the physical condition of the surroundings, the condition of crops and livestock, the physical appearance of people and their living conditions and the interactions between people. It is combined with a walk around the location, seeking out premises or sites relating to food security (the mill, shops or the marketplace, nearby fields), and visits to people in their homes.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews take place with key informants, who are purposively selected individuals. Interviews preferably take place away from other people. A mental or written checklist of key areas or open-ended questions is prepared in advance. Points of interest not previously considered are followed up.

Proportional piling

Proportional piling is used to find out about the relative importance of different things. In relation to food security, it can show the relative importance of different sources of food, and changes in relative importance following a certain event. People are asked to identify their main sources of food or ways of acquiring food. They then select symbols representing these food sources, and put them on the ground or on a table. Against these symbols, they share out a fixed number of beans (usually 100), beads or stones showing their relative importance. So, if there are 50 beans against crop production, this means it accounts for approximately 50 per cent of the respondents' source of food.

Timelines and chronologies

These are particularly useful in describing events prior to a displacement, or a historical review of periods of famine and food insecurity and people's perceptions of their main features, relative severity and underlying cause. This can give an indication of the relative severity of the current period of food insecurity, and different causes from previous periods of food insecurity.

Seasonal diagramming

With seasonal diagramming, local people can describe the seasonal factors relating to food security, such as the production cycle of different food crops (planting, weeding and harvesting); the production of different livestock products; labour demands; and periods associated with raiding or other attacks. This is useful in showing seasonal differences in food supply and access to food, and for identifying the 'hungry season', the period of plenty, and whether at a particular time of year the situation can be expected to improve, or deteriorate.

Mapping

In mapping, local people are asked to draw a rough map of their surroundings, showing features like water sources, religious meeting places, schools, shops, markets, fields, areas where livestock are kept, areas accommodating particular social or ethnic groups, new arrivals and areas of restricted access. This is useful in getting an idea of scale, particularly where access is restricted. It is also useful in terms of planning visits and walks around the affected area.

Activity profiles

Activity profiles are descriptions of people's activities throughout the day, and are useful in learning about gender differences and relationships, and the time spent acquiring food.

Notes

[1] 'Sentinel sites' are selected as representing those communities or areas most vulnerable to food insecurity, and therefore the first to reflect changes.

[2] The militia group Autodefensas Unidas Colombianas (AUC) was formed in the 1960s to protect the interests of landowners, industrialists and businessmen. The AUC is reputedly responsible for the death of 35,000 civilians in the 1990s. The oldest and largest guerrilla group, the Fuerza Armada Revolucionaria de Colombia (FARC), first emerged out of the peasant struggles of the 1950s. Today, it numbers an estimated 12,000 armed personnel, controlling roughly 40 per cent of Colombian territory.

[3] Mid Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) is a screening tool whereby all children in a population are measured, and those falling below the cut-off point are referred for further weight and height measurements. In this case, the screening provided a preliminary indication of the nutritional status of the population.

[4] The cut-off point of 130mm was in fact used mistakenly. Oxfam follows the MSF nutrition guidelines for MUAC cut-off points: for rapid population assessments, this is 125mm for moderate malnutrition. For screening exercises, a cut-off of 135mm is used.

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HUMANITARIAN PRACTICE NETWORK

Background

The **Humanitarian Practice Network** (**HPN**) was launched in 1994 in response to research that indicated substantial gaps between practitioners and policy makers in the humanitarian field, as well as serious weaknesses in the ability of the sector to learn and become more 'knowledge-based'.

Purpose

To stimulate critical analysis, advance the professional learning and development of those engaged in and around humanitarian action, and improve practice.

Objectives

To provide relevant and useable analysis and guidance for humanitarian practice, as well as summary information on relevant policy and institutional developments in the humanitarian sector.

Activities

- **Publishing in three formats:** Good Practice Reviews (one per year), Network Papers (four to six per year) and *Humanitarian Exchange* (two per year). All materials are produced in English and French.
- **Operating a resource website**: this is one of the key reference sites for humanitarian actors.
- **Collaborating with international 'partner' networks**: this increases the reach of the **HPN**, and brings mutual benefit to the participating networks.
- **Holding occasional seminars on topical issues**: these bring together practitioners, policy-makers and analysts.

HPN Target Audience

Individuals and organisations actively engaged in humanitarian action. Also those involved in the improvement of performance at international, national and local level – in particular mid-level operational managers, staff in policy departments, and trainers.

While a project and Network with its own identity, the **HPN** exists within the Humanitarian Policy Group at the ODI. This not only ensures extended networking and dissemination opportunities, but also positions the **HPN** in a wider 'centre of excellence' which enhances the impact of the **HPN**'s work.

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