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paper

Between Relief and Development: targeting food aid for disaster prevention in Ethiopia

by Kay Sharp

Abstract

The paper focuses on the question of how food aid can best be targeted to the neediest households in food-insecure areas, particularly in the context of the 1993 National Policy on Disaster Prevention and Management (NPDPM) and its central strategy of channelling relief food through employment generation schemes (EGS) in place of general free distributions. The debate on household-level targeting of such schemes has centred on the choice between self-targeting and administrative / community targeting.

As a framework for the discussion, a typology of targeting methods is briefly set out, suggesting that three dimensions of classification are needed for each targeting system: the institutional channel or mechanism; the level; and selection criteria. Community targeting, which has received little attention in the international literature, is discussed.

A review of previous Ethiopian experience with targeting through public works shows little evidence that it successfully self-selects the poorest and excludes the relatively better-off, even at low payment rates. A summary of views expressed by beneficiaries and implementing staff in chronic food-aid recipient areas sheds further doubt on the potential of pure self-targeting to meet the targeting objectives of the NPDPM. However, it also suggests that the community targeting option is not an easy or cheap one, and that a strong preference for sharing aid as widely as possible within communities applies equally to employment entitlements.

The paper concludes that a combination of self-targeting elements with community prioritisation of the neediest households is the best available targeting option for EGS. At the same time, attention is needed to improving administrative targeting at area levels.

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Kay Sharp has worked on food security and food aid issues for the past 10 years, mainly in Sudan and Ethiopia. She was the Ethiopia representative for USAID's Famine Early Warning system (FEWS) for three years before working on the study on which this paper is based. She is currently a freelance consultant.

Background

This paper is based on a 1996 study of food aid targeting in Ethiopia [Sharp 1997]. The methodology of that study included an international and country-specific literature review; consultations with all relevant food aid agencies; and discussions with beneficiary communities and implementing staff (local government and NGO) in selected areas of Wollo, Wag Hamra, Wolayta, Tigray and Hararghe. The study was commissioned by SCF (UK), but was managed by a multi-agency committee and did not focus on programmes implemented by SCF or any other specific agency. The conclusions and opinions presented here do not necessarily reflect the views of SCF or any other member of the Food Aid Targeting Steering Committee. An earlier version of this paper was presented to the Ethiopia and Eritrea Development Network Conference in Norwich in June 1998.

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1

Introduction

Ethiopia's National Policy and Disaster Prevention and Management (NPDPM), ratified in 1993, is the outcome of a policy debate started after the 1984/5 famine. The objectives and principles of the policy (see Box 1 opposite) are strongly influenced by 'LRD' (linking relief and development) thinking: their goal is to reduce what many see as a creeping dependency on food aid, while extracting developmental capital from the hundreds of thousands of tons of relief food aid distributed annually. Improved targeting is a part of this agenda, as reflected in the second and fourth Principles ('Precedence shall be given to areas where lives and livelihoods are more threatened.... [and] relief must be addressed to the most needy at all times' [TGE 1993a].)

The central strategy for the achievement of these aims is to move away from free food distributions, and instead provide relief food to the able-bodied in exchange for labour on public or community development works (called Employment Generation Schemes or EGS), with only those unable to work entitled to free food [Principle 4, Box 1, opposite]. EGS are differentiated from 'regular' Food-for-Work (FFW) projects by their role in the relief distribution system: they are to be implemented only in times and places where a developing food crisis has been identified by the early warning system, using relief resources in the early stages of a crisis to prevent a more acute emergency developing.

Box 2 (page 6) suggests some clarification of terms: however, these definitions are not universally agreed, and confusions continue. During field-work for the 1996 targeting study [Sharp 1997], it was found that local government staff commonly described the difference between FFW and EGS as one of institutional ownership – FFW being NGO projects, and EGS belonging to line ministries. This perception is actually quite acute, and merits some reflection.

In addition to contributing to infrastructural development, the requirement to work for relief food (or for cash, where available) is expected to discourage the less needy from seeking aid: that is, to function as a targeting mechanism. This idea is not new in Ethiopia: interestingly, previous Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) guidelines for food aid distribution (issued in 1979 and 1983) also tried to impose a work requirement in exchange for relief food. However, the RRC had no authority over local government and line ministries, and little control over the foreign NGOs which distributed most of the relief aid in the mid-1980s. It therefore had no way of enforcing such guidelines. The 1993 policy is different because it comes as a central government directive, binding on line ministries and on the newly-decentralised government structures from regional through to wereda (district) level. At the same time, the UN, donor and NGO community have been actively involved in the development and promulgation of the policy, as well as its

Box No. 1

**National policy on disaster prevention and management:
objectives and principles**

Objectives:

1. No human life shall perish for want of assistance in time of disaster;
2. Adequate income shall be ensured to disaster affected households through relief programmes to give them access to food and other basic necessities;
3. The quality of life in the affected areas shall be protected from deterioration on account of disaster;
4. Relief effort shall reinforce the capabilities of the affected areas and population, and promote self-reliance;
5. Contribution to sustainable economic growth and development shall be given due emphasis in all relief efforts;
6. The asset and economic fabric of the affected areas shall be preserved to enable speedy post-disaster recovery;
7. Provision of relief shall protect and safeguard human dignity and reinforce the social determination for development;
8. Disaster prevention programmes shall be given due emphasis in all spheres of development endeavours;
9. All endeavours in relief programmes shall be geared to eliminate the root causes of vulnerability to disasters;
10. Best use of natural resource endowment of the areas shall be promoted.

Basic Principles:

1. The community shall play the leading role in the planning, programming, implementation and evaluation of all relief projects;
2. Precedence shall be given to areas where lives and livelihoods are more threatened;
3. There shall be clearly defined focal points of action ... and centres of coordination shall be properly empowered;
4. Relief must be addressed to the most needy at all times and no free distribution of aid be allowed to able-bodied affected population.

Source: Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE)1993a

implementation. The policy document has been widely distributed in English (whereas the previous guidelines were never officially translated from the Amharic). In other words, these changes in relief distribution policy are actually happening.

The first few years of the new policy's implementation raised a number of targeting-related issues and points for clarification [see Sharp 1997]. Out of that list of issues, the rather narrow question on which this paper focuses is how the neediest households can be prioritised for participation in EGS, within areas selected for relief aid. The paper does not deal directly with area selection: however, this does not imply that it is less important than

household-level targeting – an issue returned to in the conclusions. The debate on how to address 'relief' to the most needy through employment provision centres around the choice between self-targeting and administrative or community targeting mechanisms. Section 2 briefly outlines a conceptual framework in which to site the terms of this debate, before returning to the specific question posed.

Box No. 2**Clarification of terms (EGS, FFW, EBSN)**

Under the NPDPM, an 'EGS' (Employment Generation Scheme) is a work-scheme transferring *relief* resources to vulnerable groups in *areas and periods of emergency*, which is to be implemented only when an emergency relief need has been officially recognised, and only for the duration of the emergency. Its primary objective is to provide food or income support to the neediest people in disaster-affected areas. 'EGS' is intended to replace general free food distributions for emergency relief, as far as possible. Participants may be paid either in cash or in food.

'FFW' or 'CFW' (Food or cash-for-work) are work-schemes transferring *regular* (non-emergency) resources. The location, initiation and duration of the work do not depend on an emergency declaration (though they are often located in chronically food-insecure and/or disaster-prone areas). They may or may not be specifically targeted at the household level (though in practice most such projects either intend or assume that the relatively poor will benefit most).

Both types of project can be seen as components or *sub-categories* of an 'EBSN' (Employment-Based Safety Net). The basic idea of an EBSN is a network of varied and independent labour-intensive projects which, by providing employment of last resort, can prevent the poor and vulnerable falling through into destitution, either because of shocks (disasters) or chronic problems.

'GR' (Gratuitous Relief) is free relief provided alongside EGS programmes, for disaster-affected people who are unable to work. This should be clearly distinguished from general free distributions, which are discouraged under the NPDPM.

2

A framework for analysis of targeting methods

Definitions of targeting (see Box 3) reflect its two-edged nature: in order to select beneficiaries, it is inherently necessary to exclude others and restrict the distribution of resources. There are three types of reason for doing this: *humanitarian reasons* (to concentrate assistance on the neediest); *efficiency reasons* (to maximise the impact of scarce resources); and *development reasons* (to minimise dependency and economic disincentives). All three of these concerns are high on the current agenda in Ethiopia.

Typology

A number of different, but overlapping, ways of classifying targeting methods are suggested in the literature. Probably the best-known is Drèze and Sen's division of methods into three 'ranges of options': administrative, market and self-selection [Drèze & Sen 1989, p.108]. Others suggest different classifications depending on the focus of their work. For example, Grosh (evaluating welfare programmes delivered through government institutions) divides targeting systems into 'individual assessment mechanisms', 'group (or geographic) mechanisms', and 'self-targeting mechanisms' [Grosh 1994, p.33]. Kennedy and Alderman (comparing different types of nutritional intervention) use the headings of 'geographical', 'family', 'individual' and 'seasonal' targeting [Kennedy and Alderman 1987, ch.4]: while Borton

Box No. 3

Definitions of targeting

- 'the identification and selection of certain groups or households or even individuals, and the distribution of benefits (or costs) to them' [Lundberg & Diskin 1994, p.4].
- 'the process by which areas and populations are selected to receive a resource ... and then provided with it' [Borton & Shoham 1990, p.79].
- 'the identification of those who will or will not be eligible for a social program' [Grosh 1994, p.2].
- 'restricting the coverage of an intervention to those who are perceived to be most at risk, in order to maximise the benefit of the intervention whilst minimising the cost.' [Jaspars & Young 1995, p.136].
- '[the practical process of] defining, identifying and reaching the intended recipients of aid' [Sharp 1997, p.4].

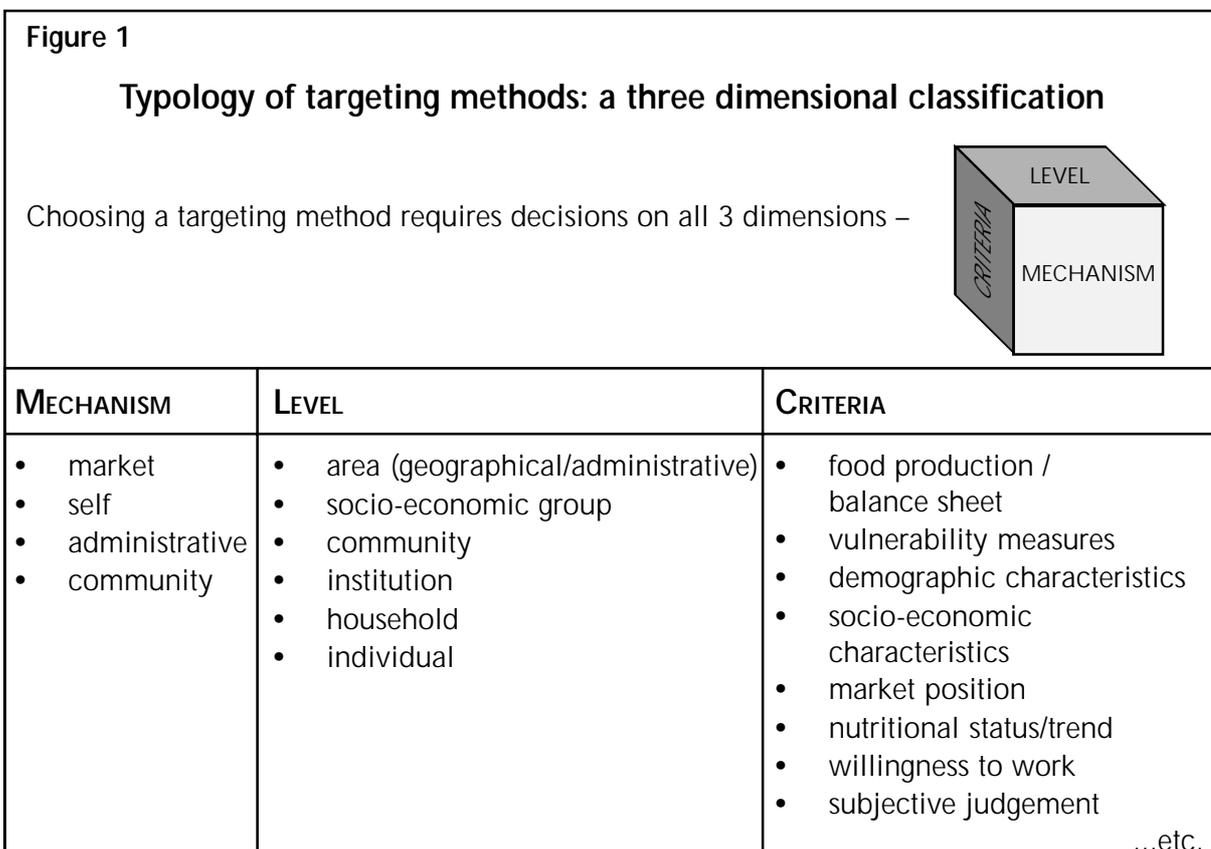
and Shoham (analysing NGO targeting during the 1980s African famine) class all the methods they describe as ‘administrative’, and focus on the choice between nutritional and socio-economic indicators.

This paper suggests a pragmatic three-dimensional framework which combines these intersecting perspectives. As represented in Figure 1, designing a targeting system requires choices on three dimensions:

- the institutional channel or decision-making mechanism (will beneficiaries be selected through the market, by administrative procedures, by their own choice, or by community decision?);
- the appropriate level of targeting (does the intervention need to discriminate between recipient and non-recipient households or even individuals, or should the unit of targeting be a geographical area or population group?); and
- the criteria by which the target group is defined and identified (demographic, socio-economic or nutritional characteristics, production or food availability measures, willingness to work, and so on)¹.

To Drèze & Sen’s three options, this framework adds a fourth institutional channel or mechanism: *community targeting*. While sometimes classed as a sub-category of administrative targeting (just as self-targeting can be seen as a type of market mechanism), it is sufficiently distinct to be worth considering separately, whatever the preferred hierarchy of classification. In community targeting, decisions are made by community members or their representatives: that is, ‘insiders’ or potential beneficiaries. Such selection is usually based on a fairly subjective, complex judgement of need or vulnerability. It tends to rely on the decision-makers’ knowledge and understanding of their neighbours’ situation, rather than data collection and analysis. This option is, of course, only applicable at levels of targeting within the community².

By contrast, *administrative targeting* is defined here as a much broader range of methods which can be applied at all levels and with all or any criteria. Its defining characteristics are that selection is made by outsiders (such as administrators or project staff) who are not among the potential target group themselves, using criteria which are as far as possible objective, measurable, and standardised.³ It usually requires some form of systematic data



collection and analysis. The selection of aid recipients by the communities to which they belong has been relatively little discussed in the international literature. Interestingly, it seems to be almost entirely an African issue (presumably due to weak administrative capacity as well as, conversely, the importance of community structures whether 'traditional' or new). Much of the limited literature dealing directly with community targeting is of NGO origin [Borton & Shoham 1990, Buchanan-Smith 1993, Jenden 1994, Oxfam 1995, Walker 1987. See also Drèze & Sen op.cit., Jaspars & Young op.cit., Keen 1991 and Voutira 1995].

Bias and abuse of power by decision-makers are a potential risk of community targeting, as of administrative targeting: some form of regular monitoring or policing is needed to detect and correct this. Even where such problems are minimal, though, communities often disagree with aid agencies' targeting priorities, or with the whole principle of selecting beneficiaries. In Africa, the intermediation of local communities in the distribution of food has been observed in a large number of cases to result simply in uniform household rations or, at best, rations related to household size.' [Drèze & Sen, op.cit., p.107⁴]. This accords with Oxfam's experience that 'assistance targeted to particular households or household members will often be shared beyond those individuals, given customary systems of exchanges and loans, and a certain amount of redistribution after distribution is bound to occur.' [op.cit., p.5].

Despite the difficulties, community targeting is an important option, particularly in contexts where administrative capacity is weak. Its advantages lie in the avoidance of costly and difficult data collection; the deeper understanding of vulnerability that community members are likely to have; and the 'spin-off' benefits of capacity-building and empowerment. In some contexts the ideological emphasis given to the latter may, indeed, be judged to outweigh many of the problems: it should be noted that the NPDPM gives primacy to the role of the community (see Principle 1 in Box 1 on page 5).

Choosing to target through community structures may also have an element of bowing to the inevitable: since it is so widely observed that communities do in fact make their own (re)distribution decisions regardless of outside agencies, the best option may be to work on making those decisions as fair and accountable as possible.

Self-targeting systems are those in which people decide for themselves whether or not to take advantage of the assistance offered, depending on whether they need [it], and what they must do to get it' [Jaspars and Young, p.40]. Designing such a programme' requires choosing a benefit which only the target population wants, or including a cost which only the target population is willing to pay' [Lundberg and Diskin, p.5]. The particular type of self-targeting considered here is targeting through employment provision, in which the costs to the participants are time, effort, and opportunity costs; and the benefit offered is a low rate of payment. Finding the correct balance between these costs and benefits (so that the people who volunteer are the intended target group) is a critical requirement for successful self-targeting.

Targeting costs

One factor in the choice between different targeting methods is their relative cost. Self-selection and market interventions are generally seen as 'cheap' options because they avoid the need for direct screening of applicants for aid; while administrative systems – with their requirements of human and physical resources for the collection and analysis of data, assessment of potential beneficiaries, management and monitoring – are assumed to be expensive.

In reality, the comparison is not so simple. On the one hand, self-targeting programmes cannot entirely avoid administrative costs: in public works, for example, decisions on location, scale and duration are unavoidable, and the setting of payment rates which will successfully target the intended participants requires considerable data and analysis.

On the other hand, the budgetary costs of administrative targeting are in fact almost never quantified, mainly because they cannot be separated from general management and monitoring activities. The assumption is often made that such costs tend to increase with the accuracy or narrowness of targeting: however, a careful reading of the literature suggests there is little or no evidence for this. Grosh, who has made one of the very few systematic cost-benefit comparisons of a range of administratively-targeted programmes, found that the most effective methods are not necessarily the most expensive or the most complicated [op.cit., p. 154-9 and passim]. In many African situations, the real problem is not so much the cost as the non-existence of institutional systems which can collect and use accurate, objective and comparable data.

If community targeting is considered as an option at local levels, then the question of ‘whose costs?’ immediately comes into focus. Considerable time and trouble is required from community representatives in such systems, but this is unlikely to be counted as a project cost.

In the final analysis, the costs and benefits of alternative targeting systems have to be weighed up in broader terms than direct budgetary costs, taking careful account of the objectives, resources and context of the intervention. Table 1, opposite, gives a summary of some of the main cost and benefit factors to be considered for each broad category of targeting.

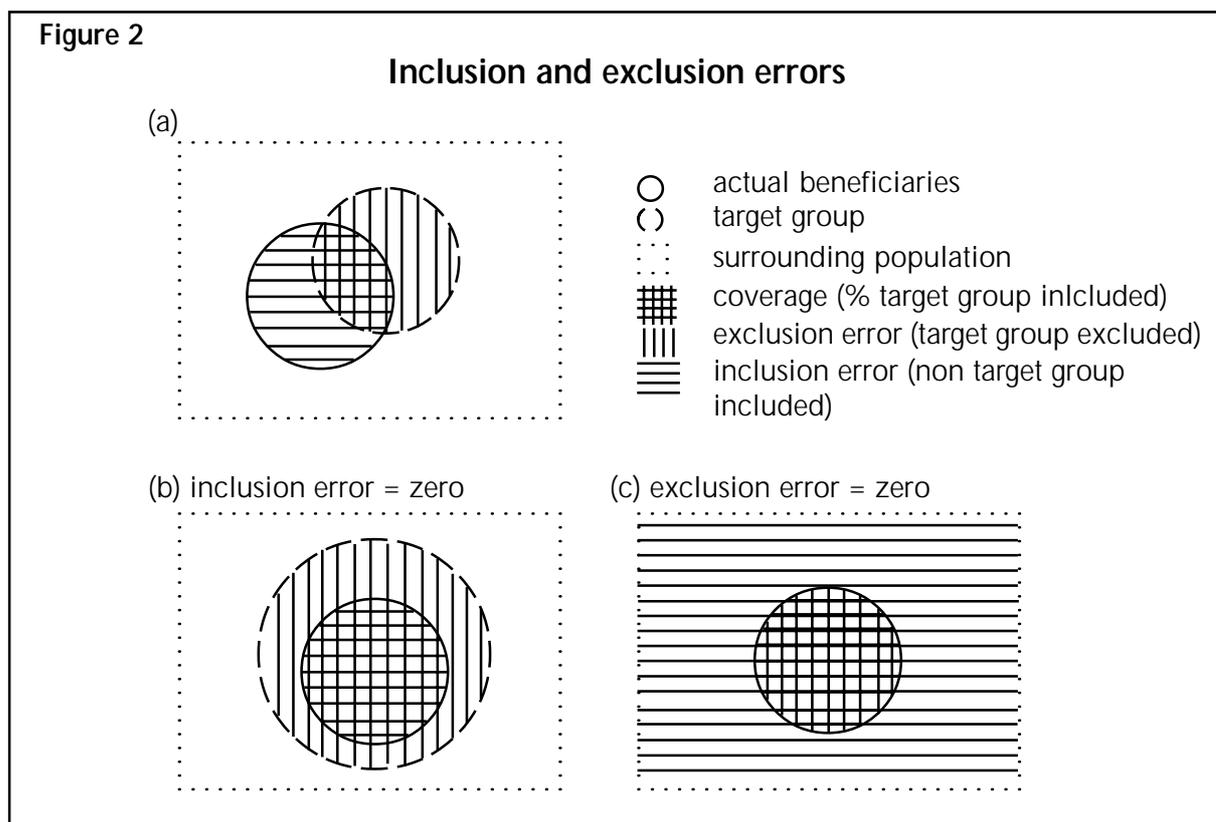
Inclusion and exclusion errors

Another consideration in the choice of targeting method is, of course, whether it will achieve the objectives of the planned intervention. Evaluating the success (*ex post*) or appropriateness (*ex ante*) of a particular targeting strategy depends partly on the relative priority given to ensuring coverage of the target group on the one hand, and restricting the spread of benefits to the less needy on the other. A perfect targeting system would include all the target group (zero exclusion error), and only the target group (zero inclusion error)⁵. In reality, of course, no targeting system is perfect. There is usually a trade-off between the two types of error, such that reducing the inclusion error increases the

likelihood of missing some of the target group, and vice versa.

Figure 2 gives a graphic representation of these types of error and trade-offs. In Figure 2a, the actual beneficiaries include a large proportion of the intended target group (the ‘coverage’); but some of the target group have been missed (the ‘exclusion error’) and some non-eligible people have benefited (the ‘inclusion error’). Estimating the numbers and/or percentages of people in these three categories is one way of evaluating the accuracy of targeting. Figures 2b and 2c illustrate options for eliminating one type of error, at the cost of trade-offs in the other. In figure 2b, the inclusion error is eliminated, but at the cost of missing a large part of the target group. In figure 2c, conversely, 100% coverage of the target group is achieved by including the whole population, thus ensuring that there is no exclusion error. This is not necessarily poor targeting: in some situations it is the best strategy, especially where the target group is a high proportion of the population and the cost of excluding a few ‘rich’ people exceeds the resources that would be saved.

When the inclusion error is large, however, and the total resources are fixed (nearly always the case with food aid distributions), one consequence is a serious dilution of impact for the really needy, as each household receives a smaller share of a pre-determined pie.



It is impossible to generalise whether inclusion or exclusion errors are more important: this decision will depend mainly on the aims and context of the distribution programme (including the proportion of target group members in the population), taking account of the feasibility of excluding non-target groups, the resources available for distribution, and the relative costs and benefits of the different options. It may not be a purely economic decision, but may depend equally on policy considerations. In the case of Ethiopia's NPDPM, *restricting* the distribution of food aid and discouraging the expectation of aid for everyone is a high policy priority, so that reducing inclusion errors in household targeting is seen as a central problem.

Table 1

Targeting methods – summary of options, costs and benefits

3

Targeting through public works: Ethiopian experience

Ethiopia has substantial experience with food-for-work, mostly designed for post-famine rehabilitation or development, rather than relief or short-term disaster prevention (though some NGOs have also run ‘relief food-for-work’ projects which are similar to the new EGS). Two striking features of the literature on this experience are, firstly, that targeting only appears as a high profile issue in the 1990s⁶; and secondly, that remarkably little monitoring or evaluation of the targeting effects of these public works programmes is documented.

It had been widely assumed in the past that such programmes automatically selected the poor. This self-targeting aspect of public works was brought to the centre of the policy debate by the 1990 WFP Food for Development Mission, which recommended the development of an Employment-Based Safety Net (EBSN) ‘offering employment of last resort at a minimum wage to all those who need it’ [Maxwell and Belshaw 1990, p.35]. The idea was further developed in Maxwell 1993:

‘Self-targeting is an attractive alternative to administered targeting, because it reduces the administrative burden, the risk of wrong judgement and the scope for corruption. By offering unlimited jobs at a low wage of ‘last resort’, projects leave it to food insecure households and individuals themselves to decide whether or not they should

participate. If many people offer themselves for work, the programme expands; if they find better things to do, it shrinks’ [p.8; emphasis added].

The two conditions italicised in this quotation are essential for self-targeting of this kind: they echo the general rule expressed by Von Braun et al (1991): ‘The self-targeting feature of public works programmes only operates effectively with an appropriate ... wage rate policy and a flexible absorption of applicants without rationing workplaces’ [p.xiv; emphasis in original]. However, both are problematic in the Ethiopian context, particularly in crisis situations. Unlimited job provision may be neither feasible (given resource and management constraints) nor desirable (given the policy objective of restricting aid), on the scale needed to cope with Ethiopia’s recurrent food security problems. Maxwell himself identifies a major difficulty with the ‘low wage’ condition:

‘If the objective is to avoid destitution, then the wage needs to be set so as to be more attractive than the marginal coping strategy which leads to destitution or increased vulnerability. This wage could be higher than the reservation wage [below which people will not work], and in very poor countries like Ethiopia, could turn out to be higher than the market wage. To put this another way, a below market wage might not be high enough to prevent destitution or starvation’. [op.cit., p.8].

Doubts were also raised during this debate about the assumption that low-paid work would attract the poor, while the relatively food-secure would choose not to participate:

'there is ... some concern that payment of 'non-competitive wages' ... may result in an inverse composition of participants, i.e. while the poorest households cannot afford to work at a below subsistence wage, slightly better-off households with typically a higher number of persons and therefore labour force may well be able to have one family member participating and thus contribute to the household budget.' [Herbinger 1993, p.9].

What little hard evidence there is on past employment projects suggests that, indeed, the relatively rich often volunteer as readily as the poor, even at low payment rates:

- A 1985 socio-economic study of workers on a major WFP / Ministry of Agriculture FFW programme (Project 2488), which was assumed to be self-targeting on the relatively poor, found 40% of the food distributed through the project during 1982/3 and 1984/5 had gone to households above the median level of wealth. [Yeraswork & Solomon, 1985]
- IFPRI examined household participation at four food-for-work sites in the 1980s, and found that the poor and rich apparently had equal access to employment in three of the four sites, while in the fourth poor and female-headed households were actually discriminated against. [Webb et al 1992, p.109]
- In 1994, the evaluation of a self-targeting pilot EBSN project at Merti-Jeju (where the value of payments had been cut to what was considered a below-market wage) found that, although the most vulnerable able-bodied households had certainly benefited, 55% of the participating households were not among the most vulnerable rank as defined by their communities. Working on the project provided an additional rather than alternative income source for labour-rich households, so low payment did not discourage them from participating. [WFP / ITAD 1994]

- A national household survey by the Grain Market Research Project and Central Statistical Authority in 1995/6 found 'no significant association between household food availability (need) and food aid receipts (either free or food-for-work)' in that year. [Clay et al, 1998, p.26]
- Eight years of experience on a Concern project incorporating key design features of EGS / EBSN (expansion and contraction of employment in response to food security conditions, and parallel distributions of free food for those unable to work) was considered in a 1993 WFP discussion paper. The project found that cutting payment rates reduced the number of people wanting to work, but it was still considered necessary to combine this with rationing of work-places per community (PA) and per household, and screening of the poorest by local committees. The reasons were that open recruitment even at very low wages would attract more labour than the project could absorb; a really self-targeting rate might be so low (perhaps 1kg of grain per day) that it would undermine the relief effectiveness of the project; and non-target groups would still be attracted because alternative employment is so scarce. [O'Sullivan 1993]
- SOS Sahel decided against self-targeting payment rates for its pilot EBSN project after extensive consultations with the community involved, giving the same reasons as Concern (above) and adding that vulnerable groups such as women might be pushed out of participation without specific selection mechanisms; and that the moral implications of self-targeting wages were rejected by community members, who found it 'unacceptable ... that poorer people should be paid lower wages essentially to reduce administrative overheads'. [Jenden 1994, p. 53-4]

This is, of course, a very short and selective summary of points from a variety of contexts: however, a careful literature search produced no Ethiopian examples of self-targeting employment schemes successfully selecting the poorest and excluding the better-off. Many of the issues raised in the reports cited above recurred in field-work discussions during the 1996 targeting study, as outlined in the next section.

Views from the 'field' (beneficiaries and managers)

During the 1996 targeting study, consultations were held with community and household representatives in a purposive sample of thirty-two Peasant Associations (tabias in Tigray) in food-insecure areas. Government and NGO staff responsible for implementing the EGS / NPDPM policy were also interviewed in the same areas. Following is an overview of points which arose most frequently in these discussions, in relation to the self-targeting potential of employment schemes⁷, and the alternative strategy of community selection.

Targeting impacts of the work requirement

Aside from the question of payment levels, the work requirement of FFW / EGS is intended to have a targeting impact in itself, not only by discouraging the better-off from applying for aid, but also by discouraging the sharing of food aid through the whole community (which has been a persistent problem with free distributions). Another obvious targeting effect of a work requirement is that it excludes some of the most vulnerable households without able-bodied labour. This is foreseen in the NPDPM by the provision of GR (gratuitous relief) for these groups (see Box 2): but in practice, a number of problems and confusions have arisen with the targeting of free relief alongside employment schemes. Where payment is fixed on a piece-rate or work-norm basis (i.e., so much food

or cash for a given length of terracing or quantity of stone moved, etc.), it has been observed that the targeting effect can be regressive, since the weakest work most slowly and therefore earn least per day.

Most people interviewed during the study agreed that the work requirement would discourage sharing of rations: as one representative put it, people were less inclined to share earnings than gifts, and in any case their neighbours would not expect it – just as they did not expect a share of someone else's harvest [Shelewa baito member, Hawzien, E. Tigray]. However, the study found that communities remain resistant to household targeting: when work is required, redistribution of rations is commonly replaced by redistribution of work-days to much larger numbers of households than planned. In places where there was no close monitoring of how EGS / FFW participants were selected (which meant most places), decision-makers generally tried to give a little of the work allocation to as many people as possible⁸. Three PAs in Bugna (N.Wollo) and Sekota (Wag Hamra) had a systematic lottery system where household heads were drawn at random to participate in each round of employment. The most common system was rotation of the beneficiary lists, so that for example each village would be told to select two people, but would send a different two people each week or each month. These rotations and lotteries, like so much else, are invisible in the food aid distribution records (which usually show only the number of rations delivered

and days worked, and not how many different individuals or households actually participated). They have the same effect on household-level targeting as the post-distribution sharing of free food throughout the community, so that the amount received by each household may not be enough to significantly help the most vulnerable. This problem has been referred to as a ‘thin blanket syndrome’ [Sharp 1997].

Some beneficiaries who had previously received free distributions complained that, now they had to work for food aid, the rations were no longer related to family size. This they considered unfair to poor households with large numbers of dependents. Although the guidelines for implementation of the NPDPM envisage a tiered rationing of work-places according to household size (so that larger households would be entitled to work more), a simple one-participant-per-household rule is much more common in practice. In some places (mainly Tigray) more work was allowed for larger families: but even then only those with enough labour could take advantage of it.

Self-targeting payment rates

The market value of wages paid in food can be adjusted either by changing the quantity, or supplying the same quantity (or nutritional value) in lower-priced commodities. Project implementers frequently opposed the idea of cutting food wages for targeting purposes on the grounds that food is supplied in the first place because of nutritional needs⁹. Existing payment standards are, in fact, set on nutritional criteria. The standard government rate for FFW in Ethiopia (3kg grain per day) was set by WFP about twenty years ago on the basis of emergency rations for a family of six, while the suggested reduction to 2.5 kg under the NPDPM simply assumes a smaller average household of five. While it is hoped that reduced rations will have a self-targeting effect, there has been remarkably little attempt anywhere to calculate what a ‘below-market’ wage would be. A few projects such as the Merti-Jeju pilot (see section 3) have cut payments and/or increased the work-norm definitions of a day’s work in order to reduce worker numbers; but with little or no analysis of the labour market.

Determining a below-market wage in fact appears to be extremely difficult, judging by attempts to estimate this in various places during the 1996 study. In many food-insecure areas where EGS is most likely to be needed, employment is scarce and

highly seasonal, so that ‘local wage rates’ may turn out to be a purely notional yardstick, if work is not available at the relevant time of year or could only absorb a minimal number of people. Where labour migration to other areas is an option, the additional search costs and risks make the payment rates difficult to compare with a local employment offer. Also, the household member likely to go in search of distant employment is often not the same person who would stay and be available for EGS / FFW, which is therefore an additional, not alternative, source of household income. On the other side of the comparison, it also proved difficult to pin down the real daily value of FFW / EGS payments in most cases because the work required varied so widely that the ‘daily rate’ was sometimes earned with half a day’s labour, and sometimes with two days’. Very few of the beneficiaries knew what they were earning per day, though most knew how much to expect at the end of the employment period.

In discussing these questions with beneficiaries, it became clear that daily or piece-work payment rates were not, in fact, a major factor in deciding whether to participate in employment schemes¹⁰. Other factors frequently mentioned were the greater security of income compared to seeking work in the town or further afield (the value of total earnings in a month or a season appeared more important than the rate of payment in relation to quantity of work); and the multiple advantages of staying at home to take care of the farm and family (which baito members in Shelewa said ‘cannot be measured in money’). FFW/ EGS was generally regarded as part-time work (even when it required a six-hour day plus an hour or two walking to and from the site), which could be combined with farming and other local income strategies such as collecting wood. Again, it was an addition not an alternative to these activities, so that comparisons with the potential earnings from ‘marginal strategies’ such as selling firewood were met with puzzlement.

Among local government staff, there was very limited understanding of the concept of market-based self-targeting wages. Where the proposal to cut EGS rations below the new standard of 2.5kg per day had been discussed, it was opposed on the grounds that it would be detrimental to the beneficiaries and to the development work, and that the numbers of people wanting to work would still in most cases be more than they could employ.

Open recruitment without rationing was encountered in a few regular FFW projects operating either on a very large scale [SEART dams

in S. Tigray], or in buoyant economic conditions - for example, CARE community FFW after a good harvest in W. Hararghe. In the same area, however, beneficiaries commented that the previous year when conditions were bad everyone who could work had wanted to participate in FFW / EGS, without even knowing the payment rate. It is, of course, in the kind of pre-emergency situations EGS is designed for that alternative employment is likely to be most scarce, and the numbers of people seeking income highest.

It is significant in this context that the designers of the NPDPM had studied the example of the Employment Guarantee Scheme in Maharashtra, and decided to name the Ethiopian programme Employment Generation Schemes in recognition of the fact that it would not be feasible to offer a guarantee of work on the scale likely to be demanded [Melaku Ayalew, pers.com.].

Community targeting

In almost all cases encountered during the 1996 study, household-level targeting for all kinds of food aid distributions was actually done (for better or worse) by community representatives or committees of various kinds, under the authority

of the Peasant Association committee (which was given this responsibility by the 1979 RRC guidelines). In only one area was an NGO directly selecting beneficiaries by administrative means (Redd Barna in Wolayta).

Interestingly, the criteria mentioned by most communities for selecting employment-scheme participants were similar to those one would expect to see in a formal survey (see Table 2): but they were combined in a subjective way, without fixed thresholds, to reach a judgement of relative need depending on the quantity of aid available. For example, in considering livestock ownership:

“If someone has even a goat, we’re told to exclude him – but sometimes we make a judgement to include someone in difficulty even if he has a goat” [village leaders in Limat Chora, Sekota].

“If the quota is enough someone with five goats may be included, but if the quota is small someone with only one hen may be excluded in favour of someone with nothing” [Wereda Chairman, Hawzien];

As Table 2 shows, by far the most frequently mentioned criterion was simply ‘poverty’ or ‘food shortage’. The study did not have the time or

Table 2

Household targeting criteria used by communities for EGS/ FFW

Selection Criteria	Frequency of use	
	PAs/23	(= %)
food shortage / poverty	19	0.59
ownership of livestock	14	0.44
no assets to sell	13	0.41
quantity of crop production	11	0.34
size of landholding	7	0.22
ownership of plough oxen	7	0.22
female-headed households	4	0.13
returnees (from resettlement / displacement)	4	0.13
family size / number of dependents	4	0.13
support / remittances	3	0.09
landlessness	3	0.09
other employment / trading (excluded)	3	0.09
ownership of prickly pear plants / beehives / eucalyptus trees	3	0.09
sale of fire-wood	1	0.03
recent sale of assets (excluded)	1	0.03
ex-soldiers	1	0.03

mandate to evaluate the outcome of specific examples of community targeting: however, it was obvious that while there were serious abuses in some places, there was a remarkable level of participatory decision-making and great efforts at fair targeting in others. In all cases, including those where targeting appeared most successful, community leaders found it an extremely burdensome task which tended to generate conflict. Everywhere, it was maintained that all the people were poor and it was difficult to exclude some. The preference for spreading aid as widely as possible has already been noted. However, the opinion seemed widespread that, as one group of elders put it:

“The government should not try to discriminate. Targeting creates conflict but if there must be selection, it should be done by the people. The people should gather together and select just elders who can identify the poor. Each village should select one or two elders.” [Elders from lowland part of Jiro Manaboko PA, Debre Sina (S Wello)]

Two successful institutional models for community targeting were encountered. One is operated in the context of a well-developed system of local democracy, in Tigray (the northernmost region of Ethiopia). In this system, elected councils or local parliaments (‘baitos’) draft a list of beneficiaries, which is then discussed and can be amended at a general assembly of the tabia or kushet. Decisions

are made by the whole assembly, by votes if necessary. This has proved difficult to replicate in other places, such as South Wello, where there is no tradition of open discussion and people are reluctant or afraid to speak. In the alternative model, special committees are elected to represent all sections or villages in the area: targeting decisions are then made by the committee in closed session, without open discussion. This approach has been used, for example, by Concern and SOS Sahel in Wolayta. Both models require significant investments of time and effort. It is suggested that the four key elements for successful community targeting, whichever institutional model is followed, are:

- transparency of decision-making;
- free availability of information (about quantities of aid allocated to the area, etc.) to community members;
- accountability of decision-makers to their constituents (so that bad decisions can be changed and representatives replaced if necessary);
- and an outside auditing or monitoring authority (whether government, NGO or donor) to detect corruption and to support decision-makers when they have to make unpopular judgements.

[Sharp 1997, Jenden 1994, Oxfam 1995].

5

Conclusions and more questions

The main conclusions drawn in relation to the Ethiopian disaster prevention policy are:

a) The self-targeting elements of Employment Generation Schemes (the work requirement and low payment rates) will not alone achieve the targeting objectives of the National Policy on Disaster Prevention and Management. Within areas selected for food aid, a central concern of the policy is to reduce inclusion errors, i.e. to concentrate limited quantities of aid on the neediest people. Given the scarcity of other employment in such areas, the tendency for households with enough labour to diversify their income base (so that EGS / FFW wages are a welcome addition, not an alternative, to other employment), and the priority given to at least one household member (usually the household head) staying near the farm, there is always likely to be a high demand for EGS / FFW participation from all income groups within the targeted communities. This is especially true in situations of impending crisis, for which EGS is specifically intended. Thus, self-targeting will neither ensure participation of the poorest (who may not have enough labour to spare), nor exclude the better-off. Unlimited provision of employment (even within selected areas) is not feasible except in well-resourced pilot projects, and may also counteract the policy objective of reducing

aid dependency. The principle of setting below-market wages (especially when paid in food) is little understood by the implementers of the policy, difficult to implement, and widely opposed.

b) A combination is therefore needed of self-targeting elements (including relatively low payment rates) with some additional system for household screening. The realistic mechanism for this is not a highly-administered selection system with centrally-determined criteria and costly information requirements; but development of existing community structures for prioritising the poorest. This option is in line with the government's emphasis on promoting the central role of the community in development planning (as exemplified in the principles of the NPDPM). It also recognises the reality that final decisions on household targeting will in any case be made within communities. However, community targeting is not a cheap or easy option. Good examples do exist, but so do bad ones. One common characteristic of the good examples is significant and sustained investment in capacity development, training, support and monitoring from outside (whether through government channels or NGOs). The costs to the community decision-makers themselves, in time and trouble, are also considerable.

Many other questions are inextricably connected

with these issues, but are not addressed in this paper. Perhaps the most important is, if even the 'rich' in these food-insecure communities are interested in working for a few kilos of grain per day; and if targeting within communities is so strongly resisted on the grounds that everyone is poor; does it make sense to put so much effort into household selection? Part of the answer must be simply that blanket coverage, over the scale of geographic area considered in need of food aid in recent years, is not a realistic option given resource constraints and policy priorities. Another part is that area-level targeting, an essential first layer in the distribution system for countries like Ethiopia, is probably where the greatest potential gains in effectiveness and efficiency can be made [see Clay et al., 1998].

The adaptation of the new food aid targeting policies for pastoralist areas (where the EGS focus is unlikely to be appropriate because of the mobility of populations) is another important question which has received little attention so far.

Finally, more information is urgently needed on the targeting impacts of the EGS programmes currently being implemented in Ethiopia. Systematic monitoring and evaluation of these impacts, and record-keeping focused more on the people involved than the physical outputs and sacks of grain moved, would greatly advance our understanding of all these issues.

Acronyms

CFW	Cash for work
EBSN	employment-based safety net
EGS	employment generation scheme
FFW	food for work
GR	gratuitous relief
NPDPM	National Policy on Disaster Prevention and Management
PA	Peasant Association
RRC	Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (no renamed the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission)
SEART	Sustainable Environmental and Agricultural Rehabilitation in Tigray

Notes

1. Clearly, these choices are to some extent interdependent, and may be partly pre-determined by the context and objectives of the proposed distribution. They may, in practice, be made in any order (for example, the criteria defining the target group may be decided first, and then the targeting level and mechanism chosen to fit them). It is important to note also that most real-life targeting systems involve a combination of different methods and levels.
2. This paper does not attempt to define ‘community’, although it is recognized that the concept is not unproblematic. In terms of scale, discussions during field-work in Ethiopia suggest that the maximum size of population for which this kind of subjective judgement of relative need is feasible may be in the region of a few hundred households.
3. (what Drèze & Sen call ‘observable indicators’ [op. cit., p.108])
4. African cases cited by Drèze & Sen are Botswana, Lesotho, Niger, Nigeria, Sudan and Zimbabwe.
5. Errors of inclusion are sometimes alternatively called ‘leakage’, although this term can also include the loss of resources which ‘leak’ from the delivery system before reaching the beneficiaries - whether through corruption, theft or inefficiency, or through inevitable storage and transport losses, additional administrative costs, and so on. Kennedy and Alderman, for example, define leakage as ‘the difference between the value of the food or cash transfer and the value of the net increment in food consumption of the at-risk population’, thus including both ‘leakages of expenditures into items other than food and the leakage of targeted food expenditures into food consumption by non-target groups’ [op.cit., p.7].
6. For example, targeting was not on the agenda of the 1989 Food-for-Work Workshop [CRDA 1989]. IFPRI noted that most of the FFW projects started after 1985 gave no explicit consideration to household targeting, simply assuming that ‘food-for-work is a self-targeting intervention from which the wealthy voluntarily exclude themselves’: this assumption was **not borne out by the IFPRI survey results [Webb et. al. 1992]. In WFP’s 1993 Inventory of Food and Cash-for-work Projects all the NGOs surveyed said their projects were intended to target the most food-insecure population in the area [Aytenu and Aylieff 1993, p.10].**
7. While the analysis focuses on targeting of EGS for relief / disaster prevention (see page 4), the distinction between this and regular non-emergency FFW was not always clear on the ground. The comments in this section therefore refer to employment schemes in general, unless otherwise indicated.
8. The 1985 evaluation of Project 2488 found the same tendency with PA selection of participants. [Yeraswork & Solomon, op.cit.]
9. The substitution of cash wages for food in situations where income is needed rather than food is an objective of the NPDPM and the draft government Food Security Strategy, and would have a number of advantages including greater flexibility in the setting of payment rates. Implementation is limited so far, though, and food aid is likely to remain more readily available than cash for such projects for the foreseeable future.
10. Compare the matrix ranking of reasons given by Wolayta farmers for preferring FFW to other employment options in Maxwell, Belshaw & Alemayehu Lirenso, 1994.
11. The fact that female-headed households were not targeted by most communities does not mean they were excluded (we found no evidence for such exclusion), but that they were not assumed to be poor on the basis of gender alone.

Glossary

baito (in Tigray)	local council or ‘parliament’.
kushet (in Tigray)	administrative level below the tabia – size varies from a few hundred to about a thousand households (kushets and tabias are much bigger since the September 1995 reduction in the number of Weredas in Tigray).
PA	sub-district (administrative level below the Wereda) – size very variable, usually (Peasant Association), between about 1,000 and 2,000 households. Also referred to as kebeles.
tabia	sub-district (administrative level below the Wereda, equivalent to the PA / kebele (in Tigray) in other Regions) – size around 8-10,000 people.
wereda	district (administrative level below the Zone) – population size varies from less than 20,000 to more than 200,000.

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RRN

Background

The Relief and Rehabilitation Network was conceived in 1993 and launched in 1994 as a mechanism for professional information exchange in the expanding field of humanitarian aid. The need for such a mechanism was identified in the course of research undertaken by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) on the changing role of NGOs in relief and rehabilitation operations, and was developed in consultation with other Networks operated within ODI. Since April 1994, the RRN has produced publications in three different formats, in French and English: Good Practice Reviews, Network Papers and Newsletters. The RRN is now in its second three-year phase (1996-1999), supported by four new donors – DANIDA, SIDA (Sweden), the Department of Foreign Affairs (Ireland), and the Department for International Development (UK). Over the three year phase, the RRN will seek to expand its reach and relevance amongst humanitarian agency personnel and to further promote good practice.

Objective

To improve aid policy and practice as it is applied in complex political emergencies.

Purpose

To contribute to individual and institutional learning by encouraging the exchange and dissemination of information relevant to the professional development of those engaged in the provision of humanitarian assistance.

Activities

To commission, publish and disseminate analysis and reflection on issues of good practice in policy and programming in humanitarian operations, primarily in the form of written publications, in both French and English.

Target audience

Individuals and organisations actively engaged in the provision of humanitarian assistance at national and international, field-based and head office level in the 'North' and 'South'.

The Relief and Rehabilitation Network is supported by:

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
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