

Humanitarian Exchange

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About HPN

The Humanitarian Practice Network at the Overseas Development Institute is an independent forum where field workers, managers and policymakers in the humanitarian sector share information, analysis and experience. *The views and opinions expressed in HPN's publications do not necessarily state or reflect those of the Humanitarian Policy Group or the Overseas Development Institute.*



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This edition of *Humanitarian Exchange* focuses on the global food price crisis of 2007 and 2008. The sharp rise in food prices was mainly caused by a combination of reduced cereal stocks, increased demand and the rising price of oil, increasing the cost of fertiliser and stimulating the production of biofuels in the US. By 2008, the number of hungry people in the world had increased to over 1 billion, up from 850 million in early 2007.

Populations already affected by crisis were hardest hit. While globally the price of cereals has decreased, it remains high in many of these countries.

Articles in this issue explore the extent, scale and impact of the global food crisis on vulnerable populations, particularly city-dwellers – a neglected group in humanitarian response – subsistence farmers and pastoralists.

They explain how affected people reduced their food intake, changed their diet and reduced expenditure on basic goods such as healthcare and education; in some countries, migration, child labour and asset sales increased. Whilst there was general agreement among concerned actors on the need for a combined response to meet immediate food needs and to increase resilience through long-term investment in agriculture, market infrastructure and social protection, in practice the main response has been food aid and the provision of agricultural inputs. Locally, adjustments in



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safety net programmes, such as the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) in Ethiopia, have been difficult, and finding donors prepared to fund both short-term emergency response and longer-term programming has been challenging, as our article on Liberia shows. Overall, the articles in this issue highlight the ever-more urgent need for reform of the international food security architecture.

Other articles in this issue examine new funding mechanisms in Sudan and Zimbabwe, an innovative approach to assessment and programming in the Niger Delta, measures to help older people in Northern Uganda and the provision of child-friendly spaces in Darfur. Finally, we review relations between NGOs and the government in Afghanistan, and Save the Children's cash programming in the wake of Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar.

As always, we welcome any comments or feedback, which can be sent to hpn@odi.org.uk or to The Coordinator, Humanitarian Practice Network, 111 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7JD, UK.

THE GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS

The global food crisis: an overview

Susanne Jaspars and Steve Wiggins, ODI

The increase in food prices in 2007 and 2008 has been widely documented, and has been the subject of many macro-economic simulations and, more recently, field studies by a number of different agencies. It attracted the attention of the international community to global problems of food insecurity, and highlighted the inadequacies of the international system of response. This article gives a brief overview of the causes and impact of the sharp rise in food prices, the international response and some of the key lessons learnt.

The causes and impact of the global food crisis

The food price spike of 2007–2008 can be seen as a sharp and short-lived increase in prices superimposed on a medium-term trend of rising prices that began as early as 2001 – see Figure 1.¹

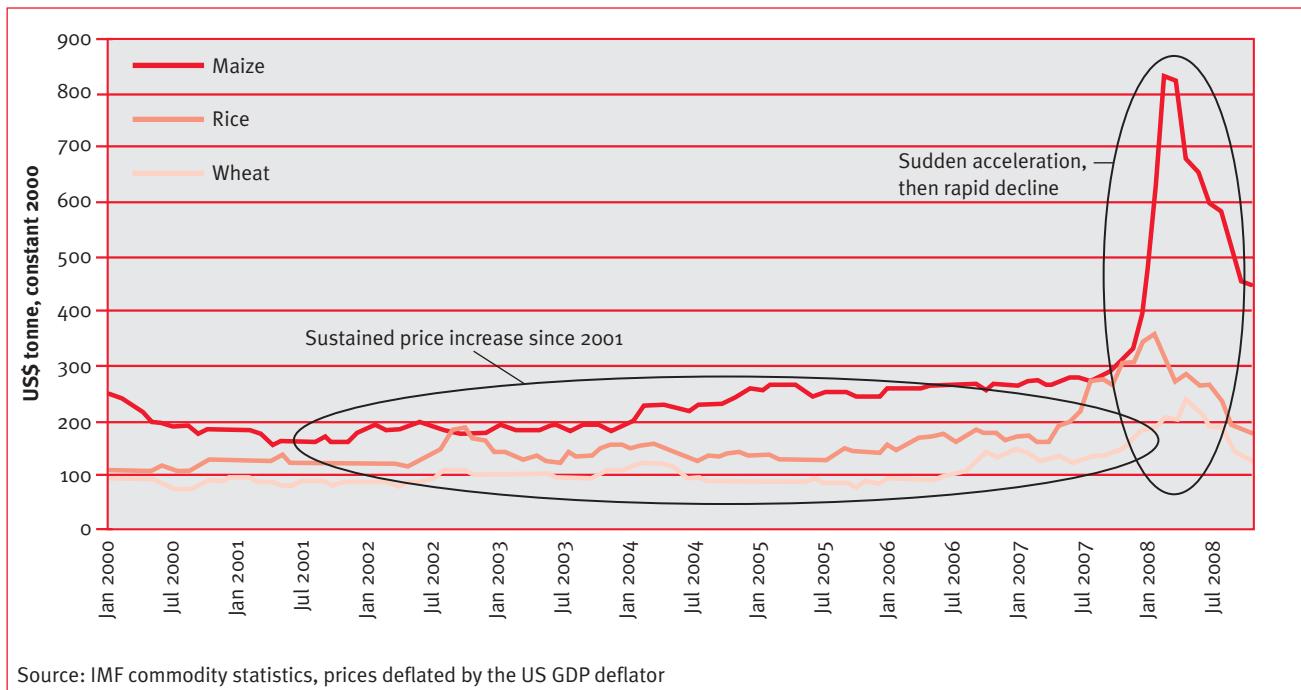
The sustained increases in the prices of grains on world markets since 2001 have been partly caused by the falling value of the US dollar against other trading currencies, increased demand resulting from strong economic growth and, perhaps of most significance, a slowdown in the

growth of cereals production since the mid-1980s. For almost two decades, production has grown at a slower rate than population growth. Stocks have declined since 2000, from around 30% of annual use to as little as 15% in 2007.

Reduced stocks meant that there was little resilience in the face of the mainly short-term triggers that arose from 2005 onwards. These included consecutive harvest failures in the important wheat-exporting countries of Australia, Russia and Ukraine, so that world cereal production fell in 2006 and 2007. The rising price of oil had two important impacts on agricultural production: increasing the price of nitrogenous fertiliser, pushing up production costs; and stimulating the production in the US of ethanol, a biofuel, from maize, which would scarcely be worthwhile at lower costs of oil and gasoline.

As the rise in the prices of grains accelerated, some countries reacted by banning or limiting their exports of grain, or importing additional supplies over and above usual imports. These responses pushed prices even higher on the world market, especially for rice. Prices of grains on futures markets rose even more as investors

Figure 1: Rising food prices since January 2000



Source: IMF commodity statistics, prices deflated by the US GDP deflator

¹ Two of the best analyses of the causes of the price spike are Philip C. Abbott, Christopher Hurt and Wallace E. Tyner, *What's Driving Food Prices?*, Report for the Farm Foundation, July 2008, and Ronald Trostle, *Global Agricultural Supply and Demand: Factors Contributing to the*

Recent Increase in Food Commodity Prices, WRS-0801, Report from the Economic Research Service, US Department of Agriculture, Washington DC, May 2008.

sought returns on commodities in preference to stocks and shares. Even if the futures prices had little effect on spot markets, they contributed to general alarm.

Increasing food prices make it more difficult for poor people to meet their food needs. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the number of under-nourished people in the world increased by 75 million in 2007, to reach 923m. The biggest increases were in Asia, the Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa. Much of this growth is attributed to increased food prices, compounding trends of rising numbers of people suffering from chronic food insecurity.

The impact of the price rises has varied between countries, depending in part on the sensitivity of local

markets to global price movements and the degree to which countries are dependent on food imports. As Hanna Mattinen's article explains, Liberia – a country heavily dependent on imported food – has suffered badly, while in the Central African Republic, where the economy is based on agriculture and domestic production meets a greater proportion of food needs, impacts have been more limited. In many cases, already vulnerable countries or population groups, such as those affected by conflict or repeated natural disasters, women-headed households and the urban poor, were expected to be hardest-hit. Most of the 30 countries and territories identified by the World Food Programme (WFP) as at risk are already of humanitarian concern, including Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Haiti, Kenya, Liberia, Niger, the Palestinian territories, Somalia and Zimbabwe. Many are already on FAO's list of countries in crisis requiring external assistance. Even meeting existing needs became difficult as global food costs rose. WFP had to raise an additional \$750m to cover existing programmes, and the agency's total budget increased from \$3 billion to \$6bn in a matter of months in 2008.²

Many studies were done to simulate the impact of increased food prices, with urban, displaced, pastoralists and smallholder farmers expected to be worst-affected. Recent field studies have confirmed these assumptions, and also show that people affected by the price increases responded by reducing the quantity and diversity of their diet.³ We have also seen reduced expenditure on healthcare, education and other basic goods. In their article, Cindy Holleman and Grainne Moloney explain how

² Speech by John Powell at a conference organised by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the 'Global Food Situation: Challenges for Humanitarian Assistance', November 2008.

³ See for example ACF, *Feeding Hunger and Insecurity. The Global Food Price Crisis: A Summary of Action Against Hunger Research in Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Central African Republic and Liberia*, 2008; and Hanna Mattinen in this issue.



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A feeding programme in Manila in May 2008

Somalis reacted to increases in the price of imported rice, the main staple food in northern and central Somalia, by reducing non-food purchases and buying less of some food items, turning to cheaper foods (locally produced sorghum) and eating lower-quality cereals. Children have been taken out of school and purchases of medicine have declined. Riots and civil disturbances took place in urban areas in many low- and middle-income countries in 2008, including Bangladesh, Côte d'Ivoire, Haiti, Indonesia and Mauritania.

increasing food prices make it more difficult for poor people to meet their food needs

The global response to the crisis

Several high-level meetings have been convened in an effort to develop an international response to the food price crisis. As David Nabarro and Marianne Muller describe in their article, in April 2008 the UN established the High Level Task Force (HTLF) on the global food security crisis. This led to the Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA) to promote a unified response. The following June, representatives from 180 countries met in Rome, and at the G-8 summit in Japan in July leaders confirmed the need for support for smallholder farmers. They also called for the removal of export restrictions, the sustainable use of biofuels and steps to address the influence of speculative capital. In January 2009, governments, civil society, the private sector and donors met in Madrid, where they reaffirmed their commitment to addressing global food insecurity.

A general consensus has emerged within the international community about the need for a 'twin-track approach' to meet immediate food needs and promote longer-term

resilience. This was first proposed by FAO, for food security responses to protracted crises. In the CFA, key components of the twin-track approach include:

- *Meeting the immediate needs of vulnerable populations:* emergency food assistance, nutrition, safety nets, the provision of agricultural inputs and services, adjustments in trade and tax policy and steps to manage the macro-economic implications of price rises, for example holding down inflation and addressing balance of payments issues.
- *Building longer-term resilience:* increase food production, especially by small farmers, manage food stocks more effectively, and adopt less ambitious targets for biofuels production. Social protection should be expanded and targeted at the most food-insecure and vulnerable people.

In reality, emergency food assistance and short-term agricultural support (seeds and fertiliser) formed the main response to the crisis. WFP raised the additional \$750m it needed to meet its existing emergency caseload, plus an additional \$450m for newly food-insecure people (a total of \$1.2bn). Other key actors in the response have been UNICEF, the FAO, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.⁴ Donor support has, however, fallen far short of the \$25–40bn a year called for at the Rome conference in June 2008. Pledges made at Rome came to \$13bn, and an additional \$10bn was promised at the G-8 summit, but only a small amount has so far been disbursed.⁵

At country level, many governments tried to manage price increases through a combination of policies affecting trade (reducing tariffs on imported grains and limiting or taxing grain exports), consumption (food subsidies, safety nets, tax reductions) and production (input subsidies and producer price support). India and Ethiopia released public stocks and offered subsidies on staple foods, but very few vulnerable countries had sufficient food reserves to draw on. Existing safety nets and social protection programmes have been adapted or expanded (the effects of price rises on the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) Ethiopia are discussed in Matt Hobson's article). In general, developing countries have responded by shifting from a reliance on the market for food to a focus on self-sufficiency.

The present – and predictions for the future

It now appears that the price spike in 2008 was the result of an unusual combination of short-term factors. Global food prices decreased dramatically in the latter half of 2008, as producers in OECD countries responded strongly to the higher prices. Even sharper falls have occurred in oil and minerals prices, and in the price of fertilizer. Prices are expected to continue to decrease in 2009 as a result of the global economic downturn, though the recession will itself affect the food security of people in some low-income or vulnerable countries, reducing investment, increasing unemployment, restricting the availability of

⁴ ALNAP, *The Global Food Price Crisis*, p. 43.

⁵ FAO, *Country Responses to the Food Security Crisis: Nature and Preliminary Implications of the Policies Pursued*, December 2008, p. 20.

credit and putting pressure on aid and remittances.⁶ It also makes it even less likely that the amounts governments have pledged to address the food crisis will materialise.

Food prices nonetheless remain above the long-term trend, and have not decreased everywhere. In many of the most vulnerable countries prices are still well above normal, and in some – including Ethiopia, Haiti, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and Zimbabwe – prices have actually continued to increase.⁷ Poor harvests due to lack of seeds and fertilizer in 2008 mean that the effects of the food crisis will persist well into this year.

food prices remain above the long-term trend, and have not decreased everywhere

In the medium term, international prices of cereals are expected to stay 20–30% higher than levels seen in 2001/02 largely owing to expected higher oil prices, which will push up production costs and make biofuel production attractive. Prices may also become more volatile if a more variable climate translates into more frequent harvest failures, in the absence of greater stocks and their better management.

Lessons for food security programming in emergencies

Given that we should expect continued instability in commodity markets, it is important that the international community learns the lessons from the food crisis of 2008. In fact, the 2008 crisis told us little that we did not already know about the nature of vulnerability, the appropriate responses to it and the need for reform of the international food security system. Rather, it has given the international community momentum to actually do something about these problems – momentum that should not be lost.

First, the food crisis has reinforced the need to think beyond food aid in addressing food insecurity. Food aid was once again the dominant response to food crisis, with less attention given to addressing problems of access to food and nutrition. The Sphere Food Security Standards emphasise the importance of good analysis to inform response, and stress that a range of options needs to be considered to address food insecurity, including income support (cash transfers, vouchers, public works) and agricultural and market support. The crisis should provide an incentive to look again at the appropriateness of food aid in tackling food insecurity, in particular longer-term programmes such as food-based safety nets. This must be done now, as lower global food prices are likely to restore

⁶ Steve Wiggins, Sharada Keats and Marcella Vigneri, *Impact of the Global Financial and Economic Situation on Agricultural Markets and Food Security*, ODI, forthcoming.

⁷ WFP, *Recent Food Price Developments in Most Vulnerable Countries*, Issue No. 2, December 2008.

global food surpluses, in turn determining the use and allocation of food aid.⁸

Second, we need to combine responses that meet immediate needs with measures to address the structural issues that cause food insecurity. The food crisis has led to a renewed emphasis on smallholder agriculture and social protection. It has also highlighted that agricultural support involves not just providing inputs, but also supporting appropriate policies and strengthening institutions, for example to improve access to credit, markets and land titles. This is equally applicable to any food crisis, including the protracted conflict-related crises that represent the most severe food emergencies. Initial indications are that, for many donors, combining simultaneous assistance to meet immediate needs with steps to promote resilience (or address structural causes) is still a considerable challenge.

Third, the food crisis has highlighted the plight of the world's growing urban populations, and their vulnerability

⁸ Ed Clay, *WFP: Thinking Beyond the Current Funding Crisis*, written evidence submitted to the UK House of Commons International Development Committee, May 2008.

to economic change. Given that urban populations have been amongst the worst-affected by the food crisis, it is curious that recommendations for long-term support for urban populations seem to be limited to social protection and support for urban agriculture, rather than laying the foundations for a more sustainable urban economy through market and trade-based livelihoods. Humanitarians, geared up as they are for rural crises, are ill-equipped to deal with emergencies in urban settings. This is a major gap, and one which the humanitarian community must address.

Finally, the international community struggled to address the problems with the existing food security architecture. The UN had to create a high-level task force, despite having at least three agencies concerned with food, and several others concerned with dimensions of food security and nutrition. This indicates the need for reform if food insecurity is to be addressed adequately in future.

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The implications of the food crisis for humanitarian response

David Nabarro and Marianne Muller, HLTF

Massive levels of food insecurity for hundreds of millions of people by no means constitutes a new crisis. Even before the upward spiral of food prices over the past few years, more than 800 million people were suffering from hunger and malnutrition. But the shocking price peaks of 2008 triggered wide recognition that the world needed to respond quickly and comprehensively, or else risk millions more becoming hungry. At the same time, the opportunity also emerged for the international community to demonstrate that it was capable of forming new partnerships and developing new approaches to address the deep-rooted problems of the global food system, and tackle worldwide food insecurity with joint action and common resolve.

The international response to hunger and food insecurity

In April 2008, the Chief Executives Board of the United Nations system met in Berne in Switzerland to decide how the international system could best respond and prevent a further escalation of the crisis. It agreed on rapid action to try to halt a major increase in world hunger, and at the same time strengthen its efforts to better fulfil the global commitments to food security and poverty reduction outlined in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Board concluded that a coordinated, consolidated and coherent approach was both essential and urgent. It created a High Level Task (HLTF), chaired by the United Nations Secretary-General, and comprising the heads of the UN bodies, the Bretton Woods institutions, the World

Trade Organisation and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The HLTF developed a Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA) to address the immediate and longer-term impacts of the food crisis and contribute to global food security.

The Comprehensive Framework for Action

The CFA is an opportunity to bridge humanitarian and development agendas, drawing on the comparative advantage and knowledge of each participating organisation, their partners and all stakeholders involved in the response to the food crisis. It sets out a programme of coordinated actions and outcomes. As such, it is an example of what the United Nations is trying to achieve in terms of its own reform objectives, namely delivering as one in areas that are fundamental to all human life: food and nutrition security.

The HLTF recognised that, despite the broad range of policies and actions already under way to respond to the food price challenge, there was a need for a consensus document that presented a common understanding of the drivers of the crisis, and laid out the actions that needed to be taken, both to meet the immediate needs of vulnerable populations and to build longer-term resilience. The result is a framework through which Task Force members stand together to advocate for urgent policy adjustments and actions and mobilise the support and resources to make such changes possible.

The CFA, which was launched in July 2008, represents a synchronised approach to social protection, food systems, small-scale agriculture, markets and trade. It presents 56 urgent actions to meet two sets of outcomes. While both require simultaneous attention, the first set focuses on immediately increasing food availability and access to food and nutrition support. Actions might include emergency food assistance and safety nets (school feeding, adjusting pensions and existing social protection programmes), supporting smallholder food production through the provision of inputs, adjusting tax and trade policy and managing macro-economic implications. The second set addresses structural issues, and aims to contribute to sustainable improvements in global food and nutrition security. Actions include the expansion of social protection, promoting sustainable smallholder food production, improving international markets and developing an international consensus on biofuels. The policy response is therefore on three tracks: responding to immediate needs, paying attention to the longer-term underlying causes of vulnerability and ensuring that markets and systems of trade work for, not against, the interests of poor people. The right to food figures as a basis for analysis, action and accountability.

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and trade**

The CFA also presents a series of actions to strengthen and coordinate assessments, monitoring and surveillance. These are neither exhaustive nor exclusive, and are not meant to be universally applied. They are intended to guide national food, nutrition and agriculture policies and priorities, and act as a reference point for the joint, coordinated and multi-stakeholder work that is already taking place or must be initiated at the country, regional and global levels.

Actions to date

Like most crises, high food prices helped to galvanise high-level political support. In June 2008, 180 delegations gathered for a World Food Security Summit in Rome called for short-term food assistance, sustained investment in agricultural production and research and greater coordination among international actors. At their meeting in Hokkaido, Japan, in July, the G-8 proposed a Global Partnership for Agriculture and Food to lend high-level political – and one would hope financial – support to country-led processes and institutions, and ensure that resources were put to work in useful ways. Similar discussions were held at the African Union Assembly in Sharm el Sheikh in Egypt at the end of June, and the food crisis was also a key theme in the UN General Assembly's sober midpoint review of the MDGs in September. However, as is typical in crisis response, the deeper and

more difficult issues, including trade barriers, biofuels and sustained financial commitments, were left unresolved.

On the ground, international agencies were able to boost their operations to help meet rising need. The World Food Programme raised more than \$1.2 billion for emergency food operations in 62 countries, and the Food and Agriculture Organisation assisted small farmers in 28 countries with fertilizer. In May, the World Bank launched a New Deal for Global Food Policy, including a ten-point action plan and \$1.2bn of financial support to countries affected by the food crisis. The IMF plugged balance of payments gaps for low-income countries suffering from food price shocks. The promise of coordinated action helped to generate some of the political and financial support that allowed such activities to take place.

Despite these efforts, the flow of overseas development assistance for food security and agriculture has been extremely slow. Resources to boost agricultural production with subsidised seeds, fertilizer and credit to farmers did not fully materialise for 2008's key planting seasons. In order to protect their own food supplies, some governments felt they had to impose import and export restrictions that did not help attempts to drive prices lower.

The HLTF has initiated intensified coordination in a subset of countries experiencing both immediate and longer-term impacts from the crisis and/or where preliminary assessments have already taken place, and there is good potential for greater partnerships. By 'intensified coordination', the HLTF means synergised working to support national authorities, engage with a broad range of stakeholders, including private entities, civil society, regional institutions (including development banks) and donor agencies, and encourage the prompt implementation of actions. The subset includes countries of humanitarian concern, such as Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Haiti and Liberia. Elsewhere, in Somalia and the Palestinian Territories for instance, new emergency food aid programmes have been created. Meanwhile, in September 2008 officials from the European Commission asked the UN system, the World Bank and some regional organisations to help them identify options for the rapid spending of one billion euros in response to the immediate impact of the food crisis on vulnerable populations. The Commission's focus is on safety nets and boosting food production and marketing among smallholder farmers.

Looking ahead

The CFA is based on the assumption that the current food crisis represents an urgent structural challenge that must be addressed in a concerted, comprehensive and coordinated way. In the humanitarian context, this requires recognising that we must go beyond the immediate crisis response, with an approach rooted in a deeper understanding of the drivers and consequences of poverty and vulnerability. It also involves putting government activities at the centre and expanding partnerships to include development actors, financial institutions and the private sector. It means ensuring that the crisis response promotes longer-term developmental and economic objectives.

we must ensure that the crisis response promotes longer-term developmental and economic objectives

While global food prices have eased significantly from their record highs in the first part of 2008, this does not mean that leaders and policy-makers can back away from their commitments. Even at lower levels, prices remain too high for poor people all over the world, and hunger is expected to continue rising. Even more worrying, in the medium to longer term food prices are expected to go back up. Other challenges – the financial crisis and climate change, to name just two – will threaten global food security for generations to come. This means that there is a need to focus on options for increasing the resilience of poor people so that they are less vulnerable to debt, forced migration, malnutrition or mortality. This includes expanding social protection, one of the cornerstones of the CFA. NGOs, UN agencies, development banks and others are seeking ways to improve the coverage and efficiency of social protection for poor people within the funds that are potentially available. Better to do this than to face greatly increased demands for humanitarian assistance.

Smallholder farmers, pastoralists and fisherfolk remain the primary focus of attention as population groups particularly affected by the food crisis. These groups comprise many of the poorest people in the world, yet they have also been bypassed by recent trends in assistance for agricultural and rural development. They need to be able to produce more and to access markets for their produce. Vulnerable groups like the urban poor and the displaced will also require additional attention.

The CFA is being realised through the efforts of many stakeholders – within civil society and NGOs, the private sector, farmers and other producer organisations as well as national authorities – with short- and long-term interventions. The notion of inclusive partnerships which can serve as the basis for a broad movement is critical here: the CFA should not be implemented as a ‘programme’, and humanitarians should be encouraged to seek ways of contributing to these partnerships at community and country levels. At a global level, this will require sustained political commitment, including by all HLTF partners. At every level, all parties must put governments at the centre and ensure that actions are based on needs and are country-led.

The HLTF is committed to an approach to coordination where national authorities are in the lead. External groups will work together through existing processes (usually the system that brings together UN Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators and World Bank Country Directors), as well as other established coordination mechanisms, including

the country-level IASC and the arrangements put in place within the framework of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, such as sectoral working groups and Joint Assistance Strategies. The collective work of the members – at country, regional and global level – will be supported by the HLTF Coordination Secretariat (consisting of around ten professionals) with elements in Rome (the principal hub), New York (with a special focus on support to the Secretary-General’s office), Washington and Geneva. The Secretariat will have five key functions.

- Monitor the situation in-country, support stronger country-led responses and track the overall response to the crisis (including resource flows).
- Encourage in-country partnerships to contribute towards achieving CFA outcomes.
- Maintain relationships with key outside stakeholders (the private sector, civil society (NGOs), regional bodies and member states in general (including major donors in particular)), and provide support as requested to the evolving Global Partnership on Agriculture and Food Security.
- Support the members of the HLTF on key policy and advocacy issues, including reporting, stocktaking, resource mobilisation and high-level conferences.
- Provide general support to the Secretary-General and the HLTF.

The Secretariat will also foster the evolution of a functioning Coordination Network made up of individuals from national authorities and institutions, NGO groups and country, regional and HQ staff of UN agencies, international financial institutions and the WTO, regional entities, foundations and research groups, private entities and donors.

The HLTF is not envisaged as a permanent fixture. HLTF members have decided not to establish new policy or fund-raising capacities for country-level work, nor do they want to see functions assumed by existing entities in the HLTF being duplicated. But the HLTF does anticipate the reinforcement and synergy of existing systems that encourage and support different aspects of country-level coordination. Business as usual does not seem sufficient, given the urgency and complexity of the tasks involved.

Conclusion

If there is a silver lining to the multiple clouds we face, it is that we have recognised their urgency and interconnectedness, and have tried to act more quickly, with greater coordination and with smarter and more efficient tools. If the current food crisis offers an opportunity, it is that we can demonstrate that the international community is interested and able to work together to address both the immediate and longer-term aspects of these structural crises, attacking poverty and vulnerability at its core.

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The global food price crisis and household hunger: a review of recent food security assessments

Issa Sanogo, WFP

The impact of the global food price shock at the macro level has been well researched.¹ Studies have sought to simulate the potential impacts of the crisis on countries and households. However, this work has lacked ground-truthing to assess the real impacts on households. This article seeks to fill this gap by summarising the key findings of recent household-level food security assessments initiated by WFP.² The objective of the assessments was to determine country-specific causes of food price increases, whether these increases were leading to significant changes in the food security status of households, and what mitigating responses might be necessary.

Findings of household-level impact assessments

Prior to launching field assessments, WFP conducted a global analysis to identify countries likely to be vulnerable to increased food and fuel prices, and therefore likely to see the biggest changes in their food security profiles. The hypothesis underlying the global analysis was that these countries would exhibit high levels of food insecurity even before the food and fuel price hikes, relied heavily on imported food and fuel commodities, had relatively large urban populations, were experiencing high inflationary pressures and had populations who spent a significant proportion of their incomes on food. Countries exhibiting a combination of these factors were ranked and then targeted for country-level assessments (Table 1).

Table 1: Countries most vulnerable to high food and fuel prices (ranked across rows and top down)

Eritrea	Madagascar	Gambia
Zimbabwe	Angola	Myanmar
Guinea	Mozambique	Kenya
São Tomé et Príncipe	Malawi	Nepal
DRC	Chad	Benin
Sierra Leone	Yemen	Mauritania
Zambia	Niger	Senegal
Burundi	Haiti	OPT
Ethiopia	Timor-Leste	Afghanistan
Tajikistan	Guinea-Bissau	Somalia

The country assessments were conducted between April and August 2008, using a proxy indicator, the food consumption score (FCS), to measure the diversity and frequency of food consumed within a seven-day recall period. The higher the score, the better the diet and the

¹ See the list of further reading at the end of this article.

² All the assessment reports are accessible at:

<http://www.wfp.org/english/?n=7325&RepType=Price%20Rise%20Impact>.

more food-secure the household. The findings are presented for three categories of countries:

- **Category 1:** countries where the major share of staple foods is imported from international markets (examples: Ethiopia, Liberia, Tajikistan).
- **Category 2:** countries where cereals in the core food basket are substitutes for internationally traded cereals (examples: Burkina Faso, Niger).
- **Category 3:** countries where the major share of staple foods is domestically produced rather than imported from international markets (examples: Burundi, Cambodia, Uganda).

in Pakistan, the number of households unable to afford healthcare increased from 6% to 30%

Impact on countries dependent on cereal imports

Countries dependent mostly on imported cereals (wheat, maize and rice) experienced substantial domestic price increases. Most of the countries where assessments were conducted fell into this category (Table 2). Average monthly price increases ranged from 30% in Nepal to almost 150% in Ethiopia. In Pakistan, increased informal cross-border trade with Afghanistan and reductions in import subsidies led to substantial increases in the price of wheat flour, the main staple food.

The impact on households' food security was consequently high. In Pakistan, the poorest quintile of households spent 13% more on food than two years earlier, to the detriment of health expenditure, as the number of households unable to afford healthcare increased from 6% to 30%. In Addis Ababa in Ethiopia, the proportion of households consuming an adequate diet (defined as FCS above 35) decreased from 64% to 40%. In Greater Monrovia in Liberia, the proportion of households with an adequate diet fell from 64% to 40%.

The demographic groups most affected include large families with high dependency ratios, women-headed or widowed households and other vulnerable groups such as orphans and HIV/AIDS-affected households. In livelihood terms, they are subsistence farming households, pastoralists, households relying on pensions and allowances, remittances or daily or casual labour and petty traders. Households with poor diets tend to report irregular school attendance and health centre visits due to insufficient purchasing power. They have fewer income

Table 2: Impacts of food price changes in countries dependent on internationally traded staples

Country	Main staple food item	Caloric contribution (%)	Average real price increase (2008/2007, %)	Expenditure on food (%)	Food insecurity status of households
Nepal	Rice Wheat	37 14	44 28	59% (and 73% for the poorest 20% of the population)	12.7% of urban households with poor FCS. 28% of rural households with poor FCS
Afghanistan	Wheat Rice	58 22	110 61	Increase of the share of expenditures on food from 40% to 78%	20 points increase of households with poor FCS
Pakistan	Wheat flour Rice	38 28	40 —	70% for the poorest households, a 10% increase for rural households	Increase from 23% to 28% of proportion of household with poor FCS
Tajikistan	Wheat	57	—	81% for rural households, 62% for urban households	11% and 23% of rural households with poor and borderline FCS, respectively. 15% and 22% of urban households with poor and borderline FCS, respectively
Liberia	Rice Cassava Wheat	28 21 9	— — —	Share of food in total expenditure decreased from 57% to 50% in favour of non-food expenditures (91% of households witnessed an increase in total expenditures)	Increased rate of poor FCS households in poor neighbourhoods from 4% in December 2006 to 8% in June 2008 in urban areas. Decrease of the % of people with good FCS from 64% to 40% in urban areas
Ethiopia	Maize Wheat Sorghum	21 18 10	147 74 133	68% for poor households in Addis Ababa	% of households with FCS increased from 3% to 5%; those with borderline FCS increased from 9% to 22% between January and July 2008
Lesotho	Maize	59	—	44% (98% of households witnessed increased food expenditures)	11% and 36% of urban households with poor and borderline FCS
Yemen	Wheat	44	—	65%	18% and 25% of households with poor and borderline FCS
Palestine (OPT)	Wheat flour Rice	38 7	90 37	80% of households spend more than 45% of incomes on food	No estimate

sources, and own fewer assets such as animals and farm equipment. Recourse to negative coping strategies like increased school drop-outs, increased migration, child labour and the sale of economic assets was reported in Lesotho, Liberia, Nepal, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Yemen.

In cases where assessments covered both rural and urban areas, the impact of price increases was higher for urban dwellers in absolute terms. The proportion of urban households with poor diet was 37%, compared to 34% in rural areas. In Pakistan, the price shock was most strongly felt in urban areas in terms of real income and reductions in caloric intake because urban dwellers spend more on food compared to rural households. However, expenditure

increases were more pronounced in rural areas, with a 10% increase in food expenditure and a 4% increase in total expenditure.

Impact on countries dependent on substitutes for internationally traded cereals

The transmission of global cereal price increases to domestic prices was higher for millet and sorghum than for commodities that are not traded internationally. In Sahelian countries, where households' caloric intake depends essentially on millet and sorghum, which are widely traded regionally, prices increased by a monthly average of between 10% and 20% in Burkina Faso and Niger, compared to 2007. The regional cereal supply and

Table 3: Impacts of food price changes in countries dependent on substitutes for traded staples

Country	Main staple food item	Caloric contribution (%)	Average real price increase (2008/2007, %)	Expenditure on food (%)	Food insecurity status of households
Burkina Faso	Sorghum	28	13	75	
	Millet	23	9		
	Maize	14	36		
	Rice	7	20		
Niger	Millet	48	12	63 (90% of households witnessed (an increase))	36% of households with poor FCS in July 2008 against 18% in December 2007
	Sorghum	12	17		
	Rice	8	18		

demand conditions are the main drivers of such price increases. However, the deterioration in purchasing power did not translate into a significant reallocation of expenditures to the detriment of non-food spending, such as education and health in Niger. About 90% of the surveyed households experienced an increase in their expenditures, and 46% reported an income decrease between December 2007 and July 2008. Households tended to reallocate their expenses within the food basket, cutting back on milk products and condiments. For example, the proportion of households shifting to less-preferred food increased from 26% to 49%, whereas the proportion of households that reduced consumption went up from 23% to 33%.

Food insecurity has deepened in Niger, with about an 18-point increase in the proportion of households with poor diet, mostly in rural areas. The proportion of households with acceptable diet decreased from 66% in December 2007 to 52% in July 2008. In livelihoods terms, the most affected households are petty traders, wage labourers, subsistence farmers and peri-urban agriculturalists.

Impact on countries which rely more on domestic production

The transmission of global prices to domestic prices was low for staple foods and high for cash crops. Staple food (plantains, cassava and sweet potatoes) prices have followed local supply and demand conditions and the global price transmission has been muted or delayed by low price increases in Uganda or even price decreases in

Burundi (see Table 4). However, moderate increases in maize prices were observed in Uganda, largely due to regional demand. Rice prices almost doubled in Cambodia, a net rice-exporting country, but this was offset by concomitant increases in incomes.

in Burundi, the proportion of surveyed urban households with good diet ranges from 60% to 85%

Households that rely more on domestic production than imported commodities have suffered less from international price hikes. The impact of global food price increases is delayed as consumers seek cheaper substitutes and shift consumption to locally produced staples in Uganda and Burundi. In Uganda, almost 75% of food needs for the majority of households are met by own production. Estimates suggest that a 10% increase in the cost of the food basket results in a 6% decline in households' purchasing power in Uganda. In Burundi, the proportion of surveyed urban households with good diet is relatively high, ranging from 60% to 85%.

The most affected households were urban poor, including casual and unskilled labourers and petty traders, landless rural households and subsistence farmers. In Uganda, the

Table 4: Impacts of food price changes on countries dependent on domestic production

Country	Main staple food item	Caloric contribution (%)	Average real price increase (2008/2007, %)	Expenditure on food (%)	Food insecurity status of households
Uganda	Sorghum	18	0	54.8 (5.5% reduction of purchasing power)	No estimates
	Millet	13	5		
	Maize	11	3		
Burundi	Sweet potatoes	19	-49	60 (95% of households witnessed (an increase))	22% of surveyed households in urban areas with poor or borderline FCS
	Beans	18	40		
	Cassava	15	-9		
Cambodia	Rice	69	74	70 (92% of households witnessed (an increase))	19% of surveyed households (nationwide) with poor or borderline FCS

Note: The average real price is calculated over the 12 months preceding the study.

most affected households (conflict-affected households, institutional populations in boarding schools, universities, prisons, military facilities and hospitals and the urban poor) are net buyers of maize. They tended to turn to non-traded cheaper foods (plantain, cassava, sweet potatoes). There has been no major change in food sources in Burundi, though households appear to have reduced the amounts they purchase.

What have we learned?

Comparing assessment findings is problematic because of methodological differences between the various studies. Findings should also be interpreted with caution, as most of the survey tools emphasised food-related issues at the expense of the non-food aspects of household wellbeing. Nevertheless, the following recommendations can be drawn from the few assessments reviewed in this article.

First, patterns of global food price transmission to domestic economies call for a diversification of local production to reduce vulnerability to international price fluctuations. The transmission rates for import-dependent countries are substantially higher than in other countries. Consequently, the impact on household food security is much higher for those depending on internationally traded food commodities than for those who rely more on domestic production.

Second, social safety net programmes must be expanded, both in rural and urban areas, to address increased food insecurity. The global food price crisis has in many cases compounded the impacts of existing shocks, such as drought, floods and conflict. Furthermore, increased food insecurity has proved to be of as much concern in urban as in rural areas.

Third, pursuing mitigating measures through emergency food aid to protect livelihoods will reduce food insecurity and malnutrition. Such measures are indispensable to prevent the use of negative coping mechanisms. So far, there has been widespread use of coping strategies that may increase the risk of malnutrition in the short term. Assessments indicate that households shift primarily to less costly, less preferred and less nutritious foods, increase debt to acquire food or reduce the number and size of meals. Use of negative coping strategies is witnessed particularly in food import-dependent countries. As the global financial crisis gathers pace, many countries may be forced to adopt more severe coping strategies.

Finally, continued monitoring is essential: the crisis is not over. Recent domestic food price decreases remain limited and price levels are still high compared to just a couple of years ago. In many countries in East and West Africa, prices are still going up.

How is WFP responding to high food prices?

WFP provided support to 23 countries in direct response to high food prices, starting in mid-2008. WFP assistance covered the increased costs of purchasing commodities and transport services, as well as including a variety of new projects. Key features of WFP's response include:

- Ramping up food assistance to urban areas where food is unaffordable and there is risk of further discontent (e.g. Afghanistan, Djibouti, Ghana, Haiti, Liberia, Mozambique and the occupied Palestinian Territories).
- Extending school feeding to the school holidays (Guinea, Haiti and Senegal), and using schools as a platform to provide take-home rations to vulnerable families (e.g. Ghana, Liberia, Mauritania, the occupied Palestinian Territories, Pakistan and Tajikistan).
- Providing supplementary rations of nutritious food to malnourished children and women (e.g. Djibouti, Ghana, Liberia, Mozambique, Nepal, Pakistan, Senegal, Tajikistan and Yemen).
- Accelerating voucher programmes to enable people to access food through the market (e.g. Djibouti and Senegal), and providing cash transfers to support work activities, including urban youth employment projects (e.g. Ghana, Liberia, Mauritania, Mozambique and Nepal).
- Expanding food for work programmes in support of efforts by governments and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) to increase agricultural production (e.g. Guinea and Senegal), or to build farm-to-market roads and other community infrastructure (e.g. Haiti, Liberia and Pakistan).
- Supplying small-scale food reserves that communities can draw upon to help them cope with price or other shocks, and combining efforts with FAO and governments to provide food with seeds, tools and support to build roads and market infrastructure to help subsistence farmers (e.g. Mauritania, Senegal and Uganda).

Assistance provided to affected populations is yielding tangible results, suggesting there is a need to maintain support. For example, in Mauritania WFP facilitated the development of a comprehensive and specific government plan to reduce the nationwide impact of food price rises. The country was the first in the region to tackle the issue. Beneficiaries reported that general food distributions had prevented asset sales and skipped meals. Elsewhere, WFP country offices in Benin, Ghana, Kenya, Pakistan, Sierra Leone and Tajikistan were able to scale up Food for Education programmes, allowing children to stay in school. In Pakistan, beneficiaries reported that the wheat being provided enabled them to build up savings, which could then be used for basic healthcare and education expenditures. In Nepal, a road construction project has reduced the walking time and transportation costs involved in reaching the nearest market.

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Somalia's growing urban food security crisis

Cindy Holleman and Grainne Moloney, FSAU

The current humanitarian disaster in Somalia is one of the worst in the world today, with 3.2 million people, or 42% of the entire population, in need of emergency livelihood and life-saving assistance. Somalia has suffered recurring humanitarian emergencies over the last 18 years; rates of acute malnutrition are above emergency levels, and chronic food insecurity affects the rural population. The current humanitarian crisis, however, is unique in that, for the first time, a significant number of people in crisis are urban poor, who are struggling to cope with sustained hyperinflation in food prices. The urban food crisis is widespread, affecting 25% of the total urban population, or 705,000 people, of which 565,000 are identified as in Acute Food and Livelihood Crisis (AFLC) and 140,000 in Humanitarian Emergency.¹ In addition, according to UNHCR another one million people have been internally displaced.

Somalia's soaring food prices

Food prices in Somalia, both local and imported, are at record levels. Cereal prices increased by between 100%

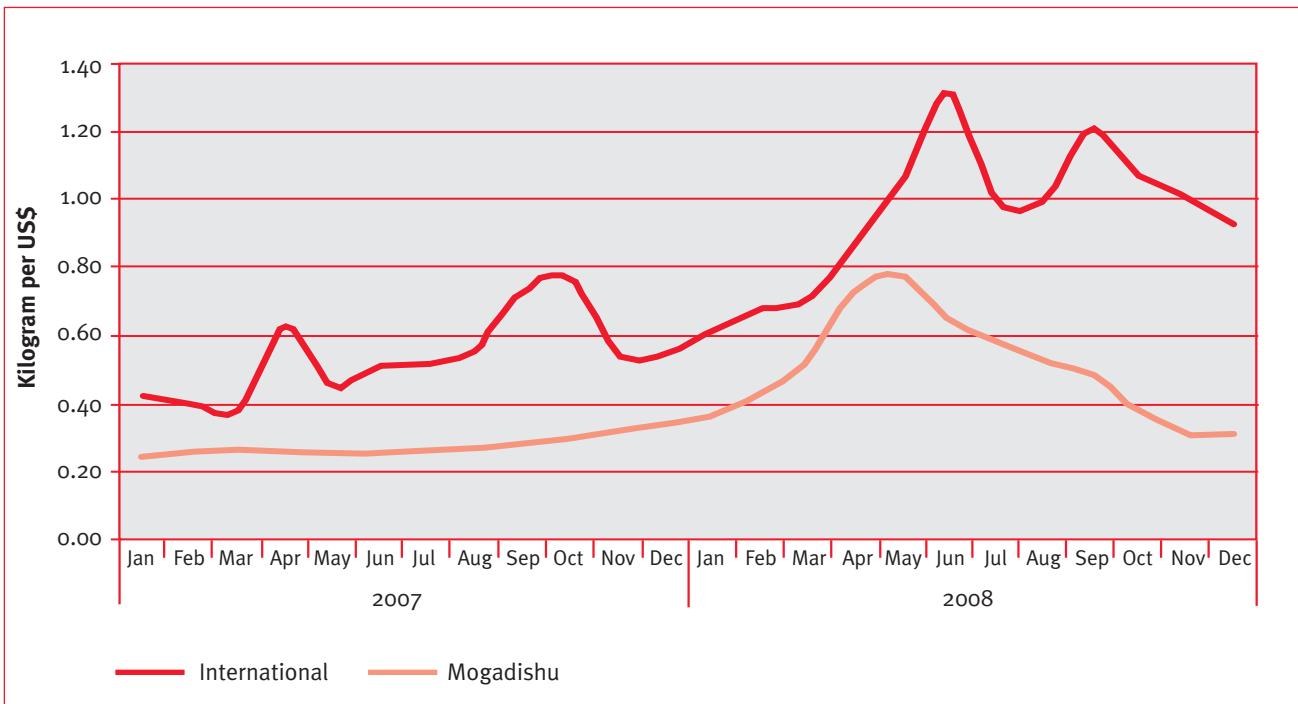
and 160% in 2007 and 130–190% in 2008. Although prices have since declined slightly, they are all still 450–780% above the long-term trend. Other imported food commodities, including basic items like vegetable oil and sugar, have also increased significantly in price.

Current levels of food price hyperinflation in Somalia are only partly attributed to rising global food prices. A net importer of cereals, Somalia imports roughly 60% of its food requirements, mostly rice and wheat flour. Although cereal prices follow similar increased trends, increases in Somalia not only exceed global cereal price increases, but the relative price differential has significantly increased over the last six months. For example, comparing international rice prices (white broken rice, Bangkok f.o.b.) with Mogadishu rice retail prices, the average price differential was .26kg/\$ during the period January 2007 to March 2008, but this increased to an average price differential of .61kg/\$ between June 2008 and December 2008 (see Figure 1). The cost of one kilo of rice more than tripled between January and June 2008, from 14,200 SoSh to 43,000 SoSh.

The food price crisis is magnified in Somalia due to a number of compounding macro-economic shocks, primarily driven by increased conflict and civil insecurity, the worst the country has seen since the collapse of the state in the early 1990s. The most devastating macro-economic shock is the dramatic devaluation in the Somali Shilling. Following uncontrolled and excessive printing of the local currency, notes began to flood the markets in 2007, rapidly increasing

¹ Acute Food and Livelihood Crisis (AFLC) and Humanitarian Emergency (HE) refer to two phase classifications within the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), originally developed and implemented by FSAU (FAO) in 2004. AFLC (Phase 3) is defined as 'Highly stressed and critical lack of food access with high and above usual malnutrition and accelerated depletion of livelihood assets that, if continued, will slide the population into Phase 4 or 5 and/or likely result in chronic poverty'. Humanitarian Emergency (Phase 4) is defined as 'Severe lack of food access with excess mortality, very high and increasing malnutrition, and irreversible livelihood asset-stripping'.

Figure 1: Comparison of rice prices: International (Bangkok FOB) and Mogadishu



Source: FAO Statistics and FSAU Market Price Monitoring System, 2009

the local money supply and sending the value of the currency into freefall. The Somali Shilling depreciated by 145% against the US dollar in 2007 and 150% in 2008. This has made imports more expensive, and the increased costs have been passed on to consumers in higher prices.

In addition, the freight transport costs associated with importing commodities increased significantly in 2008, due to increased piracy in the waters off Somalia. Since early 2008, there have been over 100 pirate attacks, with 40 successful hijackings of cargo ships and freighters destined either for Somalia or passing through international waters nearby; 14 ships and over 200 hostages are currently still being held for ransom. Freight costs have increased significantly as a result of the greater financial risk and the costs of protective escorts. Although the recent spate of audacious hijackings has attracted international attention and prompted several countries, including France and India, to deploy military escorts and patrols, piracy off Somalia's coast continues. Within Somalia, increased civil insecurity and conflict, especially in southern and central regions, resulted in an increase in the number of road blocks and 'check points', with high levels of extortion and taxation. This has resulted in higher transportation costs involved in moving commodities from one location to another, leading to further inflationary effects.

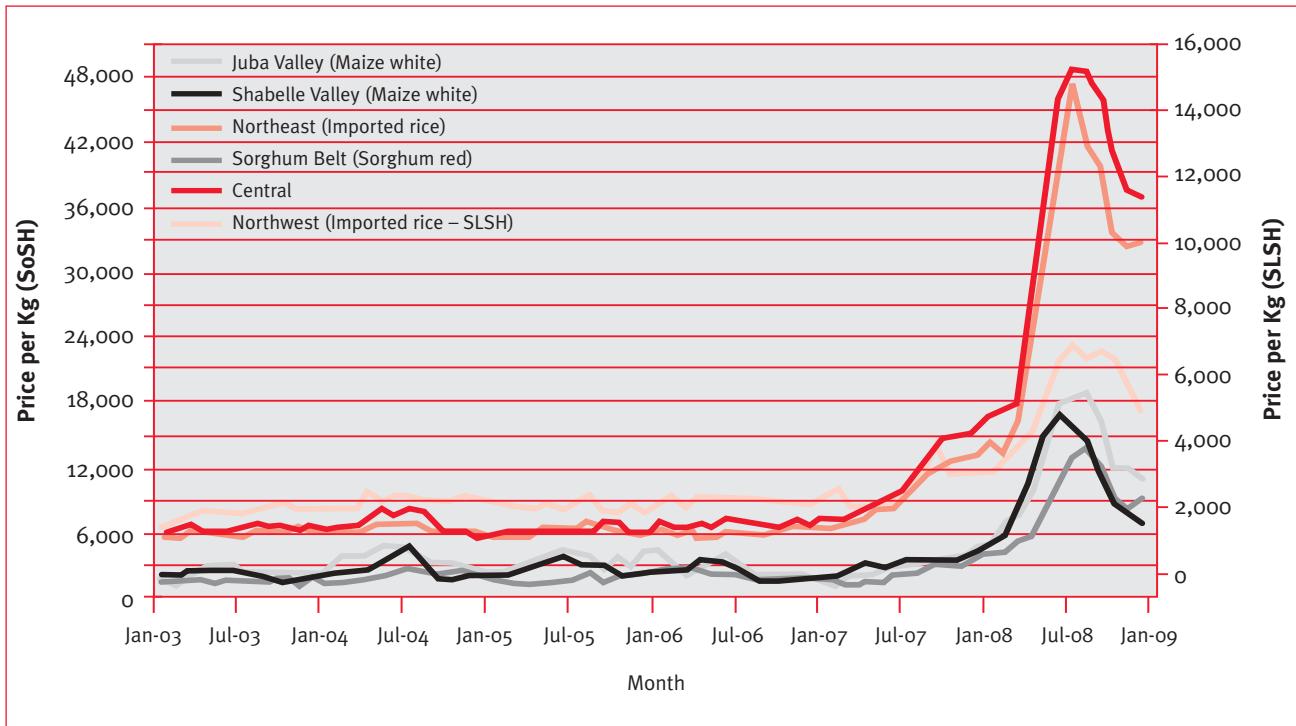
There are other inflationary pressures on food prices in Somalia. The sustained increase in the price of imported rice, the main staple food for most people living in northern and central Somalia, has forced many to switch to cheaper locally produced cereals, especially sorghum. The cost of one kilo of rice more than tripled, from 14,200 SoSh to 43,000 SoSh in the six months from January to June 2008. Locally produced cereal supplies, however, are significantly below normal, due

to successive seasons of rain failure and drought, combined with inefficient and deteriorating irrigation infrastructure. Somalia's annual cereal production in 2007 and 2008 was 55% and 57% of the post-war average (1995–2007).

although food prices have declined, they remain at record levels

Increased demand for locally produced cereals has caused an unusual outflow from the southern parts of the country to areas in the central and northern regions. Low local cereal supplies, combined with increased demand, are thus causing additional inflation in cereal prices, such that sorghum prices increased by 130% in 2008, and are now 430% above normal levels. Moreover, according to Somalia's 2008 Annual Cereal Balance Sheet, it is estimated that there is an overall cereal supply deficit of between 75,000 and 130,000 metric tonnes, due to below-normal domestic cereal supply and reduced commercial imports (80% of the five-year average). Overall, there are no reported cereal supply shortages in the country, and cereal remained available in markets throughout Somalia, albeit at significantly increased prices. Food aid, estimated at 299,000 metric tonnes in 2008, has played an important role in filling the overall gap in cereal supplies, and cereal flow analysis indicates unusual marketed cereal flows, including cereal food aid.

Although food prices declined slightly between October and December 2008, they remain at record levels. The weakened Somali Shilling, increased importation and

Figure 2: Rice prices per kilo, January 2003–January 2009

shipping costs due to piracy, below-normal domestic cereal supplies and an overall cereal supply deficit are keeping food prices high and widening the differential between food prices in Somalia and global food prices.

Declining urban purchasing power and food access

An analysis of high food prices alone is not sufficient to determine the overall impact on household food access. As emphasised by Amartya Sen in his food entitlement theory, a person's access to food is determined by their level of assets and income and the value of these on the market relative to the price of food. In March 2008, the FAO Food Security Analysis Unit (FSAU) of Somalia initiated a quarterly *Rapid Urban Emergency Food Security Assessment* in 29 towns throughout Somalia. The assessment was repeated in June 2008, October 2008 and January 2009 with an expanded sample of 38–48 towns. The purpose of the study was to measure the impact of hyperinflation on the cost of an urban minimum food and non-food expenditure basket (MEB) relative to the average income levels of the urban poor, in order to evaluate food access. Changes in income and expenditure patterns were analysed and expenditure gaps – the amount of the MEB poor households cannot afford – were estimated.

The MEB is based on three urban baseline livelihood studies.² It represents a monthly 'minimum' set of basic items required by the urban poor, consisting of essential basic food items, such as sorghum, vegetable oil and sugar, comprising 2,100 kilocalories/person/day for a household of 6–7, and basic minimum non-food items, such as water, kerosene, firewood, soap and cereal

² See FSAU Technical Series Report: *Baidoa Urban Baseline Analysis*, February 2009.

grinding costs.³ To compare rates of increase an urban poor consumer price index was calculated as weighted averages of the percentage price changes for the minimum 'basket', with the weights reflecting relative importance in household consumption.

This index indicates significant increases in the cost of the minimum expenditure basket over the last 18 months, with the largest increases occurring in the north-east, centre and south (Figure 3). By March 2008, the cost of the minimum expenditure basket was 160%–201% of the cost in the previous year, and by October 2008 it was between 233% and 338%. This doubling and then tripling in the cost of the minimum expenditure basket is largely attributed to increased sorghum prices, as cereal constitutes the largest proportion (50%–60%) of the MEB. The highest rates of increase, 338% and 266%, occurred in the central and southern regions respectively.

The urban poor largely rely on casual unskilled labour in order to earn income. An analysis of labour wage rates over the last 18 months indicates that there has been an overall inflationary impact on wage rates (Figure 4), as average wages have increased steadily since March 2007, by about 110%–130%. A similar inflationary effect is seen in livestock prices, the primary source of income for the largest rural livelihood group, pastoralists.

Wage rate increases, however, have not kept pace with commodity price increases, and as a result the terms of trade between cereal and daily wage rates (kilo of cereal per daily wage rate), a measure of the poor's purchasing power, declined sharply, by 40%–50% between January

³ For a full description of the items and quantities of the minimum expenditure basket, see FSAU Technical Series Report: 2008 Post Gu Analysis, no. V. 15, 15 October 2008, p. 32.

Figure 3: Cost of the minimum expenditure basket, March 2007–December 2008

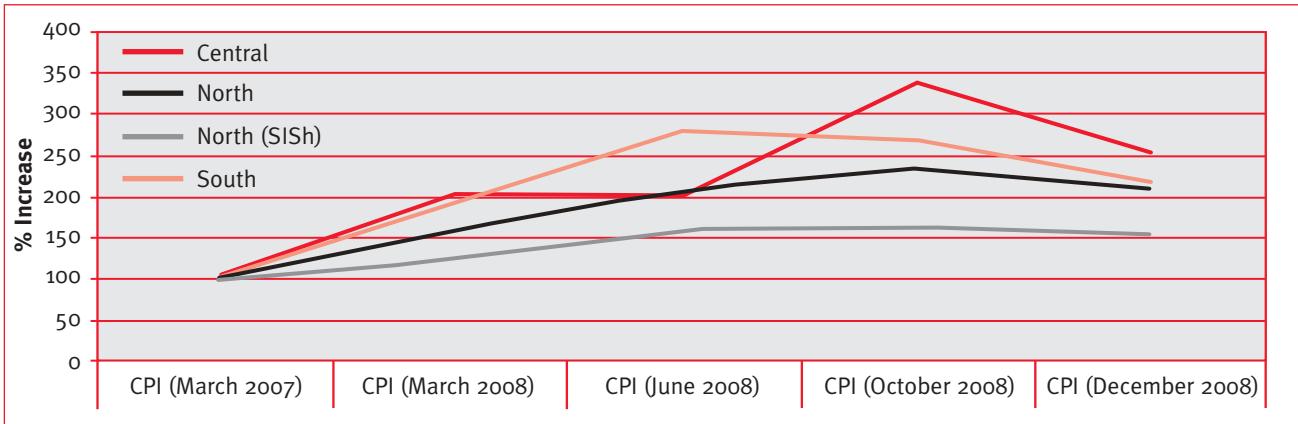
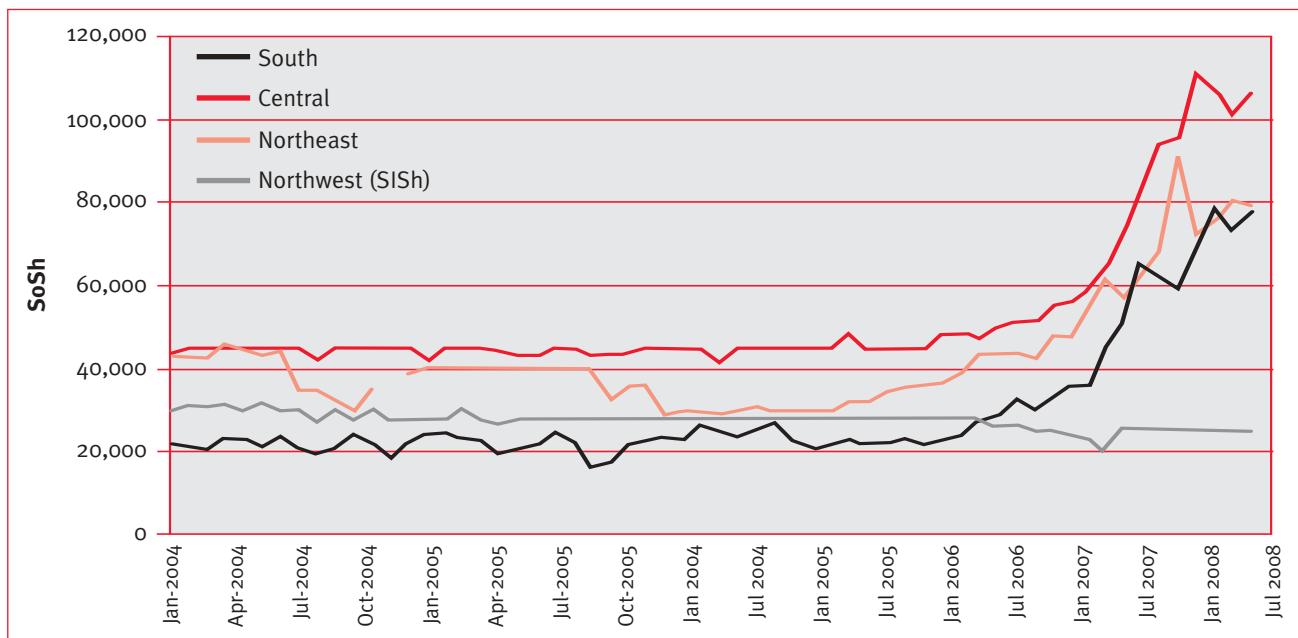


Figure 4: Unskilled daily labour rate



and June 2008. For example, in southern Somalia a daily wage bought only 4kg of cereal in June, compared to 7kg previously. As cereal prices began to decline between October and December 2008, the purchasing power of urban households began to improve, although it is still significantly lower than the post-war average (1991–2008).

Distressed coping mechanisms and nutrition

With income unable to match basic food and non-food price increases alone, urban poor households have had to resort to multiple coping mechanisms, particularly financial assistance, in order to meet their basic minimum food needs. Social support networks are exceptionally strong and the most common forms of financial assistance for the urban poor are remittances and cash gifts, which increased steadily, by 159% and 565% respectively between March 2007 and December 2008. Loans and purchases on credit have also increased. Loans take the form of cash provided by relatives or extended credit from shops, and for both there is an expectation that loans will be repaid. Currently, most

urban poor are heavily indebted and unable to repay their debts. Financial assistance is currently covering an average 15%–35% of the minimum expenditure basket for many of the urban poor in south, central and north-eastern regions. Without this, many urban households would not be able to meet the costs of their minimum food and non-food needs.

Urban households are also adopting a number of other coping strategies in response to the food price crisis. These include reducing non-food and some food purchases (cereal, sugar and oils), switching to cheaper foods (from imported rice to locally produced sorghum) or consuming lower-quality cereals. They have also been forced to remove their children from school and reduce their purchases of medicine.

To assess the impact of the food price crisis on the nutritional status of urban households, FSAU initially assessed anthropometric indicators as a component of the quarterly urban assessment. Mid Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC)

was assessed in over 10,000 children in two rounds in March and June, from over 50 sites. The results indicated a varied picture without any strong correlation with the food security analysis. This is in line with recent reports including from Action contre la Faim (ACF)⁴ and the World Food Programme (WFP),⁵ whereby the implications of increased food prices on urban populations are more likely to be manifested through other indicators, such as micronutrient deficiencies as a result of reduced dietary quality. However, the lack of clear correlation could also be linked to a further constraint, namely the need for representative samples when assessing anthropometric status, which, when monitoring over 50 sites on a quarterly basis, proves difficult. Other, simpler tools that were also sensitive to the impact of the urban food prices at the household level, without the need for large samples, were required.

As a result, FSAU reviewed the indicators assessed and, for the October and December analysis, looked at dietary diversity and coping strategies employed at household level. The results indicated similar trends to those reported by ACF, where households chose less nutritious food, significantly reducing animal protein and relying on cereals and oils to meet their calorific needs. Overall, the numbers of households consuming fewer than four food groups per day – FSAU's definition of a poorly diversified diet – ranged from 20% to 60%, with the regions most affected also reporting the highest increases in food prices. Other coping strategies reported included skipping meals, borrowing food or eating in neighbours' houses. The overall number of households employing at least one of these coping strategies increased from 32% in October 2007 to 59% in October 2008.

Conclusion

Hyperinflation is reducing the ability of market-dependent households, especially the urban poor and IDPs, to access the basic food and non-food items their families require. The continuing urban food security crisis, ongoing since early 2008, is pushing urban populations into deeper levels of absolute poverty, further eroding their resilience and ability to cope and increasing their vulnerability to future shocks. In a population with such high levels of nutritional vulnerability, the impacts of shifts in consumption patterns can be extremely detrimental, leading to long-term negative effects on growth and development by increasing rates of stunting. The negative implications of these trends on economic development are well documented.

Emergency livelihood support is urgently needed for the urban poor in Somalia, who are in Acute Food and Livelihood Crisis and struggling to cope with significantly inflated food

⁴ ACF, *Feeding Hunger and Insecurity*, Briefing Paper, January 2009.

⁵ Sight and Life Magazine, no. 2/2009, 'Nutrition in the Perfect Storm'.



Young child consuming boiled maize, indicating a poorly diversified diet, Shabelle region (FSAU November 2008)

prices and declining purchasing power. The types of support needed could include public works programmes rebuilding urban infrastructure in return for cash or vouchers, increased safety net programmes, improved social services, educational support (school feeding, take-home rations, waivers for school fees), micro-finance (small business loans, subsidised basic services (rent, electricity, water, transport), food aid (food for work, supplementary feeding through health clinics)) and debt relief. Parallel interventions are also needed to rehabilitate water sources for human consumption, health and hygiene education, selective feeding centres where acute malnutrition rates are high, and support to local health services and mobile clinics. The current urban food security crisis is an opportunity to refocus attention on the critical need to rebuild Somalia's dilapidated towns and cities, while at the same time providing critical relief to the urban poor and reinvigorating the economic viability of peri-urban and urban centres.

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Livestock, livelihoods and humanitarian response: the Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards

Cathy Watson and Andy Catley
Network Paper 64, December 2008

This Network Paper discusses livelihoods-based livestock programming and its role in humanitarian emergency response. It highlights the importance of taking livelihood assets, in particular livestock, into account in responding to emergencies and describes how the Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards (LEGS) Project has been developed to support this process.

The food price crisis and its impact on the Ethiopian Productive Safety Net Programme in 2008

Matt Hobson, Save the Children UK

The Ethiopian government's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) is the biggest social protection instrument in Africa and one of the biggest programmes of its type in the world, providing cash or food transfers to nearly 7.2 million people in 2007. Ethiopia has seen unprecedented inflation in 2008 coinciding with a period of global food price growth. This, together with rain failure, is having a significant impact on people's ability to meet their basic food needs. This article looks at how the PSNP has responded to these challenges.

The PSNP

The objectives of the PSNP are to 'provide transfers to the food insecure population in chronically food insecure woredas in a way that prevents asset depletion at the household level and creates assets at the community level'.¹ The full programme, which began in 2005, operates in four of Ethiopia's Regions, with pilots currently implemented in two others. The vast majority of PSNP resources (approximately 85%) are provided as payment for participation in public works, with the remaining support provided to households without access to adult labour. Households in receipt of PSNP benefits



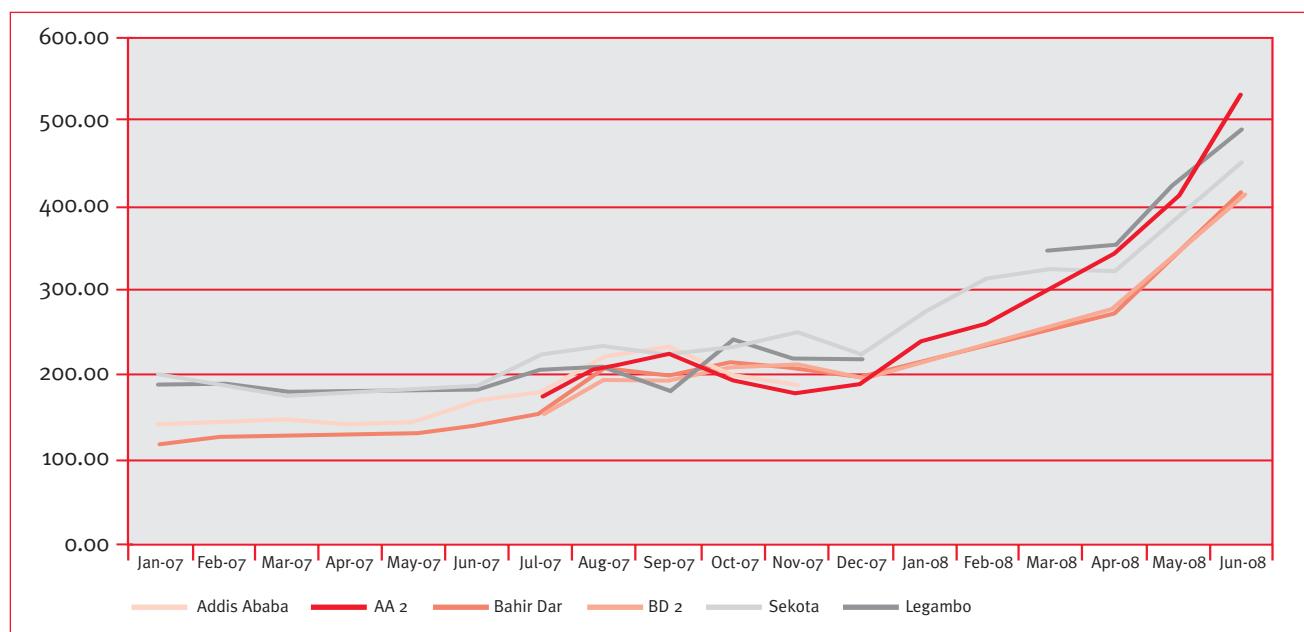
Women and children arriving at a medical centre in southern Ethiopia in July 2008

(cash, food or a combination) receive transfers from January to June each year. These are typically the 'hunger' months in Highland areas. As a result, most of the tables and figures in this article refer to the months January–June.

Food price rises in Ethiopia

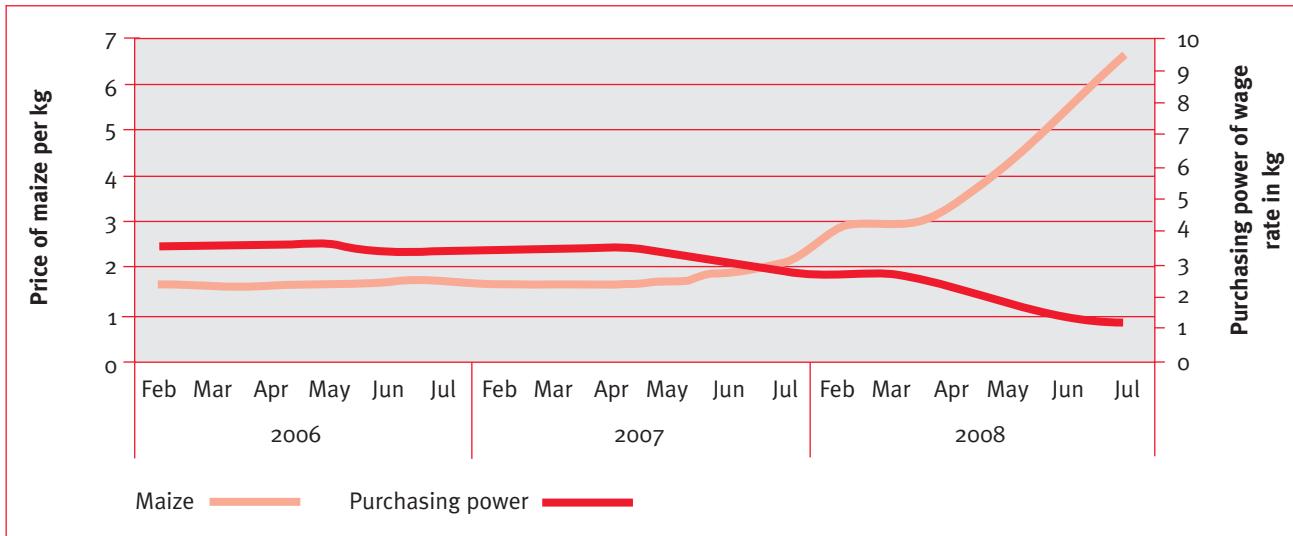
Food prices across Ethiopia have increased significantly since mid-2007. Figure 1 shows the absolute rise in food prices in four markets between January 2007 and June 2008.

Figure 1: Food price inflation in Addis Ababa, Bahir Dar, Sekota and Legambo



¹ Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MoARD), Programme Implementation Manual (PIM), 2006, p. 1.

Figure 2: Purchasing power of PSNP wages in Gubalafto woreda, 2006–2008



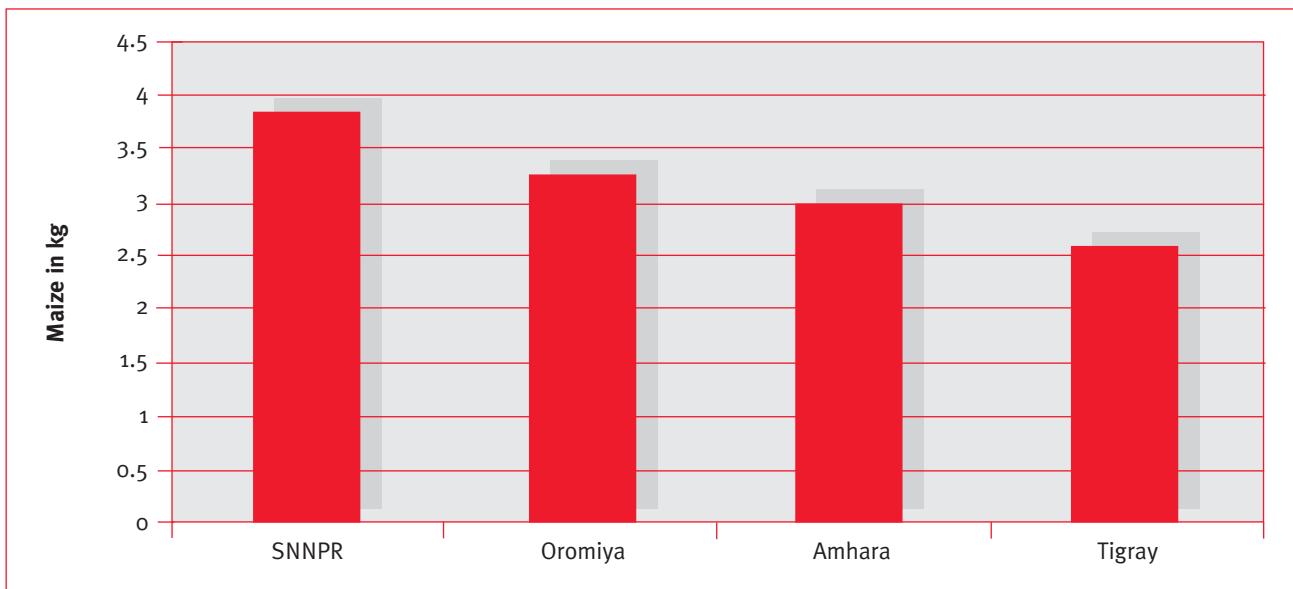
In Highland areas, normal seasonal variations mean that food prices on the market are typically significantly higher in July/August than they are in January/February. Between 2005 and 2007, the PSNP wage rate (6 Ethiopian birr or \$0.42) enabled a household in Amhara Region to buy about 3.6kg of maize. However, seasonal variations each July between 2005 and 2007 meant that households were only able to buy 2.8kg of maize with 6 birr. This constituted a 21% loss in purchasing power in a ‘normal’ year. Between early 2006 and mid-2007, the price of maize in Gabalafto market in Amhara remained fairly stable at just below 2 birr per kilo.

However, between July 2007 and February 2008 the price of maize rose to 3 birr/kg. In a ‘normal’ year before 2007, households would expect to see the price of maize decreasing at this time, not increasing. The Ethiopian government responded by increasing the PSNP wage rate from 6 to 8 birr (\$0.56) per day in early 2008. However,

maize prices on local markets continued to rise, to the point where, in February 2008, 8 birr purchased just 2.77kg of cereal. Six months later, at the end of the 2008 PSNP transfers in July, the 8 birr PSNP wage rate only enabled a household to purchase 1.2kg of cereal. As Figure 2 shows, this represents a loss in purchasing power of 56% for the poorest and most food-insecure households in Amhara Region, in the space of seven months. Between April and July 2008, the reduction in purchasing power of PSNP wages (and therefore the effective value of the wage rate) continued at nearly 20% a month.

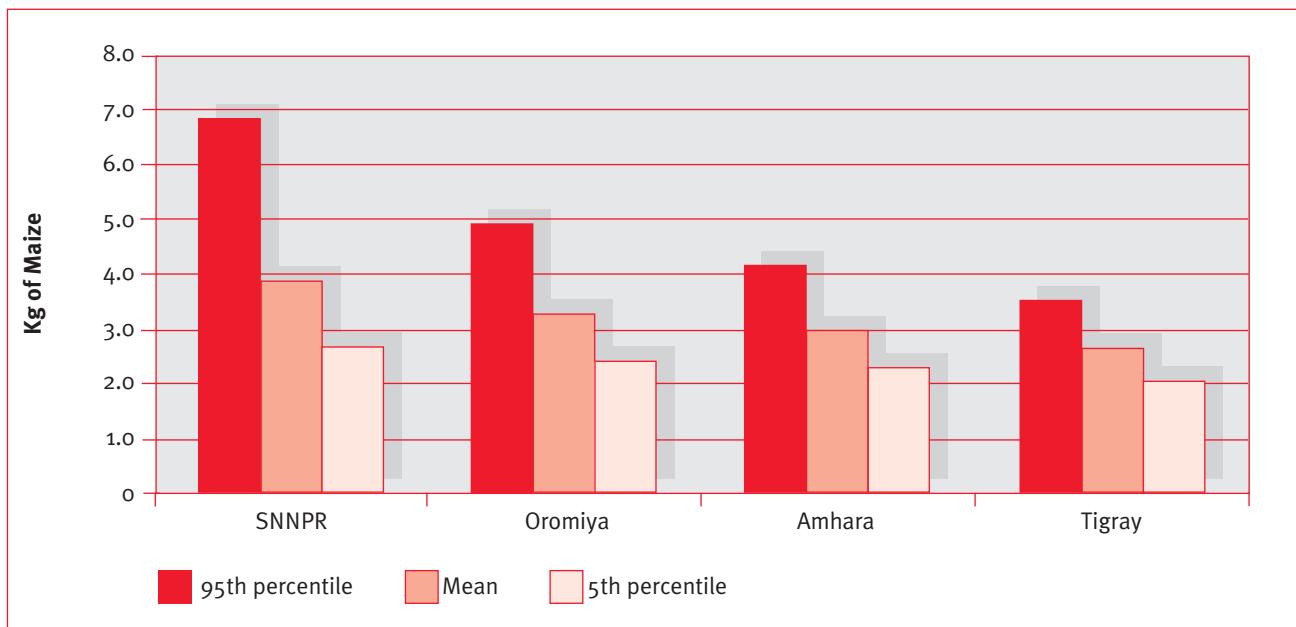
Purchasing power among PSNP households varies significantly between Regions. Figure 3 shows the amount of maize that could be purchased with the PSNP wage rate of 6 birr per day in four Regions between 2005 and 2007. Taken as an average, purchasing power in Tigray was significantly lower than among comparable households in Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR).

Figure 3: Average purchasing power (6 birr) in four Regions in 2007²



² Data is sourced from the November 2007 Wage Rate Purchasing Power Study.

Figure 4: Purchasing power (6 birr) within Regions, 2007



Purchasing power within regions varies too, as Figure 4 demonstrates. This shows that poor households living close to the cheapest 5% of markets in Tigray have better purchasing power than those living near to the most expensive 5% of markets in SNNPR. Therefore, chronically food-insecure households that live close to cheaper markets in Tigray are better off than their counterparts living near expensive markets in SNNPR (despite the average Regional differences). From this it follows that one national size of PSNP transfer does not meet all the requirements of poor households in different Regions. The Ethiopian government has, however, repeatedly stated that varying wage rates between Regions is politically unacceptable.

How has the PSNP responded to food price rises?

In different parts of the PSNP coverage area, some food-insecure households receive food, while others receive cash in exchange for their labour. Maintaining parity between the cash and food components of the PSNP has proved an ongoing challenge, particularly since the end of 2007. At present, three wage rates are operational in the PSNP, depending on geographical location and the implementing agency involved:

- A cash wage rate, currently 8 Ethiopian birr (\$0.75) per day or 40 Ethiopian birr (\$4.20) per person per month.
- A full food basket, based on the Sphere standards, which state that those receiving *emergency* assistance should get the equivalent of 2,100 kcals per day. In Ethiopia this is calculated as 15kg of cereal, 1.5kg of pulses and 0.5 litres of oil.
- 15kg of cereal. The government's Programme Implementation Manual (PIM), which guides the implementation of the PSNP, states that payments in kind will be '3kg of grain per day plus pulses and oil'. However, the government views pulses and oil as a bonus which will only be provided when available.

In 2005, there was parity between the first two of these 'wage rates'. Indeed, one of the aims of the PSNP design was to investigate which type of transfer had the most impact on smoothing consumption, protecting assets and stimulating markets. However, food price and availability fluctuations since 2006 have resulted in considerable changes in the comparative value of the three different wage rates, distorting the impact of the PSNP.

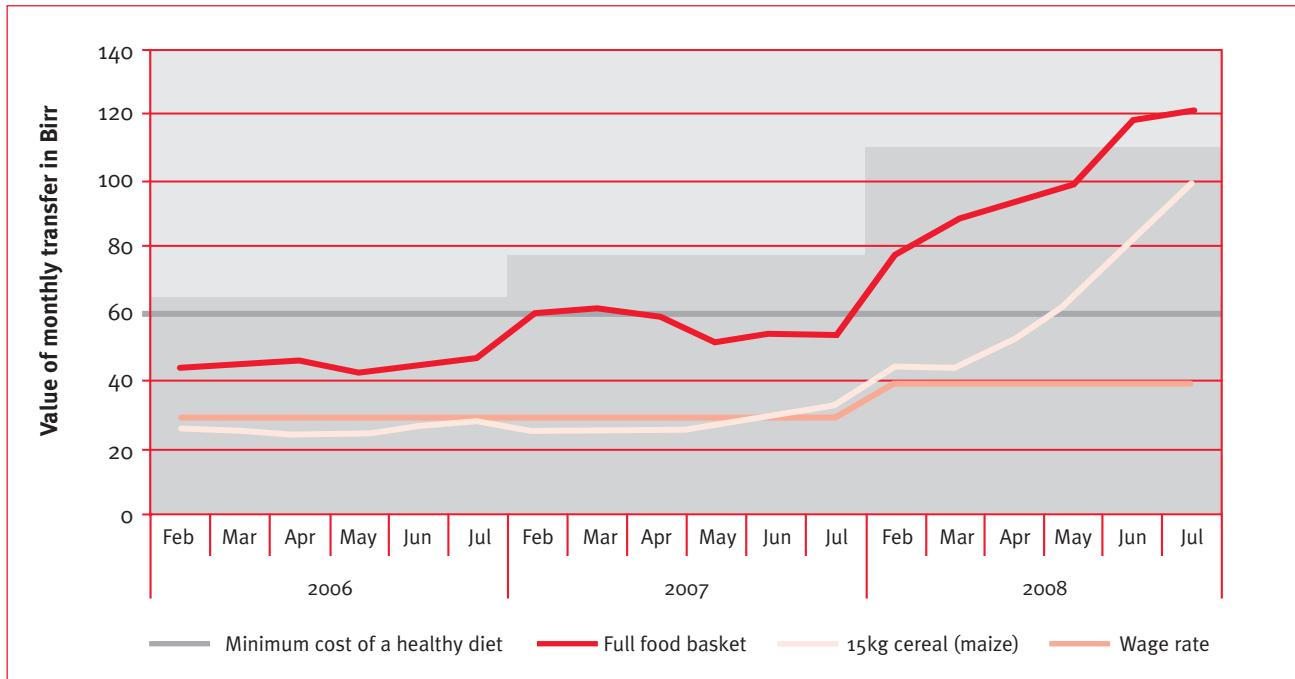
maintaining parity between the cash and food components of the PSNP has proved an ongoing challenge

The relative values in Ethiopian birr of each of the three wage rates since 2006 are presented in Figure 5. Also indicated in Figure 5 – in the shaded area – is Save the Children UK's calculation of the Minimum Cost of a Healthy Diet for parts of Amhara Region.³ This new methodology uses linear programming to generate the financial value of a diet that meets 100% of nutritional requirements, based on local availability. In other words, this is how much it costs a household in this area to guarantee against malnutrition. The cost of a healthy diet in 2006 in Amhara Region was approximately 66 birr per month. In Figure 5, this has been increased on an annual basis in line with the rate of food price inflation.⁴

Figure 5 shows how the financial value of the different wage rates in the PSNP has contributed to meeting the nutritional

³ C. Chastre et al., *The Minimum Cost of a Healthy Diet: Findings from Piloting a New Methodology in Four Study Locations*, 2007.

⁴ The annual rate of inflation through to July of each year has been used. Inflation rates have been taken from the Central Statistical Authority's website.

Figure 5: The relative value of different transfer modalities in Gubalafto woreda

requirements of household members since 2006 in Gubalafto woreda. Although all three wage rates have responded differently, cash has failed to maintain the same contribution to households' nutrition as a full food basket. This goes some way to explaining the outcomes of escalating food prices on the 57% or so of poor food-insecure households that receive their PSNP wage rates in cash.

As part of the PSNP design, there is a contingency fund which can be tapped by Regional governments in the event of a crisis. The value of the fund represents 20% of the value of PSNP transfers in the Region. Unfortunately, due to the severity of the crisis and the lower than normal harvest after poor rains, the contingency fund in Amhara had been exhausted by June 2008. The funds were used to support those households suffering from food shortages but who were not enrolled in the PSNP. This made it more difficult for the PSNP to respond to its target group as food deficits emerged. From June 2008 onwards, everyone in need was reliant on humanitarian assistance alone.

The anticipated impact of food price rises on the PSNP in 2009

From the end of the scheduled PSNP transfer period in July 2008, food prices in rural markets appear to have stabilised, albeit at (or near) their peak. In Gubalafto and Sekota markets, Amhara Region, the price of maize peaked at 6.60 and 7.15 birr respectively in July (usually the seasonal peak price for staple foods). In November 2008, prices were 5.45 and 5.50 birr respectively. Despite the appearance of cheaper maize on the markets, this still represents just under a 300% increase on prices in the period 2005–2007 (when they were stable at around 2 birr per kilo). Thus, in Gubalafto market purchasing power had begun to increase for PSNP households – but only marginally. Figure 6 (p. 22) plots market prices against purchasing power for PSNP households in Gubalafto woreda.

Implications for the PSNP

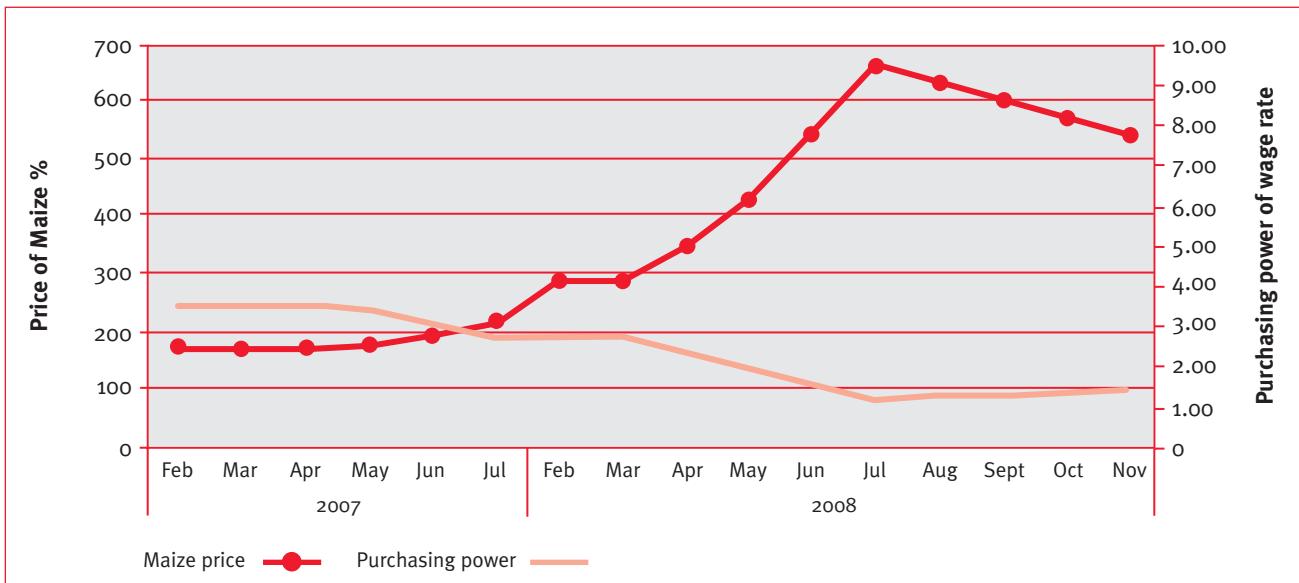
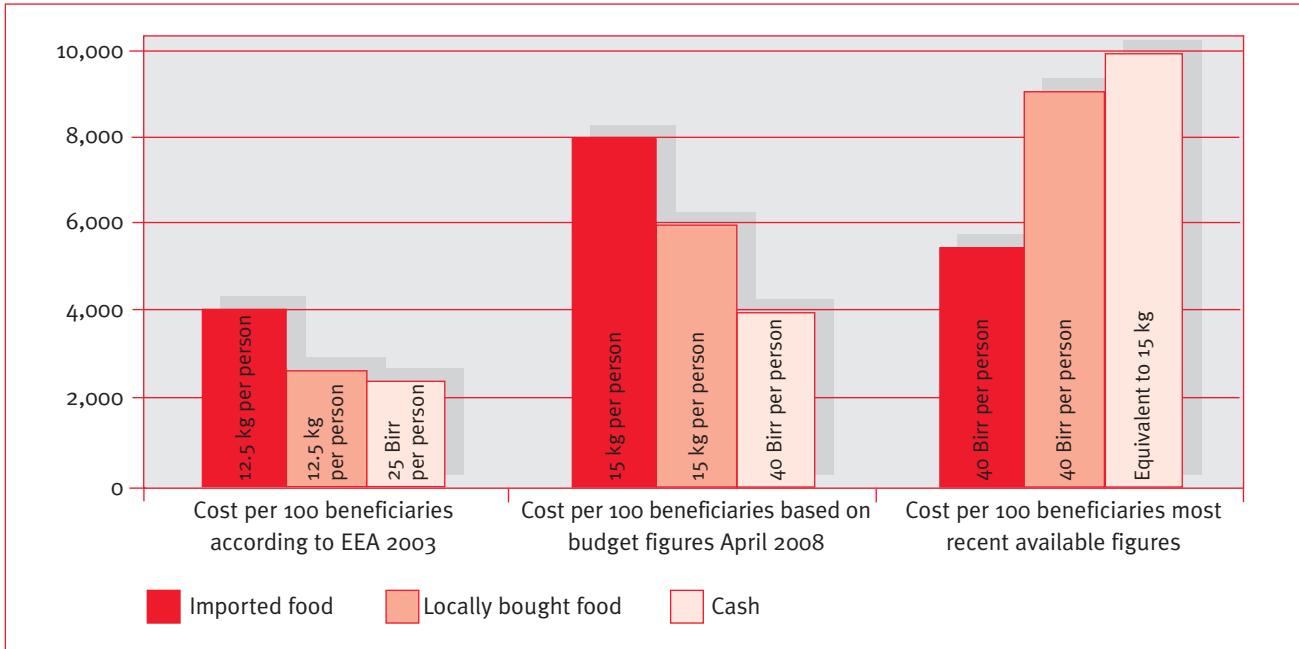
The PSNP is designed primarily as a cash-based safety net to protect chronically food-insecure households and ensure that they meet their food requirements without having to deplete household assets. However, the cash provided through the PSNP is inadequate to enable recipients to purchase foods similar to those provided in a food basket. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the vast majority of PSNP participants consulted in a Save the Children UK study in 2008 indicated that they would prefer to receive food, rather than cash, under the PSNP.⁵ PSNP participants indicated that they distrusted cash because they had seen its value deteriorate so rapidly; food was more tangible and reliable, and did not lose its value.

Using data from Save the Children UK final evaluations of prior programmes, the government's Medium Term Expenditure and Financing Framework for the PSNP and market prices, Figure 7 (p. 22) shows the differences in programme cost between imported food, locally procured food and cash transfers between 2002 and 2008. In July 2008, it was (abnormally) more cost-effective for the PSNP donors to transfer food rather than cash.

Conclusions

Events in 2008 provided the PSNP with its first real test. For the first time since the programme's inception, PSNP target households faced a large-scale, significant shock. Many of these households' usual means of response had already been exhausted by the time the extent of the crisis was fully appreciated. Between 2005 and 2008, the cash portion of the PSNP largely succeeded in meeting the objectives of the programme: asset accumulation and smoothing of food consumption. However, this was largely not the case during 2008.

⁵ See Save the Children UK's study *Cash, Food, Payments and Risk*, 2008.

Figure 6: Purchasing power of PSNP wage rate in Gubalafto woreda, February 2007–November 2008**Figure 7: Differences in programme cost between imported food, locally procured food and cash transfers (Ethiopian Birr), 2002–2008**

An underlying factor in the problematic response has been a delayed understanding of the real impact of inflation on the rural poor, due to inappropriate analysis and delayed responses to manage risk. Because chronically food-insecure and poor households typically purchase the majority of their food on the market – the poorer households are, the more they rely on the market – those who received cash under the PSNP lost as much as 56% of their purchasing power as a result of the food price rises during the period February–July 2008. Although absolute food prices are now slowly declining, if the PSNP had restarted transfers in November 2008 the purchasing power of chronically food-insecure and poor households would still be around 45% below its level a year earlier.

Several implications flow from this, both for the government and for donors funding the PSNP. First, the system of three different wage rates needs to be rationalised and parity between them achieved. This will entail significantly increasing the value of the cash wage rate.

Second, as demand is outstripping supply the PSNP must grow in scale and scope, to allow more chronically food-insecure households to enter the programme. While growing in scale and scope, an expanded PSNP must also ensure that it is tailored to the livelihoods of those it is providing assistance to. Replicating PSNP ‘blue-prints’ for other livelihoods systems is unlikely to be appropriate: a PSNP pilot is under way in some lowland, pastoral areas and a tailored safety net

instrument that relies on the strengths of pastoral livelihoods should be explored with relevant stakeholders in more detail.

Third, steps must be taken to ensure that the type and quantity of resources put into the PSNP are flexible enough to enable the programme to meet its objectives. If a cash-based instrument is still favoured by the government, then flexibility in the delivery and quantity of cash could address concerns about poor households being unable to purchase sufficient food with PSNP transfers. Finally, risk management strategies have to be reviewed so that future crises can be identified and addressed in a timely fashion. The early-warning system currently operational in Ethiopia's lowland, pastoral areas must be extended to cover the whole country. The fundamental function of such a system would be to trigger preventative responses to losses of the productive assets the PSNP is meant to help households accumulate. This requires pre-positioning resources and the completion of the administrative and legal necessities during times of 'normality'. Preparedness 'audits' should be completed for each agency and administration, and contingency plans at district level should be prepared, with locally agreed 'triggers' for response.

For donors, the priority must be making good on commitments in 2005 to fund a PSNP that delivers timely, predictable and appropriate transfers (a 1 birr increase in the PSNP cash wage rate means an additional \$25 million). Donors must also recommit to supporting the PSNP, rather than reverting to the old, untimely system of annual needs identification, humanitarian appeal, drip-fed funding and the eventual (usually late) delivery of humanitarian assistance.⁶ Lastly, donors should make extra resources available to fund an effective early-warning system that enables communities to manage the risks they face.

Matt Hobson is Head of Hunger Reduction at Save the Children UK. His email address is Matt.H@scuk.org.et. This article is based on a Save the Children UK report published in September 2008, entitled *Cash, Food, Payments and Risk in the PSNP*, by Judith Sandford. Interested readers should contact Save the Children UK for a copy. Matt Hobson would like to express his thanks and appreciation to Judith Sandford, without whose work this article would not have been possible.

⁶ During the period 1997–2006, there were only two years when food contributions under the emergency response exceeded 85% of what was requested.

Increased food prices in Liberia: new crisis, old relief–development dilemmas

Hanna Mattinen, Caroline Broudic and Helene Deret, ACF

Dramatic increases in basic commodity prices during 2008 provoked riots in several countries, and were considered a serious threat to people's food security and national stability. Vulnerability to such an external shock, however, varies depending on the specific context. Factors such as dependency on imports for basic food commodities, government capacity to mitigate the impacts of rising prices, the reliance of the population on markets, political stability and overall living standards all influence the intensity of the crisis and its consequences.

To highlight the different impacts of the crisis, Action contre la Faim (ACF) conducted surveys in several countries, including Liberia and the Central African Republic (CAR). In Bangui, the CAR capital, ACF found that the impact of increases in international prices was relatively limited, and that food insecurity was linked mainly to traditional seasonal patterns of hunger and increases in fuel prices. In Liberia, on the other hand, people were significantly affected. This article focuses on the impact of the price shock on the capital, Monrovia, using the findings of ACF's survey in Greater Monrovia carried out in May and June 2008.

Why is Liberia particularly vulnerable?

Fourteen years of civil war in Liberia between 1989 and 2003 severely affected the national economy and brought

about profound changes in society, notably a massive increase in urbanisation, in particular in Monrovia. Imports are vital to the economy: about two-thirds of the country's staple food, rice, is imported, and people are heavily reliant on imports for petrol and other basic food commodities. The country's own rice production declined by an estimated 76% between 1987 and 2003. Meanwhile, markets and the road network are under-developed; the coastal belt, where the country's largest cities including Monrovia are located, is poorly connected with inland areas, and most of the commercial exchanges that serve urban centres take place internationally, making prices especially sensitive to international fluctuations.

While the government took steps to mitigate the impact of price increases, including removing the tax on imported rice and imposing a price ceiling on bags of bought rice, the impact of these measures is uncertain. What is clear is that the price spikes appear to have hit the poorest hardest. Even before the current price shock the food security situation in Monrovia was fragile. An ACF nutritional survey in February 2008 showed 17.6% global acute malnutrition (GAM), above the 15% emergency cut-off point. Although the causes of malnutrition in Monrovia are complex, inadequate food intake was identified as one of its key determinants. In response to the price shock people changed their diets, eating less protein and fewer

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vegetables and substituting rice for nutritionally less rich cassava, and children were sent out to look for work more frequently. Admissions of severely malnourished children into ACF/ANDP nutritional centres jumped by 40% between April and May. While it is impossible to establish a clear link between increased prices and increased malnutrition, it is likely that higher prices reduced access to food for the most vulnerable, affecting their nutritional status.

Proposed responses

ACF identified a twin-track approach to respond to the situation in Monrovia. First, short-term interventions were recommended to mitigate the immediate adverse effects of the price surge on the most vulnerable. Second, longer-term measures were developed aimed at building people's resilience

and increasing their capacity to cope with potential future shocks. These steps were in line with the government's own strategy, which was important given that the government had shown itself willing to find a solution to the crisis. Apart from measures to mitigate domestic price increases and to ensure consistent supply, such as suspending import taxes on rice and agricultural inputs, and imposing a price ceiling for rice and a short-lived ban on food exports, the government also proposed maintaining access to food for vulnerable households through food-based programmes and promoting domestic food production through support to farming. Funding of these initiatives, however, remains unclear.

The two main short-term activities proposed by ACF were the treatment and detection of acute malnutrition and the distribution of wet food rations through canteens, combined with cash for work. Canteens were considered a better option than traditional blanket feeding because this would ensure that targeted children consumed the ration, and were deemed safer, if logistically more difficult. A two-stage targeting system was proposed for short-term food and cash-based interventions, combining geographical and demographic targeting. Geographical zones (townships) were targeted according to population density, access to formal employment and quality of the existing infrastructure, and the number of children referred to ACF nutritional programmes. Households within these areas were selected according to demographic criteria: children under five and pregnant and lactating women were targeted to reduce the risk of a further degradation in the nutritional situation, aggravated by the additional health risks posed by the rainy season, which runs from June to October. This is typically a lean period: job opportunities and petty trade are more limited, and local food production is lower, pushing prices up. In addition, inadequate drainage in Monrovia means that parts of the city are flooded and pools of stagnant water develop, increasing health risks. There is a seasonal peak in malaria and cholera cases at the end of the



©ACF – Liberia

Liberia is particularly vulnerable to food shocks

rainy season, and respiratory infections are common. Densely populated shanty towns like West Point and Clara Town are worst affected.

It is clear that the proposed approach encompasses the risk of both inclusion and exclusion errors, but this risk was deemed acceptable. Alternatives such as organisation-led household targeting would have been too time-consuming and would probably not have been feasible given the complex nature of Monrovian society and the lack of social cohesion in the city following the civil war.

the price spikes appear to have hit the poorest hardest

The proposed mid- and long-term actions include technical and policy measures, some of which do not fit into the 'traditional' realm of humanitarian NGOs and call for extensive government involvement. The first aim is to improve the resilience of the urban population by diversifying their sources of food and income. The second aim is to reduce Liberia's dependence on international markets for staple foods and to enhance the capacity of its smallholder farmers, increasing production and improving resilience to future market shocks. Actions include enhancing staple food production and upgrading roads and markets to better serve the agricultural sector, promoting farmers' organisation to increase their bargaining power and discourage unfair international competition, and investing to improve the quality and preservation of produce. These proposed measures have far-reaching consequences and require the participation of a wide range of actors, including the government.

Despite the well-documented and worrying food security situation, ACF could not find funding to set up these

projects. ‘Emergency’ donors were not interested in funding projects that aimed at preventing a crisis in the future, while ‘development’ donors were not interested in funding short-term projects. Liberia clearly falls into a funding gap: the country does not qualify as an emergency, and hence funding of short-term projects is extremely difficult, even if these projects are crucial to any longer-term development.

‘emergency’ donors were not interested in funding projects that aimed at preventing a crisis in the future

Conclusions and future challenges

Liberia illustrates the complex response the price crisis calls for. Boosting agricultural production, one of the key objectives in the Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA) of the High Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis, is a good example of such complexity. Profound structural issues need to be addressed before positive returns from a distribution of agricultural inputs can be expected. Liberia possesses significant unused agricultural capital, but swampland needs to be rehabilitated; road and market networks require immediate attention and storage facilities, even at the household level, are inadequate. It is also unclear whether the Liberian population has the necessary farming skills or will following such a long and devastating civil war. The government needs to scale up its investment in the agricultural sector, accompanied with policies limiting negative returns on smallholder farmers. The national budget for the agricultural sector has been doubled for the current fiscal year, but still only represents 2.4% of the total budget. Additionally, agriculture does not provide immediate returns, and it is necessary to provide for the most pressing needs of vulnerable populations.

The current price shock in Liberia needs to be set against the backdrop of political stabilisation following the end of the civil war. This has seen a shift from an emergency-oriented response towards rehabilitation and development programmes. Most aid actors have withdrawn from direct assistance, and are now involved in programmes aimed at strengthening local capacities. It is likely that agencies’

ability to identify and react to a potential humanitarian crisis has weakened. The donor landscape too has changed. Only a very limited number of donors are willing to fund short-term projects designed to prevent the degradation of people’s food security situation. In other words, the situation needs to be qualified as a crisis before funding is allocated. Yet donors interested in more long-term programming are not interested in short-term action, and call for longer-term investment. Catch-22.

The food price crisis clearly illustrates that short-term measures to meet basic needs must be accompanied with long-term measures to support livelihoods from the outset, if satisfactory and sustainable humanitarian outcomes are to be achieved. This raises challenges for humanitarian and development actors, donors and governments, and calls for new forms and means of collaboration. In such a context, the emergency–development division seems increasingly outdated. Instead, holistic approaches that more effectively link the short term and the long are needed, to bridge the artificial gap between these two concepts. In particular, in countries that have just embarked on the fragile early recovery phase, such as Liberia, there is a need to maintain a minimum capacity for humanitarian response or establish functional safety nets to avoid any risk of regression in the humanitarian situation.

Overall, the international food crisis is yet another aggravating factor affecting the world’s 960 million food-insecure people. The ultimate impact of the crisis on the livelihoods of these people will vary according to their capacity to cope with price fluctuations and their governments’ capacity and willingness to mitigate the effects of the shock. Given the global financial crisis, it is unclear how the situation will evolve, but prices are predicted to remain high, meaning continued additional stress for vulnerable households, putting their livelihoods at further risk. In such a context, there is a crucial need for adequate surveillance systems and timely action to mitigate the impacts on the livelihoods of poor households.

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Food security and livelihoods programming in conflict: a review

Susanne Jaspars and Dan Maxwell, Network Paper 65, March 2009

The focus of humanitarian assistance in conflict has understandably been on life-saving interventions. Yet conflict-related emergencies also have serious impacts on people’s livelihoods. Livelihood strategies become extremely restricted and may involve considerable risks to personal safety.

In these circumstances, livelihood interventions are an important complement to humanitarian relief, particularly in protracted conflicts, where relief often declines over time and there may be opportunities to support new livelihood strategies or find other ways to help conflict-affected people meet their basic needs.

This Network Paper reviews food security and livelihoods programming in conflict. The aim is to gather information on the types of food security and livelihoods interventions that are being implemented in conflict situations, their objectives, when particular livelihood interventions are appropriate, what the constraints have been in implementing them and how these constraints can be overcome.

Funding mechanisms in Southern Sudan: NGO perspectives

Wendy Fenton and Melissa Phillips

During 2007 and 2008, donors commissioned reviews of a number of the key aid instruments in use in Southern Sudan. The main impetus for these reviews was a growing perception that, three years into the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), the current mix of funding mechanisms was not delivering results on the ground quickly enough. This article draws on a review conducted in early 2008 to examine issues around fund design, access and effectiveness from the perspective of NGOs supporting service delivery in Southern Sudan.¹

The MDTF: raised expectations, disappointing results

By far the largest funding mechanism in Southern Sudan is the Multi Donor Trust Fund (MDTF), administered by the World Bank. In all, 14 donors have pledged \$650 million to the fund. Mandated by the CPA, the MDTF allocates funds against priority national programmes, implementation of which is contracted out to the government and UN actors, the private sector and NGOs. Monies provided are matched by government contributions.

The MDTF was originally expected to enable the rapid expansion of basic services. Instead, however, it took a longer-term view of development planning. As a result, building central government structures and capacity has been prioritised over the delivery of results. Three years after it was established, the MDTF has delivered few tangible benefits in Southern Sudan. The World Bank, as administrator of the fund, has been criticised for creating and then failing to manage high expectations that the MDTF would quickly deliver ‘peace dividends’. Donors have not acted strategically and proactively in pressing for progress, or in supporting the establishment of effective delivery mechanisms.

Most of the successes highlighted in reviews of the various funding mechanisms being used in Sudan are related to whether the instrument has met donor objectives, rather than whether results have been achieved on the ground. For example, the MDTF is credited with enhancing donor coherence and coordination, reducing transaction costs for donors and the GoSS, building GoSS capacity at central level and encouraging GoSS ‘ownership’ of national development programmes. At the same time, however, the reviewers who reached this conclusion also add that, despite a ‘significant increase in activity during the second year of operation, including an increase in disbursement and contracting ... most of the projects have not yet delivered tangible goods to the public’.²

¹ Wendy Fenton, *Funding Mechanisms in Southern Sudan: NGO Perspectives*, Juba NGO Forum, February 2008.

² Review of Sudan Multi Donor Trust Funds, Phase I, Scanteam, 2007.

the largest funding mechanism in Southern Sudan is the MDTF

A review of the MDTF conducted in late 2007 noted that the World Bank had taken action to address some of the problems, hiring more staff and simplifying procedures.³ Decision-making authority has been devolved to the field and efforts have been made to move programmes forward. The World Bank and donors have also sought to manage expectations better by redefining and clarifying the fund’s objectives. What has still not been addressed, however, is the failure to involve NGOs and civil society sufficiently in the design, implementation and monitoring of MDTF programmes. Instead, NGOs are still seen largely as ‘implementing partners’ – fast becoming a euphemism for ‘contractors’ or ‘sub-contractors’.

UN management of pooled funding: efficient and cost-effective for whom?

The UN is responsible for a range of funding mechanisms in Southern Sudan, including the Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF), a pooled fund worth around \$150m a year, and the Sudan Recovery Fund (SRF), both administered by UNDP.

Many donors see pooled funding and the centralised management of pooled funds by the UN as a way of reducing the administrative burden associated with managing individual NGO grants, increasing coordination and making it easier to share lessons. Donors also regard pooled funding as a means of meeting their commitments to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, the OECD principles for engagement in fragile states, the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative and UN reforms using one mechanism. For NGOs, however, working through the UN bureaucracy can reduce efficiency and increase operating costs. Accessing funding through the UN can be a slow and cumbersome process. UN management costs mean that less money is available to cover NGO overheads, while the short timeframe of some UN-managed funds – such as the CHF – is also problematic.

A recent review of the \$54m, three-year Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), managed by UNDP and funded by the UK, the Netherlands and Denmark, notes that the main objectives of the funding were not to deliver basic services for Southern Sudanese but to ‘Strengthen and assist UNDP to become more strategic, coordinated and programmatic through enhancing its alignment to national strategies, sharpening its focus, providing a more

³ *Ibid.*

predictable flow of resources, and improving the quality of delivery; and to enhance the effectiveness of UNDP.⁴ Under the SPA, UNDP worked with two NGO partners on a Local Governance Framework Project. Although the two NGOs initiated the project, wrote the proposal documents and carried out the groundwork, once the project was established the NGOs were excluded from high-level meetings with the GoSS, despite having long-standing ties and good relations with the Local Governance Board and other government actors.

In addition to reviewing systems and procedures, UNDP has responded to its critics by trying to engage much more constructively with NGOs. While this is encouraging, NGOs believe that UNDP will need to do much more to establish a ‘culture of partnership’ within which more constructive relationships can be built.

Targeted, bilateral funds have delivered results ...

In contrast to these pooled mechanisms, bridging and recovery funds such as DFID’s Basic Services Fund (BSF) and the European Union (EU)’s Recovery and Rehabilitation Programme (RRP), a three-year, €50m livelihoods initiative administered by UNDP, have made important contributions to supporting service delivery through NGOs. Acting on the recommendations of NGOs and others, DFID decided in late 2008 to strengthen and expand the BSF into a new multi-donor fund with greater GoSS involvement. In Phase II (January 2009–June 2010), the governments of the UK, Norway, Canada and the Netherlands are providing a total of £28m, with a greater focus on building local government capacity. The EU is also considering doubling its allocation to the RRP by providing an additional €50m, extending its timeframe and programmatic scope, inviting contributions from other donors and making UNDP compete for the management tender.

the SRF is intended to fill the ‘recovery gap’ between short-term humanitarian assistance and long-term development funding

... and the UN is learning from them

Approved in 2008, the Sudan Recovery Fund (SRF) is a UNDP-managed pooled fund intended to fill the ‘recovery gap’ between short-term humanitarian assistance and long-term development funding. At the time of writing, the SRF had made one grant of \$20m. Encouragingly, the entire first tranche of SRF funding was allocated to NGOs and, despite initial concerns about administration and management arrangements, NGO expectations are high that the fund will support the rapid expansion of basic services, while

⁴ G. Boyd, K. Orlander, H. Pearce and K. Adiebo, *UNDP Strategic Partnership Fund 2005–2007: End of Strategic Partnership Review*, report commissioned by the governments of the UK, the Netherlands and Denmark, draft, 2007.

simultaneously developing the capacity of local government and civil society to manage these services. The UN succeeded in getting the fund up and running, as planned, in time for the 2008/2009 dry season. To expedite the establishment of the Fund, the UN designed the necessary procedures and forms and began to identify potential staff even before receiving the official go-ahead.

The UN also appears to have given careful consideration to the lessons learned from experiences with the MDTF and the CHF and other UNDP-managed funds. There is evidence that feedback from reviews has been incorporated whenever possible in the development of the SRF proposal. These are all welcome developments given the largely negative experience NGOs have had in working with UNDP in Southern Sudan. NGOs also asked that the criteria for judging UNDP’s fund management performance should include how relationships with partners are handled.

NGOs: room for improvement

NGOs and other civil society actors see a wider range of roles for themselves within Southern Sudan’s pooled funds, including acting as change agents, advocates, programme implementers and testers of new and innovative approaches. On the ground, NGOs usually have long-term relations with communities and local authorities, making them valuable partners in building capacity and facilitating the transfer of responsibility for service delivery to the government. Many carry out research and analysis which could contribute to constructive changes in policy and practice. Others have considerable experience of working within consortia and of managing umbrella grants and sub-contracts.

That said, NGOs themselves bear some responsibility for the lack of strategic engagement with key funding mechanisms. Three years into the CPA, a number of key NGOs have only just finished relocating their offices and decision-makers to Juba from Nairobi. NGOs have found it difficult to adapt to donor agendas and corresponding changes to the funding environment more broadly. A lack of knowledge, confidence and collective capacity has hindered NGOs from engaging strategically, though these problems have been addressed to some extent through NGO membership of the MDTF Over-sight Committee and the BSF and SRF Steering Committees.

To foster more strategic NGO engagement with the GoSS, donors, the UN and other key interlocutors have funded the establishment of a dedicated Secretariat to support the NGO Forum, the largest coordination and information-sharing body for international and national NGOs in Southern Sudan. The Secretariat should be able to learn from and build on progress made by the NGO Health Forum. Health NGOs, which reportedly provide 86% of available health services in Southern Sudan and pay the salaries of three-quarters of health staff, enjoy a large degree of leverage with the GoSS, donors, the UN and the World Bank. Strong and consistent leadership by NGO Forum representatives, coupled with the support provided to the GoSS Ministry of Health, have strengthened relationships between the actors concerned.

Another of the Secretariat's priorities is to promote the involvement of Southern Sudanese NGOs and civil society in all aspects of recovery and development in Southern Sudan, starting with the management and activities of the NGO Forum itself. Most local NGOs and CBOs have not been able to engage directly and substantively with either the MDTF or the CHF. In 2008, only five national NGOs received CHF funding, up from two the previous year. Although donors have sponsored several workshops and training sessions, there is as yet no coherent strategy to encourage local involvement. Promoting the development of such a strategy will be a priority activity for the newly established Secretariat; successfully decentralising the NGO Forum to States and counties will be key in this.

Conclusion

When peace came to Southern Sudan, the expectation was that additional amounts of multi-year funding through the MDTF and other sources would enable NGOs and other actors to continue to support the emerging government to establish basic services infrastructure and systems, while simultaneously expanding and improving the quality of services. However, start-up, structural, staffing and management issues associated with the MDTF and most of the UNDP-managed funds hindered effective NGO engagement and delayed progress on the ground. Although some donors continued to fund a few NGO service delivery programmes bilaterally, when the MDTF did not come through many NGOs were forced to continue to use short-term humanitarian funding, primarily from USAID, ECHO and the CHF, in an effort to bridge this gap. Despite the short-term nature of these funds, they have played a crucial role in delivering services, particularly health and water and sanitation.

Those instruments that appear to be working well in supporting recovery needs are either bilateral funds implemented through NGOs, such as DFID's Basic Services Fund and the EU's RRP, or fast and flexible pooled funds, like the Capacity Building Trust Fund, managed by UNICEF and accountancy firm KPMG. The CBTF, established prior to the CPA in 2004, has been used to fill gaps not addressed through other mechanisms, including covering stipends and equipment costs for the new government in 2005 and, later, managing and disbursing donor and GoSS funds on behalf of the MDTF. NGO experience of UNDP-managed pooled funds has been mixed at best, and extremely negative at worst. The ability of NGOs to engage with the UN and donors effectively around these issues has been limited, though the NGO Secretariat, if used effectively, should be able to address this weakness. The failure of all actors to recognise existing strengths, build

additional capacities and actively encourage and support the participation of Southern Sudanese NGOs and civil society through aid instruments and real partnerships is an urgent issue, and one which must be addressed.

Southern Sudan needs flexible approaches and aid instruments, accessible to key actors such as NGOs, which together meet both immediate service delivery needs and longer-term state-building objectives. Ensuring that funding mechanisms deliver results on the ground as effectively and efficiently as possible should be both the priority objective and shared responsibility of all actors concerned. Better coordination between funding mechanisms will provide opportunities to identify synergies and avoid overlap and duplication. Fast, flexible, and predictable multi-year funding will enable NGOs and other actors to support the GoSS in expanding the delivery of good-quality basic services – the foundations on which peace and development can be built.

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Developing NGO-led approaches to pooled funding: experiences from Zimbabwe

Jeremy Konyndyk, Mercy Corps

Over the past decade, the humanitarian sector has seen a trend away from direct bilateral donor-to-NGO grants and towards the consolidation of funding streams into a variety of shared, centralised funding mechanisms – theoretically simplifying the process of project funding for all involved. While UN-led approaches like pooled funds have made some progress in improving operational coordination and donor alignment, they have simultaneously created serious new difficulties for implementing partners and their impact on programme quality is at best ambiguous. Mercy Corps believes, based on our experience managing a multi-donor, multi-partner funding pool in Zimbabwe, that NGO-led approaches to pooled funding have strong potential and should be explored as an alternative to UN-led efforts.

Pooled funding: drivers and challenges

The UN has created pooled funds in several countries – notably the Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF) in Sudan and the Pooled Fund (PF) in the Democratic Republic of Congo, both of which focus on financing field-level relief and recovery efforts through NGO or UN actors. The UN's cluster system, rolled out in several pilot countries in 2006 and now expanding to all UN humanitarian operations, has likewise served to centralise and consolidate funding streams – albeit through UN agencies rather than within new mechanisms. These various approaches are intended to serve as one-stop-shops for donors and implementing agencies, consolidating multiple funding streams within a single entity.

The trend towards increased consolidation of funding streams and centralisation of funding mechanisms has been driven by a number of very real shortcomings:

- Inadequate operational coordination. Effective humanitarian coordination has been a challenge for years. Pooled mechanisms aim to improve coordination by strengthening the link between coordination priorities and funding decisions. The UN's 'cluster system' has had a similar effect – channelling a greater proportion of humanitarian funding through UN cluster lead agencies, in the name of enhanced coordination.
- Limited donor capacity. Donors have an understandable desire to minimise their internal overhead costs relative to programme expenditures. By outsourcing the oversight of humanitarian resources to an external actor – whether a pooled funding mechanism, a UN agency or a contractor – donors reduce their net administrative burden while in theory ensuring adequate project oversight.
- Poor donor alignment. The Paris Declaration of 2005 affirmed the need to reduce the 'fragmentation' of development-oriented aid flows by aligning donor contributions with shared assistance frameworks.

Donors are now applying similar principles to their humanitarian funding, moving towards support for clear and broadly-agreed assistance strategies under the cluster system. For NGO and host governments that know how difficult it is to develop a coherent humanitarian response out of a patchwork of different donor priorities, this could potentially be a helpful development.

Evaluations have shown that mechanisms like pooled funds and the cluster system have indeed made some progress towards addressing these problems. However, these approaches have not been an unmitigated success – the UN's performance has been mixed overall and a number of new problems have arisen. In particular, for the NGOs that ultimately receive much of the funding in the humanitarian sector, these changes have highlighted new weaknesses within the system:

- A disconnect from programme implementation. In Sudan, an independent review of pooled funds noted that donors' perceptions of pooled funds seemed to be based on 'whether the instrument has met donor objectives associated with current aid agendas rather than on delivery of results on the ground'. Likewise, ODI's report on the CHF and Pooled Fund notes that they have 'failed to fully engage and utilize NGO capacities and ... their primary implementing role'.
- Slow and inefficient administrative processes. Evaluations of the CHF and the pooled funds have universally identified the slow pace of disbursement as a major weakness. UNDP's performance in administering funds to NGOs has proved extremely problematic, its systems rigid and slow-moving in the face of dynamic relief and recovery needs. One report, commissioned by the CHF and Pooled Fund donors, concluded that 'although UNDP has made a concerted effort to adapt its procedures, it is questionable whether it is fundamentally equipped to undertake programme management of humanitarian projects'.
- Excessive focus on funding UN agencies. ODI's evaluation of the CHF and Pooled Funds found that prioritisation of funding often appeared to be linked to internal UN issues rather than assessed needs – with funding going to UN agencies at levels disproportionate to their capabilities. One example of this is the CHF's initial response to the 2007 floods in Sudan: 80% of the first cycle of funding was disbursed to UN agencies, and only 20% to NGOs on the ground. The donor-commissioned evaluation of the funds also noted that disbursements to UN agencies were often not linked to any form of project impact measurement – with the result that much of the funding went to UN overhead rather than project costs.



A small-business owner supported by Mercy Corps

- Partnership challenges. NGOs' difficulties with the partnership procedures of UN agencies have been exacerbated by the advent of the cluster system and the corresponding increases in the proportion of humanitarian funding routed through UN, rather than bilateral, channels. These challenges – including inadequate overhead support, the imposition of unrealistic salary caps, long delays between projects starting and funds being disbursed, onerous administrative requirements, and difficulties in covering field administration and logistics costs at a realistic level¹ – are forcing agencies in some countries to question whether they can accept large-scale UN funding. UN partnership problems – which were manageable when NGOs received a large proportion of their funds from bilateral donors – risk becoming unmanageable as bilateral funding opportunities recede.

there are serious weaknesses in how the UN has approached the consolidation of humanitarian funding

There are serious weaknesses in how the UN has approached the consolidation of humanitarian funding. Mercy Corps believes that a preferable way to retain the benefits of centralisation and consolidation, while also addressing the shortcomings of the existing UN-led

¹ Several UN agencies, to their credit, have recognised these challenges and taken steps to update their policies. UNHCR has engaged InterAction in an ongoing discussion of partnership reform, and UNICEF in Uganda opened a productive dialogue with partners, resulting in policy changes that addressed many NGO concerns.

models, is to give NGOs and civil society actors a more central role in the management of these mechanisms. Mercy Corps' experience with an NGO-led pooled fund in Zimbabwe has shown the potential of such an approach.

The Joint Initiative in Zimbabwe

In 2005, the government of Zimbabwe launched Operation Murambatsvina ('Operation Restore Order') to close down slums throughout the country. The resulting displacement of 700,000 of Zimbabwe's poorest people constituted a serious emergency, and humanitarian actors in the country sought to organise a response. The UN attempted to develop a flash appeal, but the government refused to sign off on it. The appeal was eventually submitted to donors without the government's approval, but by that

point a great deal of time had been lost and the donor response was tepid. In light of the poor response to the appeal, several international NGOs in the country began discussing the idea of organising their own response. The idea was put to donors, who proved supportive of the concept and asked the NGOs to take it forward.

With the encouragement of donors, these NGOs – Mercy Corps, Africare, CARE, CRS, Oxfam, Practical Action and Save the Children – began to flesh out the structure of such a partnership. Naming their effort the Joint Initiative (JI), the partners drafted a concept paper outlining how the consortium would function, and designed an assessment plan. As part of this process, the partners devised a unique system to optimise coordination and separate it from individual agencies' fundraising considerations. During the assessment design phase, each partner indicated which sectors and regions they wished to target. Any overlaps would be resolved by consensus. The partners agreed that funding would be designated for each sector based on the relative urgency of need, as determined by the joint assessment, and then assigned to partners based on the prior agreement on coverage responsibilities. This system facilitated the selection of the most-qualified partners for each sector, while discouraging partners from simply pursuing the most lucrative sectors (since funding allocations were separated from designations of sectoral responsibility).

With these plans in hand, the consortium met several major donors to formally pitch the idea. The JI's donors (DFID, USAID, AusAID, the Norwegian government, CIDA and SIDA) agreed to contribute an initial \$60,000 towards carrying out the assessment and design phase, following which a full proposal was submitted. After detailed negotiations, the JI partners persuaded donors to agree to an unusual but greatly streamlined administrative and accountability structure. In order to minimise the overhead burden of

involving 12 partners and donors, all donors to the consortium agreed to receive a single joint financial report, and a single joint narrative report. Strategic and funding decisions would be made by the JI steering committee, consisting of the partners' country directors and a representative of the donor group. Once per quarter, the steering committee also met the broader donor group to ensure that all donors remained engaged. Donors agreed not to earmark funds provided to the consortium, instead allowing the JI steering committee to make funding allocations. Finally, rather than using multiple sets of differing procurement guidelines depending on the funding source, all donors permitted the consortium to use SIDA's guidelines as the common standard.

USAID – which for legal reasons could not contribute directly to the consortium – agreed to cover the administration and management costs incurred by Mercy Corps as the lead agency. This ensured that all funding from the other donors went straight to the recipient implementing partner, as Mercy Corps had no need to impose a general management fee. In contrast to the traditional fixed-fee arrangement that the UN typically adopts, this approach constituted a more transparent and accountable means of covering administrative management costs.

NGO consortia could manage large multi-project funds involving multiple donors

For the first phase of the Joint Initiative, which ran from May 2006 to March 2008, donors committed \$5 million. The initiative performed extremely well: of the 16 activity targets in the original proposal, the consortium met or exceeded 13. In many cases targets were surpassed. This is all the more impressive considering the highly politicised and economically volatile operating environment. Several achievements were particularly notable. The consortium set up triple the expected number of vendors' associations to facilitate business training and credit provision, trained triple the planned number of Community Home-Based Carers and facilitated tenure clarification for more than double the projected number of households. An independent external evaluation of the project's first phase found that 'the JI programme has been an innovative approach in providing support to poor and vulnerable urban households. Overall, the programme successfully met its targets and objectives'.²

The way forward

The Joint Initiative was relatively small, at only \$5m, and many NGOs (Mercy Corps included) have experience of managing far larger sums as part of single-donor programmes. It is reasonable to believe that NGO consortia could likewise manage comparably large multi-project funds involving multiple donors. Given the

² Lovemore Zinyama and Bakhethisi Mlalazi, *Final Evaluation of the NGO Joint Initiative for Urban Zimbabwe Community-Based Support for Vulnerable Populations*, report to the Joint Initiative Donor Group, April 2008.

potential of this type of approach, what steps should be taken to replicate and expand it to other settings? Several key lessons emerge from the case study:

- NGOs must take the initiative: the JI arose out of a collective approach and proposition to donors. This indicates that donors may be responsive to NGO-led mechanisms, if the NGOs are proactive in making their case.
- Donors must adapt: while NGOs need to be proactive, donors also need to be flexible in responding to new structures. NGO-led pooled mechanisms are a new approach and may not always fit neatly into donors' traditional systems. In Zimbabwe, the donors to the JI accepted a new manner of working with NGOs, altering their reporting and accountability procedures.
- The UN retains an important role: even when it does not function as the principal pass-through agent for funding, it is still vital in facilitating coordination. It has a pivotal position in the humanitarian architecture as the developer of technical standards, convener of coordination fora, leader in developing cluster strategies and principal representative of the humanitarian community's interests to host governments. In all of these functions, the UN's leadership is vital to the collective success of the humanitarian community.
- Build around a clear focus: the Joint Initiative was developed in response to a clear, compelling and urgent problem – Operation Murambatsvina. The clarity and urgency of the needs enabled the NGOs involved to make a compelling case to donors. In the absence of this kind of focus, it may prove more difficult to mobilise sufficient donor engagement.

Mercy Corps is applying these lessons in Sudan's Abyei region. The Abyei Relief and Rehabilitation Programme (ARRP) began in 2006 as an EC-funded consortium focused on the rehabilitation of the region, but in the wake of the Abyei crisis of May 2008 the ARRP partnership structure also provided a platform for a very effective emergency and early recovery response (albeit with non-ARRP funds). In the aftermath of the crisis, the members of the consortium (Mercy Corps, Save the Children, GOAL and ACAD) asked donors to channel recovery funds through the ARRP partnership structure rather than the CHF, given the CHF's well-documented challenges in Sudan and its single-year funding cycles. The partners believed that their own structure, with a multi-year funding horizon and demonstrated flexibility, provided an optimal channel for post-emergency transitional funding. While the process of shifting the ARRP from a single-donor fund to more of a pooled approach remains in its early stages, the consortium partners have received indications from several donors that they intend to support this NGO-led mechanism rather than resort to the CHF.

Another area where this type of model could be taken forward is within the cluster system. As noted above, cluster system countries have seen a shift in donor funds away from bilateral grants to NGOs, and funding to UN agency cluster leads has increased. This shift in funding streams can improve incentives for coordination, but it also

subordinates the NGO cluster members to the lead agency's partnership policies – sometimes with problematic results. However, there is no reason why a group of cluster NGOs could not form a consortium and approach donors directly for funding. The UN cluster lead could continue to provide coordination support and leadership, without the burden of having to administer large amounts of funding. This would also enable NGOs to operate more effectively, without having to adapt to the often-onerous administrative requirements imposed by UN agencies.

Mercy Corps' experience with the Joint Initiative in Zimbabwe shows the clear potential of an NGO-led approach to pooled funding. Mercy Corps and its partners have been able to capitalise upon the positive aspects of pooled mechanisms – enhancing operational coordination, reducing the administrative burden on donors and increasing the alignment of priorities amongst donors – while avoiding time-consuming bureaucracy, utilising sensible and appropriate administrative procedures and – most importantly – delivering high-quality programmes.

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The Niger Delta: 'explo-action' as a way in

Jacqueline Tong, independent consultant

How can agencies gain access in difficult contexts? Valuable work has been done on negotiating access with armed non-state actors, but what if negotiation is not enough? What if the context is so challenging that a conventional approach is impossible? One solution is 'remote control' or 'shared management', where national staff are dispatched to manage projects directly. For a variety of reasons, this approach is controversial. This article suggests that a different approach – 'explo-action' – may be an effective answer.

What is explo-action?

Explo-action means 'exploratory mission together with medical action'. It is commonly used by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in emergency situations, whereby medical activities are launched concurrently with an assessment or exploratory mission. It is generally characterised by the rapid setting up of medical services to implement treatment and gather medical data and other information necessary to understand the nature and gravity of an emergency. This method is often used when the situation is so urgent that the usual methods of needs assessment, project design and implementation are too slow. Explo-action was formalised as a distinct methodology in Colombia, for MSF Spain. There it is used to open projects using mobile clinics in new, highly insecure areas, with the expectation that, in time, a more regular service can be implemented.

Explo-action in the Niger Delta

MSF Spain decided in early 2007 to launch a conventional needs assessment in Bayelsa, in Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta. This area was chosen because it was expected that

already difficult security conditions in the Delta would deteriorate further, affecting the health and humanitarian situation of an already marginalised and distressed population. MSF Holland has been present in Nigeria since the 1990s, and carried out a malaria project in Bayelsa from 2001 until 2005. MSF France has a trauma hospital in the commercial capital, Port Harcourt. MSF Spain had no presence in the area, and the needs assessment represented the first step in commencing activities there.

The state of Bayelsa has a population of some 1.7 million. The main ethnic group, the Ijaw, is the fourth-largest in the country. The state covers two of the region's three large oil basins, with a topography characterised by complex river networks known as 'creeks'. Nigeria derives an estimated 80% of its foreign earnings from oil. The oil fields are nationalised; all revenues are taken at the federal level and shared with the oil companies, but no compensation is given directly to host communities. Oil-producing states are allocated 13% of the revenues, but a significant proportion of this money – perhaps as much as 90% – never reaches its destination through a process of misappropriation known locally as 'chopping'. These resource-rich areas, like others around the world, suffer from the 'paradox of plenty': far from benefiting from the valuable resources they contain, they become impoverished and marginalised.

Bayelsa is a very complex society. Key elements within it include the 'legitimate' authorities, traditional rulers, the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), a powerful social and political force, and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), a loose coalition of militant groups that emerged in 2005. There is also the phenomenon of 'cult

groups', made up of disaffected youth and often very violent. Religion is important: the region has a plethora of Christian churches following a variety of different creeds, alongside a deep-rooted belief in traditional forms of religion. The practice of magic is common. Although the Niger Delta region has a history of communal violence, over the past few years anger at the government has grown, and most conflicts have become very political in nature. In particular, MEND kidnaps expatriate oil workers, in part as a statement of protest against the federal government, and attacks oil installations in an attempt to cut production. Few expatriates move around without armed guards, and several Western governments warn against travel to the Delta. The families of prominent Nigerians are also at risk.

after the initial rapid visit, an in-depth 'explo' was launched

The process of entering such an unsafe area included several weeks of desk research, followed by an initial rapid field visit to determine whether security conditions allowed freedom of movement and access to populations in need. After the initial rapid visit, an in-depth 'explo' (needs assessment) was launched. Initially this was confined to areas reachable by road, as it was said to be too dangerous to go into the creeks, which are only accessible by boat ('kidnapping', apparently, was 'an inevitability'). With careful planning, however, it was possible to make two visits to communities in the creeks. The assessment team spoke to a broad cross-section of the population, in markets, restaurants, at creek boat hubs and in medical institutions. We also interviewed political leaders. Very few people are willing to speak freely in the presence of armed guards, and none were used by the assessment team.

Findings

The assessment found extreme marginalisation and poverty among the majority of the population. According to the local media, as many as 70% live below the poverty line. Throughout the state, the infrastructure for basic utilities such as water, sanitation and electricity is poor at best and non-existent at worst, even in the state capital, Yenagoa. In rural and creek areas, frequent oil spills contaminate waterways and arable land. Continuous gas-flaring is said to cause acid rain.

The health situation is equally worrying. Estimates of average life expectancy range from 43–46 years. No global data is available, but figures can be extrapolated from a few focal sites. Available medical indicators show high levels of malaria and waterborne diseases as leading causes of morbidity and mortality. Of special note was the finding that 8% of mortality in 2005 was caused by anaemia. This is a fertile area that should have abundant fisheries; if true, this figure gives cause for acute concern. Vaccination coverage in many areas is low, and according to a government health official less than 10% of pregnant women have any sort of ante-natal check (this is very low, even by Sub-Saharan African standards). The health system barely functions, and

access to health care is severely limited by a lack of staff and medical supplies, corruption, a troubled public health insurance scheme and access difficulties.

Explo-action

Given the medical indicators and the poor state of the health system, there is clearly good grounds for some sort of external intervention. Right from the outset of the assessment, there was a strong feeling that there was space for MSF to work. It is a general rule of thumb that, if hunting is required to identify a project, the question 'is it necessary here?' needs to be asked. In Bayelsa, it was more a case of 'where to start?'. While the assessment barely scratched the surface, it was felt that further assessment would yield little more of value, and it was decided to move into 'explo-action' mode. In Bayelsa the rationale for this approach was based on the complexity of the society, insecurity, the sparse medical data available and the need to gain the trust of all key stakeholders.

In Bayelsa, most needs are in the creeks, but access is extremely problematic, for logistical reasons as well as insecurity, making this a difficult place to choose as a point of entry. Rather than being mobile, in the first instance it was decided to establish roots on the land. A township near Yenagoa and a busy creek hub were selected as the best sites to undertake a modest medical intervention. The initial proposal was to establish an independent clinic (so as not to become entangled in the failing health system) with stabilisation in-patient facilities. A clear and comprehensive project would be established after further assessment. In particular, the original assessment did not examine the public health impacts of oil pollution and gas-flaring, and it is expected that adapted epidemiological monitoring will prove or disprove the hypothesis that pollution is adding significantly to the health burden. After some delay due to administrative demands, the clinic is in service, and MSF-Spain is hoping to conduct further assessments in other areas.

The future

Bayelsa presents a unique set of variables, making conventional approaches to establishing a new project hazardous. Explo-action assumes a risk of failure, but it is also seen as a 'least risk' approach when there are so many unknowns. Remote control could have been proposed, but it has been controversial in MSF (and elsewhere) as it contradicts the agency's operational policy of proximity to affected populations and increases the risks national staff are exposed to. Starting work in a new country with unproven national staff, especially in light of the high levels of corruption, also makes remote control a high-risk approach. Explo-action is therefore a means of retaining proximity, ensuring that national staff do not bear the brunt of insecurity and maintaining the integrity of projects.

To date, outside of emergencies MSF has tended to use explo-action on a case-by-case basis. No clear parameters have been defined governing when to use this method to gain entry into a new context. There is scope for more formal definition of explo-action, and context indicators should be identified, so that explo-action can become a

tool of choice rather than a ‘default’ position. It would also be interesting to establish whether explo-action has been used by other groups, and if so whether the method can be adapted to non-medical activities.

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Building lasting solutions for older people displaced by the conflict in Northern Uganda

Susan Erb, HelpAge International

The 19-year conflict between the Ugandan government and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) displaced over 1.8 million people in Northern Uganda. After a ceasefire agreement was finally reached in 2006, many displaced Acholis began to return to their villages of origin. Yet data collected in early 2008 indicates that the return process is still only at its start. Long-term displacement has caused social deterioration and many internally displaced people (IDPs) are heavily reliant on food rations and NGO and UN support provided in displacement camps. Security fears related to attacks from Karamojong cattle rustlers and the possible return of the insurgency also remain high. As a result, many displaced Acholis commute between camps and transit sites, and between transit sites and their villages of origin.

Older people and the return process

UNHCR data from January 2008 indicates that 21% of the Acholi IDP population had relocated to transit sites, and another 32% had returned to their villages of origin. Around half of the remaining displaced population – 47% – remained resident in camps.¹ According to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) in Uganda, an estimated 31% of Acholi IDPs had moved to transit sites, but only 6% had fully returned to their villages of origin, leaving 63% still officially resident in camps.² Although these figures present slightly

different pictures, either way it is clear that the process of return is far from complete. Even those who have made a permanent return need both time and practical support before their livelihoods are fully re-established and social services transferred to rural parish locations.

In 2008, HelpAge International seconded an expert on ageing to the Protection Cluster Working Group (PCWG), led by UNHCR and intended to mainstream the rights and specific needs of older people into humanitarian protection responses. The secondment included an extended mission to Uganda in mid-2008, aimed at providing practical, targeted support to PCWG members in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader Districts.

HelpAge International’s own research indicates that older people (defined as those aged 60 years and above) are often disproportionately affected in emergencies, are commonly overlooked in both immediate responses and rehabilitation and are given limited if any opportunity to participate in programme planning.³ International humanitarian agencies often assume (incorrectly) that older people will be covered by a specialist agency, or will be supported by traditional family and community mechanisms. Even UNHCR’s own extensive Real Time Evaluation of IDPs in Northern Uganda in

¹ UNHCR, *Uganda Briefing Sheet*, February 2008.

² IASC in Uganda, *IASC Working Group Update on IDP Movement*, January 2008.

³ Gina Bramucci and Susan Erb, International Federation of Ageing, Global Ageing: Issues and Action, ‘An Invisible Population: Displaced Older People in Darfur’, *Ageing Africa*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2007.

August 2007 failed to include reference to issues affecting older people.⁴

Research conducted during the 2008 mission confirmed that a disproportionate number of the Acholi remaining in camps were older people. UNHCR research in eight IDP camps in Lira, Oyam and Apac districts further substantiated this trend, confirming that the remaining camp populations comprised exclusively older people.⁵ A brief assessment of return trends showed that between 3.5% and 5% of older IDPs were being included in the process of permanent return to villages of origin.

older people are often disproportionately affected in emergencies

Focus group discussions and interviews with older people and stakeholders, including NGOs, UN agencies and local government officials, were carried out to explore the barriers to return older people were facing, and to identify recommendations as to how they could be more actively included in determining and implementing programmes.

Findings

During discussions and interviews, older people overwhelmingly expressed a desire to return to their villages of origin. However, priority needs that they felt had to be met before they could return were listed as shelter, assistance, access to social services such as healthcare and schools, caring responsibilities and psychosocial wellbeing.

Lack of shelter was identified as the main reason for not returning. A March 2008 rapid food security assessment in 11 camps in Pader District reinforced these findings, noting that nearly all older people cited shelter as the primary barrier to return, compared with just over half (56.4%) of overall respondents.⁶ Older people said that they did not have the materials needed – bricks, grass and bamboo – or the physical capability to walk long distances to collect materials, carry them back and then construct new homes. Older women cited particular difficulties due to lack of mobility and physical strength, and felt unable to ask fitter members of the community for help. Many younger people, for example, were demanding cash payment in return for their assistance.

Closely linked to this were strong feelings of uselessness among older people as a result of their physical incapacity, lack of strength and loss of traditional roles within the household and community. In many cases, communities prioritised the return of younger and more able members, rather than older relatives. The tacit expectation was that

⁴ UNHCR (Claire Bourgeois and Neill Wright), IDP Advisory Team, and Jeff Crisp (PDES), *Real-time Evaluation of UNHCR's IDP Operation in Uganda*, August 2007.

⁵ UNHCR, *Report on the Reminat [sic] IDPs within Lango Sub-Region*, March 2008.

⁶ *Ibid.*

older people would eventually be assisted with return, but only when the basic needs of other returnees had been met. Feelings of social and economic uselessness also heavily impacted on older people's wellbeing.

Access to services provided in the camps, including healthcare, water and food distributions, was also a factor in older people's continued presence there, particularly as most act as sole carers for their grandchildren. Older people cited the lack of schools in return areas, reporting that grandchildren would simply commute back from the villages to the camp in order to attend secondary school. Camps also provide markets for goods for those older people who are economically active.

For many older people, care of the dead was another significant concern, both in terms of moving the bones of relatives who had died in the camps back to villages, and anxiety that some return sites were affected by 'roaming spirits'. For themselves, older people were eager to return to their land before they died.

Crafting effective responses

Responding effectively to the needs of older people and including them in the planning and implementation of humanitarian responses is particularly important now, as efforts are being made to close IDP camps and phase out camp-based humanitarian assistance. If older people and the children they care for remain in decommissioned camps, they may receive reduced support, may be unable to meet their basic needs, and may be exposed to isolation and psychosocial trauma.

ensuring the participation of older people in decisions that affect the quality of their lives must be an overarching and cross-cutting element of all programme responses

Seeking to ensure the participation of older people in decisions that affect the quality of their lives must be an overarching and cross-cutting element of all programme responses. Older people need to be consulted and must be encouraged to become active participants in determining solutions. One concrete method to ensure that old people's voices are heard is to encourage the development of Older People's Committees or Associations, which empower older people to engage in mutual social (and economic in the case of livelihoods activities) support. This could be done with little additional input, as part of regular camp monitoring and community meeting activities. However, there may be a need for support materials and direction to assist with the development of these committees.⁷ In

⁷ Information to assist with the development of OPAs can be accessed through HAI's website at www.helppage.org. See also HAI, *Establishing and Working with Older People's Associations in Cambodia: A Practical Guideline*, 2006.

addition, it is important to ensure that older people are represented on other community forums, such as agricultural committees or women's groups.

Protection actors should seek to raise public awareness of older people's rights and their contribution to the community, including their roles as mediators, educators and advisors, teachers of livelihood skills and traditional healers. By devaluing their own contributions, older people reinforce the message to their families and communities, as well as to NGOs, UN agencies and the local government, that they are useless. An information campaign directed at older people, the wider community, implementing partners and local government could help here. Hosting regional radio broadcasts where older people's rights, needs and contributions are highlighted, debated and discussed could be another way to achieve this.

One area where public awareness needs are particularly acute regards health services for older people. Older people complained of being treated poorly by healthcare providers, who were seen as insensitive to their needs. Some older people were told that they were 'not sick, just old'. Many also said that they were too weak to walk to healthcare centres, and that, if they did do so, when they arrived they were told that 'medicine is for children not old people'. Meetings with World Health Organisation (WHO) staff during the mission confirmed the impression that medical staff are not trained to respond to older people's health problems.

WHO noted that it has been unable to address the health needs of older people in its programming, focusing instead on children's health, reproductive health and HIV/AIDS. However, it recommends that protection stakeholders could work through Village Health Teams (VHTs) to involve older people directly as team members. Working through the VHT system can support the regular monitoring of visits to older people, which could encourage community care of older people as well as feeding information on the incidence and types of older people's health issues from the community level upwards through the health service system. Appropriate geriatric drugs should also be made more widely available, and Health Cluster members could set aside a specific time each week to receive and treat older people. This would reduce waiting times for older people as well as allowing health staff to focus specific attention on them. HelpAge International's experience in Darfur has found this a beneficial initiative for improving older people's access to care.

Collecting disaggregated data on older people from 60–79 and over 80 is central to effective programmatic responses. Breaking this data down further to identify active older people, who would benefit from support to return to villages of origin, and those who need specific assistance to meet basic living requirements, is vital for appropriate humanitarian intervention.

Integrated and inter-generational responses

It is vital that agencies share good practice and work together to avoid duplication or the introduction of new structures which undermine traditional clan support. Even where programming may not intimately involve older people, wherever possible it is important to consult them and engage their participation as advisors. One older man complained that, while NGOs had programmes tailored to agriculture, older people were excluded. This oversight could be easily addressed with no additional inputs, by simply inviting older people to participate as mentors, advisors and organisers. For example, involving older people in the distribution of tools and agricultural equipment reinforces their role as active participants, recognises their knowledge and experience and engages them productively with a socially and economically important duty.

Inter-generational links could also be nurtured through activities such as the inclusion of older people in child-friendly spaces, where they can act as story-tellers, or by using young people to build shelter for older relatives and neighbours. Any situation where old and young can share the work enables older people to talk about their own life experiences and increases the economic resilience of multi-generational households.

Appropriate assistance

Older people should be consulted on their specific needs, and on how assistance to meet them can best be provided. Housing, for example, needs to be age-appropriate and easy for older people to maintain. Livelihood interventions are vital in addressing older people's protection needs. Income generation provides older people with an opportunity to contribute economically to their households through agricultural activities, small-business enterprise, handicraft work and trading, building self-esteem and increasing feelings of positive wellbeing.

Next steps

Protection Cluster Working Group members and local government have a unique opportunity to positively influence the creation of durable solutions for older displaced Acholis, whether they choose to return to their villages of origin, remain in camps or relocate elsewhere within Uganda. While the recommendations given here are specifically focused on older people, most if not all are also applicable to adults with physical disabilities and could be adopted and adapted to improve their quality of life. HelpAge International has developed checklists to help Protection Cluster members to ensure that they are including older people in both initial and ongoing needs assessments as well as in regular programming. It continues to work with PCWG member agencies so that the needs and contributions of older people are recognised and addressed by humanitarian actors.

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Combining child protection with child development: child-friendly spaces in Tearfund's North Sudan programme

Anne McCulloch, Tearfund

Child-friendly spaces are widely used by many agencies working in emergency situations or in areas of continuing crisis to provide temporary activities and support for children. They are recognised by UNICEF as a key child protection strategy. As well as aiming to protect children, such spaces can also foster child development. This article describes Tearfund's use of child-friendly spaces in its programme in Darfur.

Tearfund's Darfur programme

In January 2005, Tearfund began providing child-friendly spaces in highly volatile Beida Locality, southwest of Geneina in Darfur. The programme started in response to requests from the local community for additional support to displaced children who had no access to schooling. Currently, 18 centres are run each morning throughout the locality. In June 2008, these centres were attended by over 5,000 children, from two distinct target groups:

- Children at the right age for school, but who do not have access to school because they have been displaced to towns which do not have the capacity to host them in existing schools, there are no or insufficient IDP schools and/or their parents are unable to pay school fees.
- Children between two and seven years of age, who are too young for school and are unable to access preschools (there are only two alternative small preschools in the entire locality).

Why not just address problems of access by paying school fees? With thousands of children in need of access to education, this would be impossible. It would be difficult to safely distribute cash without creating a security risk for staff and adding to the insecurity of the children receiving the funds. It would also be difficult to select who should receive fees, and to keep them accountable for spending the money as intended.

The child-friendly spaces provide physical safety, psychosocial activities and educational assistance for children five days a week. Outdoor play areas, sports pitches and volleyball courts have been developed. These spaces also provide children without access to school with an opportunity to enjoy informal education. They provide a routine and a structure for children whose lives have



Children playing in a child-friendly space in Arara, Darfur

©Anne McCulloch

been heavily disrupted, and also give them the support of an adult from outside their family.

The child-friendly spaces are organised into three age groups. Children who attend are between two and 16, although there is no upper or lower age limit. The majority of children are between the ages of three and 12. Each day the children join together at the start and end to sing a wide range of songs. In age-appropriate groups the children participate in numeracy and literacy education, organised group recreational and art activities (painting, drawing, clay modelling), organised group sport (football, volleyball, rounders), free play on outdoor play equipment, drama and storytelling and make-believe play activities (house corner, puppetry). They are also given informal teaching in life skills, especially health and hygiene.

child-friendly spaces provide a routine and a structure for children whose lives have been heavily disrupted

Each child-friendly space has a weekly timetable for each age group. Spaces are run by three local facilitators (volunteers) who receive small amounts of food as an incentive each month, in the form of sugar, oil, wheat flour or milk powder, depending on the location. Food incentives

are given as a way of thanking the facilitators for their time and to help them support their families. The facilitators are not salaried in the hope that, in the long term, communities themselves will take the programme over.

The facilitators are trained twice a month on the various activities and on how to provide psychosocial support to the children in their care. With Tearfund staff they have developed a folder for each centre containing ideas on different activities. This includes suggestions from other NGOs and ideas drawn from the Sudanese curriculum. Ideas include explanations of how to make toys like cars from empty tins, games such as tag and hide and seek, simple ways to teach numbers by counting objects, ideas for setting up a house corner and learning the words to songs. Children who have attended child-friendly spaces should be able to integrate into mainstream schools more easily because of their prior access to some formal routine and learning activities. This benefit was noted in a recent external evaluation of the programme.

All facilitators have signed a good conduct policy (developed collaboratively between Tearfund and UNICEF) and have had extensive child protection training. A register of children's names and key details is kept for each centre. This includes notes on children classed as Extremely Vulnerable Individuals (EVIs) according to UNHCR criteria. This enables Tearfund staff to ensure that the most vulnerable children receive additional support as required, including access to non-food items for their families, referral to other agencies or visits by a facilitator to the child's home.

In each location a local teacher has been designated to link with the child-friendly spaces. Ministry of Education representatives for the area have been involved in the selection of these teachers, and have provided ideas on setting up and running the centres. In several locations IDP schools share resources and facilities, giving IDPs a place to store their things and providing additional shade to teach under. In the evenings the centres are open for teenagers and young people (aged roughly between 12 and 25).

Resources

In Darfur, UNICEF provides kits containing many of the resources needed to run child-friendly spaces, including volley-ball nets, volley balls, footballs, small balls, paper, pencils, exercise books and small chalk boards. In addition, Tearfund provides chairs and mats, blackboards and chalk, outdoor play facilities including sand pits, seesaws, slides and swings, access to clean water, latrines, hand-washing facilities and soap and shelters.

Initially the centres used a UNICEF tent or a *racuba* (a wooden frame with a straw roof) for shelter. However, as many of the centres have now been running for more than two years, a more permanent structure was required. In 2007 Tearfund built 14 more substantial centres in Beida Locality. Each was painted with Arabic numbers and alphabet pictures, and each has a purpose statement to facilitate community understanding about the centres. Each centre also has a store which allows easy access to resources.

Key learning

- Use incentives to pay volunteers, to provide a livelihood contribution.
- Ensure that facilitators have the skills needed to run child-friendly spaces to a high standard.
- Build storerooms so that resources are readily available, and regularly restock supplies so that facilitators feel confident in using the resources, knowing that they will be replaced.
- Provide regular training and develop resources around which facilitators can structure activities at the centres.
- Building play equipment on each site can help increase the range of activities children can be involved in. Play equipment is permanently in place and so is always available.
- Link with the Ministry of Education to help ensure that child-friendly spaces are integrated into national systems.

In some locations it is not appropriate to build such centres as communities hope to leave the area and return to their former homes. In these locations *racubas* are still used, with resources stored in metal boxes in a nearby home. It is anticipated that, once there is no longer a need for child-friendly spaces, the shelters can be used for other community activities.

child-friendly spaces can be a valuable tool in providing social support for children

Psychosocial support

Child-friendly spaces can be a valuable tool in providing social support for children, seeking to build on children's resilience and natural ability to recover while limiting the long-term effects of conflict.¹ Child-friendly spaces, along with youth activities and children's clubs, which Tearfund also provides, encourage the development of pro-social behaviours for children, including enhanced self-esteem, hope and a sense of self-efficacy. Evidence from focus group discussions held in December 2008 (three years into the programme) in all the locations with child-friendly spaces suggest that relations among children, and between children and adults, have improved.

Child-friendly spaces, youth activities and clubs provide an environment that evidence suggests can mitigate the impact of crisis on children. They do not provide psychiatric counselling or group therapy, but are focused on fostering children's natural resilience and coping

¹ See Mona Macksoud, *Helping Children Cope with the Stress of War – A Manual for Parents and Teachers*, UNICEF Publications, 2000; Laura Arnston and Christine Knudsen, *Save the Children Psychosocial Care and Protection of Children in Emergencies – A Field Guide*, Save the Children Federation, 2004.

mechanisms. Tearfund's child-friendly spaces work with children in constructive ways, drawing on their own capacities and on the strengths and assets of their communities. Under the supervision of a caring adult, these centres provide children with a safe environment in which they can play, socialise, learn lifesaving information and express themselves. By participating in arts and crafts, games, cooperative learning, team-building activities, drama and structured educational lessons and sports, children are helped to come to terms with their experiences.

Various guidelines are available to help ensure that psychosocial activities are of good quality. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)'s *Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings*, a collaboration between UN agencies and international NGOs, were published in 2007.² The guidelines state that protecting and promoting mental health and psychosocial wellbeing is the responsibility of all humanitarian agencies and workers. In addition, Tearfund has its own internal policy and quality standards on child development as part of the agency's commitment to accountability. These guidelines lay out the essential first steps in protecting or promoting mental health and psychosocial wellbeing in the midst of emergencies. They identify useful practices and flag potentially harmful ones, and clarify how different approaches complement one another. The guidelines have a clear focus on social interventions and support, in line with the approach Tearfund has taken in developing its child-friendly spaces, youth activities and clubs in Beida Locality. UNICEF also has guidelines on minimum standards when running child-friendly spaces, which Tearfund has adapted to the Darfur context through participation in the Child Protection Working Group. Adaptations involved ensuring that the guidelines matched the service that NGOs in Darfur provide at their centres, so for example there was no need to include a section on catering or laundry.

Child-friendly spaces are appropriate in the context of Darfur because they provide temporary informal

² See <http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/content/products/default.asp> and IASCmhpss@who.int.

education for displaced children in what will hopefully prove to be transitional locations, before they return to their original homes. Once they do so, more permanent education facilities can be provided. As the Darfur conflict continues, however, Tearfund has started to support the government in building additional classrooms. We are also continuing to provide training for teachers connected to Tearfund's child-related activities, and working closely with the government, local commissioners, other NGOs and UNICEF and UNHCR in an effort to provide more schools to which all children can have access.

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Recommended reading

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NGO relations with the government and communities in Afghanistan

Emilie Jelinek

This article explores the relationship between NGOs and the Afghan government, and communities' perceptions of both. The research on which it is based was principally undertaken in three provinces, Herat, Balkh and Kabul. The article also draws on the author's experience in other parts of the country, specifically the south-east. The core of the study highlights the issues shaping relations between the Afghan government and NGOs, with a view to improving them, and identifying areas where they can better appreciate each other's respective merits. A

clarification of roles and greater communication between NGOs and the government would help to foster a more effective relationship in an environment where, at present, neither can work properly without the other.

The working environment in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is one of the most difficult countries for NGOs to work in. The security situation is getting progressively worse, with aid workers subjected to a growing number of direct attacks, threats and intimidation. In 2008, 40 humanitarian

aid convoys and 47 aid facilities were attacked, ambushed or looted, and 112 aid workers were kidnapped (five of whom were killed). In some areas, infrastructure and services are almost non-existent. The military presence is high, and in some areas NGOs are compelled to share operational space with the military, affecting how NGOs are perceived locally and raising difficult issues of independence, neutrality and impartiality.¹ Social and political systems are not uniform across the country, requiring organisations to adopt very specific local approaches to the areas in which they are working. The complex and multi-faceted nature of the conflict in Afghanistan has brought together a host of different actors, ostensibly working together to meet a variety of objectives and often required to produce immediate results despite the fact that objectives, actors and initiatives are not always complementary. Political imperatives often lead to programmes that are not responsive to local needs.

Relations with the government

Although influencing the political and security environment is beyond the scope of agencies working in the field, certain aspects of NGO work, specifically relations with the government, could be improved. While coordination between the government and aid agencies has arguably improved over the past few years, particularly in Kabul, more could be done.

Afghanistan is one of the most difficult countries for NGOs to work in

Currently, coordination between NGOs and the government takes place at various levels, both in Kabul and in the provinces. NGOs are required to submit regular reports to line ministries (as well as the ministries of economy and finance). Provincial Development Committees were set up in each province in 2005 in order to improve coordination between the centre and the provinces; there are also specific sectoral meetings (involving line ministries and UN and NGO representatives), held monthly. To some extent, the effectiveness of these meetings depends on the personalities involved; some participants are more active than others, and attendances vary.

¹ Concerns about the impartiality and independence of humanitarian agencies within the framework of a new 'integrated approach' to state-building and humanitarian response have crystallised around the issue of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). Although civil-military relations form an important part of the aid discourse in Afghanistan, PRTs are not discussed here. For a discussion, see ENNA/BAAG, *Afghan Hearts and Minds*, 2008.



Community representatives in Zurmat District, Paktia Province

The government currently has the ability to facilitate or obstruct NGO operations. A number of NGOs working in Afghanistan today operated prior to and during the Taliban era. Although their work was highly regulated, they nonetheless had the space they needed to operate. Now, however, NGOs must work alongside a government intent on regulating, planning and managing their projects and activities. This is in part due to the fact that the current administration in Kabul claims service provision as one of its main objectives. According to a law designed to ensure NGO accountability and transparency, and ostensibly to enhance coordination, NGOs must consult with the government and sign a Memorandum of Understanding before they can implement projects. NGOs must also report to the government on all their activities, unlike other actors such as private contractors or Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). Whilst enabling the government to keep track of what NGOs are doing, this system makes it difficult for them to implement projects in a timely manner.

Despite tensions, the government and NGOs have at times worked together to produce some remarkable and widely recognised achievements, such as the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), the Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS) programme and even some evolving community-based education programmes. Yet the fact that so many different actors are involved in development and humanitarian activities, including the UN and the military, means that relations are inevitably complex. Concepts of impartiality and independence sit uneasily amidst this growing need for increased coordination, if not collaboration. By the same token, government views on NGOs are often negative and contradictory. Provincial government respondents accused NGOs of wasting funds and using donor money to pay for extravagant, luxurious lifestyles. At the same time, however, they admitted that they relied heavily on NGOs to carry out work and deliver services which they did not have the resources or the capacity to deliver themselves.

The most effective working relations have been established where NGOs have worked to involve the government in their research efforts, providing them with information about their programmes and plans and inviting them to various events, training sessions and project inaugurations. In Herat, for example, one international NGO is careful not to hire qualified agronomists away from the government, so as not to undermine government capacity. The organisation also recognises that capacity is low and resources are scarce, and so helps out by providing the government with transport to field sites.² It also seconds staff to government offices. Relations also tend to be better with agencies that have had a long-standing presence in their area. As one NGO staff member in Herat stated:

Both NGOs and the government have responsibilities. The government should focus more on a coordinating role to bring NGOs together. NGOs should build government capacity. Their roles should be complementary ... The government is the biggest development agency in the country and NGOs should realise this. Their role should be to create models for development, which the government can follow. The NGO field level worker cannot simply take decisions, but should advise and inform. However, the role NGOs have is crucial. They can identify why and how a system is failing. But many NGOs don't involve the government in their work.

There is considerable frustration within the provincial government over its inability to reach communities due to a lack of resources. In a country where the road and communications infrastructure is severely under-developed, outreach to communities takes on greater meaning. Not having the resources to access districts and communities severely undermines reconstruction efforts, and in many cases exacerbates tensions with NGOs, which generally can afford to make visits to local communities and establish relations with local people. Several provincial government respondents mentioned that they felt disempowered and resentful as a result. This again poses a particular challenge to NGO-government relations, as NGOs will undoubtedly want to maintain their distance and independence from the government in their work. However, they may want to consider approaching local government representatives when conducting field or site visits, so that the government can increase its presence and legitimacy with local communities. Interviews conducted in Balkh and in areas of south-eastern Afghanistan revealed great community dissatisfaction with the minimal government presence in their area, which of course is compounded by the worsening security situation.

Community perceptions of the government and NGOs

Views of the government differed among the local population in Herat and in Balkh. In the former, there appeared to be growing resentment towards the government

² Time and again, government respondents expressed frustration at being unable to access communities because of lack of transport and fuel.

for its lack of engagement in communities, some of its policies (notably the banning of poppy cultivation, which adversely affected people's livelihoods³) and its inability to provide services. Whilst a desire to see a government rather than NGO presence was voiced numerous times, respondents in several communities in Balkh indicated that the provision of security, which seemed to be the main expectation from the government, made up for the lack of basic services. All community members interviewed in Herat, for example, brought up the weakness of the government. One villager stated: 'Our government is very weak and we need the support of foreigners. We need them and they should be here to support us. However, NGOs should consider what really needs to be done and they should be more attentive to what communities are asking for'.

The most frequent complaint against the government by communities concerns rampant corruption, which has become endemic and is severely undermining state-building efforts. Meetings held over the course of the last six months with community members in Paktia and Khost provinces in the south-east reveal mounting indignation and anger against a government which, two years or so ago, people were still willing to support.⁴

As for NGOs, a recurrent complaint was that they implemented projects regardless of what villagers had asked of them. 'An organisation came to our village to ask us for our views on what type of assistance we needed, but then they did what they wanted.' In another village, however, a village council representative stated that 'NGOs come here and they are very straightforward; they tell us what they can provide us with, and are honest with us. They are hard-working and regularly supervise the projects they are implementing'. There still appears to be a general misunderstanding among both the government and people regarding who and what NGOs are. According to a research consultant who undertook an extensive study of large private contractors working in Afghanistan, many of the people spoken to often referred to these contractors as NGOs.⁵ The military often employ contractors, which communities confuse for NGOs, to carry out projects which are not properly supervised and lack accountability.

According to a senior advisor working in Kabul, perceptions of NGOs are linked to the outcomes of the projects they implement: 'where decent, professionally staffed and well trained NGOs have been operating, results have been good. This contrasts with the South, where NSP projects have been implemented through private contractors. Outcomes have been negligible. Vast amounts of funding are being tied up in these contractors' overheads. Good qualified and well respected NGOs are

³ In Paktia province, where local communities have honoured the poppy cultivation ban, people are still waiting for the government compensation promised them. This adds to mounting resentment towards the government.

⁴ When asked what the causes of growing insecurity were, people across the south-east unanimously cited government corruption as well as 'botched' military operations, resulting in civilian casualties.

⁵ See Fariba Nawa, *Afghanistan, Inc.: A CorpWatch Investigative Report*, October 2006.

doing a tremendous job and where outcomes are good, NGOs are viewed favourably by the local population'.

Such outcomes are undoubtedly linked to the amount of time spent engaging directly with communities. As one member of a national NGO working in the south-east stressed, NGOs must engage with all local actors, not just with the government, and invest time in getting to know tribal elders and influential community members in areas where they are working.⁶ According to this representative, it was vitally important for NGOs to establish their presence and legitimacy and engage in projects such as building mosques (a common request). Donors must understand the local context and give NGOs the freedom to engage in such activities.

Where next?

Greater clarity regarding the purpose, authority and membership of the various agencies working in humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan is required. NGOs must make clear who they are and what they do, as their ability to deliver aid to those in need may be severely compromised in the long term if these lines become blurred. Furthermore, the contradictory nature of the government's often negative perceptions of NGOs suggests that the government is perhaps unsure as to the type of partnership it wants, and should define what must ultimately be a strategic partnership, realising and making use of the expertise and wealth of knowledge and information NGOs can bring.

In summary, the study found that government perceptions of NGOs were good where:

- NGOs had involved the government by providing it with

⁶ One recent report recommends that NGOs should frequently revise their knowledge and understanding of the workings of local power structures, which may have become fractured, disempowered, fundamentally altered or supplanted by new informal structures (see ENNA/BAAG, *Afghan Hearts and Minds*, 2008).

information about their programmes, activities and future plans.

- NGOs had invited the government to events, training sessions, workshops and project inaugurations, and helped ease government logistical constraints.
- NGOs had a long-standing presence in an area and had spent time and effort in getting to know the local population and community leaders.
- NGOs had made efforts to coordinate their activities with the government and keep the government up to date with their work.

The most important determinant of how NGOs were perceived was government capacity. In ministries where capacity was low, standard perceptions of NGOs were overwhelmingly negative. Where it was apparent that government staff were more experienced and qualified, perceptions of NGOs were much more balanced, and there was generally a recognition of their value and expertise and the wealth of information they can offer.

Relations between the government and NGOs are likely to be more constructive in cases where the government is confident and capable. The government of Afghanistan is however neither of those things. Working in Afghanistan will undoubtedly remain frustrating, and government capacity will take time to build. In certain cases, NGOs may not even want to be associated with what they perceive to be corrupt and unaccountable bodies. However, by identifying exactly what each other's respective roles are and should be, there is the potential to achieve an effective and complementary relationship.

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Save the Children's Emergency Cash Transfer Programme in Myanmar

Sue Mark, Save the Children in Myanmar

In the early hours of 3 May 2008, Cyclone Nargis made landfall in the Ayeyarwaddy Delta in Myanmar. Official figures released by the Post-Nargis Joint Assessment (PONJA) in July 2008 put the death-toll at 84,537, with 53,836 missing and some 2.4 million severely affected. Damage from the cyclone has been put at over \$4 billion. Prior to Nargis, there was limited experience in using cash as a form of intervention for relief or development in Myanmar. Nargis presented an opportunity to use cash transfers, given the immense shock to livelihoods, resilient markets and the logistical difficulties in getting goods to the remote villages of the Delta. Although the Myanmar government generally does not view cash

transfers favourably, agencies have been allowed to distribute cash for very clearly defined objectives. This article describes Save the Children in Myanmar (SCiM)'s cash transfer programme.

Outline of the programme

In line with the priority needs identified by affected communities, the programme aimed to help cyclone-affected households to 'begin to fulfill their right to livelihoods and to reduce dependence on food assistance through the rapid replacement of essential livelihoods assets'. With £667,000 in funding from the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC), the programme provided 28,000 households with cash

grants of 50,000 kyats. Livelihoods Committees were formed in each village to facilitate the delivery of livelihoods projects. Assets supplied included boats, nets, livestock, items to start small businesses and fertilizer.

The programme used a mixture of cash grants direct to households and facilitated procurement of livelihood assets. The choice between these two methods was based on several factors, including whether the local authorities would accept the use of cash as a means of recovering livelihoods, the applicability of cash to livelihoods activities, market access and the potential for cash to cause conflict between targeted and non-targeted communities. Safety and logistics were also considered.

In light of the tensions caused within some communities as a result of household-level targeting in food aid programming, it was decided that the project would give equal levels of assistance to each household in the targeted villages. Villages were selected according to the following criteria.

1. Food security: so that households would not use the assistance to buy food, it was essential that people enjoyed minimal levels of food security.
2. Degree of mortality and damage.
3. Degree of household poverty and vulnerability.
4. Multi-sectoral approach: other Save the Children sectors should be working in the village, to ensure maximum outreach capacity and pre-existing relationships.
5. Overlap: avoid areas where other agencies were doing similar work.

prior to Nargis, there was limited experience in using cash as a relief intervention in Myanmar

The project was launched in the last week of July 2008, and was completed by the end of September, a little over two months later. The target of 28,000 households was reached across seven area offices in the eastern and western regions of the Delta. This is notable given that SCiM did not have a livelihoods programme or staff in place prior to Nargis.

Evaluation

An internal evaluation of the project was conducted, involving focus group discussions with 17 Livelihoods Committees and 102 interviews with households from poor and very poor wealth groups, including 54 in an area which only used cash grants and 48 in an area which used a mix of cash grants and facilitated procurement. As most households used the majority of their cash grant to buy



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Cyclone damage in Kum Yangon town in the Ayeyarwaddy Delta

livelihoods assets, there was no obvious difference between the two methods in terms of outcome for the households concerned. A market survey was also carried out, including interviews with seven traders.

Impact on livelihood recovery

Most people said that the project had had an impact on their livelihood recovery, through investment in essential livelihoods assets. Of the 102 households surveyed, 37 said that they had recovered their livelihoods to a quarter or below of their pre-cyclone levels; 52 reported that livelihoods had recovered to 50% or above their pre-cyclone levels; nine stated that their income levels were 100% or above pre-cyclone levels and four did not respond.

Usage of cash

Livelihoods Committees (LCs) from each of the 17 villages visited reported that nearly all the grants had been used for the purchase of assets to support livelihoods, predominantly casual labour, petty trade and fishing. The household surveys also showed that the majority – 66 households – used all of their grants for the purchase of livelihoods assets. Thirty used most of the grant for livelihoods assets, with the balance going on food, education and health expenses; only six households reported not using their grants for livelihoods asset recovery, instead opting to spend all of the money on food, education and health.

Relationship between food and livelihoods

Given the strong relationship between food security and livelihoods, the survey also looked at the impact of the cash transfer on the quality and quantity of food available. Regarding sources of food, 55 out of the 102 households surveyed reported that their primary source of food was food assistance, followed by fishing, purchase and lastly exchange from farm labour. The cash injection resulted in a moderate increase in the quantity and quality of food: of the 102 households, 58 said that food quantity had remained the same, and 34 said that it had increased. The

remaining ten households had no answer or said that food quantity was lower. Regarding quality, 49 households reported that it had stayed the same, and 23 said that it had improved. Nineteen households said that the quality of their rice had deteriorated, and 11 gave no answer. An additional question was added to the original survey to assess whether households receiving food assistance were aware that it would end in the coming few months, and how they would cope. No one asked was aware of this possibility, but neither did anyone ask for food aid to continue.

Expenditure priorities

When asked about their main expenditures, 90 households said that their greatest expenditure was on food, followed by livelihoods assets, health and education. This data is interesting because it tells us that households were still seeking to diversify their diet or add to the food aid they were receiving by buying food. This finding supports an SCiM food assessment conducted in November 2008, which showed that cyclone-affected households, for the most part, maintained a diet similar to their pre-cyclone one, with some reduction in protein, meat and eggs, and that food aid only made up between 30% and 70% of total household food consumption, as targeted households shared their rations with others not receiving aid.

Attitudes towards livelihoods recovery

All households felt hopeful that they would eventually recover their livelihoods, but believed that this would take anywhere from three months to five years, with an average of 2.5 years. Most households wanted to further develop their existing livelihoods activities, in particular through working capital in the form of grants or loans: out of the 102 households surveyed, 75 gave this as their first priority, and 17 as a secondary need.

Accountability and transparency

All the LCs reported that they were 'satisfied' with the intervention, for various reasons: SCiM dealt directly with the entire community and consulted everyone; the community had a choice in what to purchase; the programme helped reduce food insecurity, for instance by increasing income; and it helped to ameliorate the problem of joblessness. In a few cases, LCs influenced the type of assets some households purchased. In one instance, for example, a basket-weaver was told by the LC to buy a pig even though he did not know how to raise it, and actually wanted to invest in his weaving business.

Households too said that for the most part they were satisfied with the intervention, which they thought was fair, and addressed the needs of the most vulnerable households. Households placed importance on staff taking time to explain and consult, and liked the fact that they were given a choice. Communities also thought that the LCs were an effective means of community mobilisation. There was a strong sense that fairness meant giving equal support to everyone, regardless of how well-off households were. Generally, communities felt that the better-off often acted as 'patrons' to poorer households, and there was a strong sense of inter-dependence.

For this reason, village-level targeting covering 100% of households was used in this emergency intervention. While 100% coverage is not normally a method advocated by SCiM, it may be appropriate in the immediate aftermath of a crisis, when targeting would have caused delays. Better-off groups would be less likely to support targeting of poorer groups until they have recovered some degree of their own assets.

Market responses to cash injections

From the interviews with traders, it seems that local markets were only marginally affected by the programme, as the cash amounts being provided were not significant compared to the size of the market overall. Although not at pre-cyclone levels, markets were very resilient. Although the prices of some goods rose steeply in the first two months after the disaster, overall household and productive supplies could be bought at or just above pre-cyclone prices. In our household surveys, half of respondents said that markets were recovering and shops reopening, but that there were still fewer market actors than before, and some items had gone up in price. For example, certain types of boats had gone up from 150,000 kyats to 280,000, nets from 30,000 to 40,000 kyats, diesel from 4,200 to 7,000 kyats per gallon, beef from 3,000 to 5,000 kyats, chickens from 3,000 to 6,000 kyats, and salt from 300 to 800 kyats. Any price increase must also take into account the rampant inflation in the country, which stood at 34% in 2007. Some traders were able to purchase on credit, albeit only in small amounts of 200,000–300,000 kyats. As a result of unpaid debts after the cyclone, goods were sold less frequently on credit. Traders who were still selling on credit were charging between 10% and 30% interest a month on the value of the goods. Some shopkeepers mentioned difficulties in restocking as a result of problems with damaged storage space.

Conclusions

Several encouraging conclusions can be drawn from the evaluation of SCiM's project. First, cash transfers can be a very effective and quick way to help people recover their livelihoods after disasters, whether through access to capital as a loan or grant, or through in-kind asset replacement and skills training. In Myanmar, because the majority of poor and very poor households still rely on casual labour as their predominant source of income, future livelihoods interventions should focus on the replacement or provision of livelihoods assets in order to smooth out household cash flow, as paid labour is highly seasonal. Second, the fact that none of the households asked for food aid to carry on suggests that people prefer assistance with livelihoods recovery over continued food aid. Third, markets are resilient and can provide most of the goods people need to restore their livelihoods. Any type of cash transfer programme should be followed up with monitoring visits to see that households are using their cash for the purposes intended. Ideally, it should also be followed with other forms of support to help people utilise their grants effectively, such as business development or skills training.

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