



COMMITTEE ON WORLD FOOD SECURITY

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**POLICY ROUNDTABLE
ADDRESSING FOOD INSECURITY IN PROTRACTED CRISES:
ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

Table of Contents

MATTERS TO BE BROUGHT TO THE ATTENTION OF CFS	Page 1
I. CHALLENGES	Paragraphs 1 - 3
II. KEY ISSUES	4 - 23
<i>How livelihoods adapt in protracted crises</i>	5 - 6
<i>Gender issues in protracted crises</i>	7 - 9
<i>The role of local institutions in protracted crises</i>	10 - 12
<i>Aid flows to countries in protracted crisis</i>	13 - 15
<i>Humanitarian food assistance in protracted crises</i>	16 - 18
<i>Towards social protection in protracted crises</i>	19 - 21
<i>Using short-term responses to support longer term recovery in agriculture and food security</i>	22 - 23
III. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	24 - 25

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Matters to be brought to the attention of CFS:

- Endorse the recommendations contained in this background document
- Support the organization of a High-Level Expert Forum on Protracted Crises, no later than 2012, to discuss the current state of knowledge and stakeholder experiences regarding food security in protracted crises and project the way forward. The High Level Panel of Experts will play a key role in the preparation of the High Level Forum
- Launch a new “Agenda for Action for Food Security in Countries in Protracted Crises”. The Agenda for Action will establish principles and modalities for addressing effectively and efficiently the specific food security needs of these countries. Progress towards the establishment of an Agenda for Action will be monitored by the Committee’s inter-sessional process.

I. CHALLENGES

1. The issue of protracted crises and their food security implications have not received appropriate attention in the development discourse. This year’s State of Food Insecurity in the World (SOFI) focuses on countries in protracted crisis, with the key findings from the report presented in this note. Protracted crises have been defined to mean “*those environments in which a significant proportion of the population is acutely vulnerable to death, disease and disruption of livelihoods over a prolonged period of time*”.¹ Protracted crises are not all alike, though they may share some of the following characteristics:²

- a) duration or longevity
- b) localised conflict
- c) weak governance or public administration
- d) unsustainable livelihood systems and poor food security outcomes
- e) breakdown of local institutions.

2. Based on a set of measurable criteria (e.g. the longevity of the crisis, the composition of external aid flows in terms of the actual levels of humanitarian assistance and the inclusion of the country on FAO’s list of Low-Income, Food Deficit Countries-LIFDC), there are currently twenty-two countries considered to be in protracted crisis. For this set of countries the level of undernourishment is estimated to be more than three-fold when compared with the rest of Developing Countries (excluding India and China), and representative of roughly 166 million people. In light of this, a key message emerging is that within the global efforts to reduce hunger and malnutrition, countries in protracted crisis require special attention, and that appropriate responses for these countries differ from those required in short-term crisis or in non-crisis development contexts.

¹ J. Macrae and A. Harmer. 2004. Beyond the continuum: Aid policy in protracted crises. *HPG Report* 18, page 1. Overseas Development Institute, London.

² D. Maxwell. 2010. In between and forgotten: constraints to addressing smallholder transformation and food insecurity in protracted crises. Submitted to *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*.

3. In fact, to date, due to the largely undefined and misunderstood nature of countries in protracted crisis, the international community has struggled to engage and provide adequate support to this group of countries. These difficulties are linked to two key issues:

1. the perception (and misperception) of protracted crises
2. the way in which assistance is managed in response to protracted crises (referred to as aid architecture).

II. KEY ISSUES

4. A number of case studies reveal cross cutting issues including the process of livelihood adaptation, the effects of the crisis on gender related issues and the role that local institutions can play in mitigating the effects of the crisis, particularly with respect to food insecurity. Of equal importance, national and international responses to protracted crises are analyzed including aid flows to countries in protracted crisis, provision of food assistance, the challenges and role of ensuring social protection and supporting agricultural recovery to ensure food security.

How livelihoods adapt in protracted crises

5. In protracted crises people's livelihoods are forced to change to cope with the shifting environment and there are short, medium and long term livelihood adaptations that take place. On the positive side these adaptations demonstrate human resilience and flexibility such as livestock traders in Darfur altering their trade routes to avoid areas of insecurity. On the negative side many adaptations can be harmful or unsustainable, especially when prolonged over extended periods of time. For instance, in the Nuba Mountains of Sudan, traditional farming systems were jeopardised because of the conflict. Traditional cultivations in the plains were stopped and, as a consequence, farmers started to over exploit the more secure hilly areas of the region with long term negative environmental effects. Too often, in protracted crises, what might begin initially as a short-term response to a crisis becomes a longer-term or permanent way of life. In many protracted crises situations large numbers of people move from rural to urban areas resulting in saturated labour markets subsequently forcing people to become dependent on livelihoods that can have devastating environmental effects amongst other negative outcomes.

6. Too often consideration of livelihood adaptation, which is vital to long term food security, is hardly considered by external assistance, particularly in their long-term dimensions. In light of the importance of protecting and promoting livelihoods, there are three broad types of interventions that should take place:

- a) *Livelihood provisioning* which aims to meet immediate basic needs and protect peoples' lives
- b) *Livelihood protection* which includes intervention aimed to protect and support people's assets and to prevent further deterioration of livelihoods
- c) *Livelihood promotion* which aims to improve livelihood strategies and assets, and to support key policies and institutions that can boost livelihoods.

Of particular concern from the point of view of assistance programmes is the time-lag that occurs between the start of livelihoods programming when crises become protracted. Even when programming actually takes place, much of it is short-term focused on livelihood provisioning, or at best livelihood protection. Humanitarian agencies must become aware of, and be prepared to engage with, the longer-term transitions that begin or are accelerated during prolonged crises. Such engagement challenges the short-term planning horizons that characterize humanitarian programming, but will ensure more appropriate interventions in preparation for the post-crisis era.

Gender issues in protracted crises

7. The food security status of men and women is affected very differently in both acute and protracted crisis situations, most notably in three key areas:

- through sexual exploitation and gender-based violence
- access to (or lack of) social services such as healthcare and education
- stress on livelihood strategies and survival or coping mechanisms.

In armed conflicts differences in gender roles result in part from unequal access by men and women to assets, economic opportunities, services, crisis aid and decision-making.

8. Debates on food security in humanitarian emergencies and protracted crises have largely ignored gender issues. In many crises little is known about gender dynamics prior to the crisis, limiting the basis for analysing both the short and long term impacts. These knowledge gaps are further compounded by a dearth of gender-disaggregated data on poverty and vulnerability in protracted crisis situations.

9. To overcome the negligence of gender issues in addressing food insecurity in protracted crises there are four key areas that should be addressed:

- A. A better analysis of the various vulnerabilities and impacts generated by the crises
- B. Increased programming on the ground that is gender sensitive and seeks to restore, not only existing inequalities but also to secure and build assets in ways that empower victims of crises (e.g. through safe and secure access to land, cash and other productive resources for women and the youth)
- C. Humanitarian responses that deliberately ensures that institutions embrace a gender perspective in which the needs and rights of both women and men are recognized
- D. Increased improvement of access to health and education particularly for women, resulting in a long-term positive effect on social and economic development in communities affected by protracted crises.

The role of local institutions in protracted crises

10. Considering the role of and supporting local institutions is critical to addressing food security in protracted crises. Local institutions often remain or emerge to fill gaps when national institutions have failed. These institutions have the potential to play a key role in addressing protracted crises, but they are too often ignored by assistance programmes (especially external assistance). Based on evidence from Sierra Leone, Liberia, southern Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) the remarkable resilience of local institutions in the face of conflict becomes apparent. This illustrates that crises not only lead to devastation but can also result in important positive institutional and social changes including increased political awareness and an increase in self-organized collective action. In the eastern region of DR Congo, local people relied on their own institutions to deal with issues related to access to land that were fuelling the conflict. They established so-called *chambres de paix* or “peace councils” composed of elders. These councils were tasked with investigating land disputes and reaching a compromise solution among the concerned farmers. In Liberia, informal institutions played a critical role in the survival and food security of local people during the civil war from the late 1980s to 2003, and indigenous “development associations” were central to the reconstitution of post-conflict governance arrangements, the provision of social protection, the rehabilitation of infrastructure and promotion of food and livelihood security. Clan-based networks and membership organizations or “development associations” emerged to cope with the drivers of the conflict and its impact on livelihoods. These organizations created safety nets for the vulnerable and food

insecure, resolved conflicts and developed social and physical infrastructure such as clinics, roads, market sheds and community halls.

11. Past experience shows that humanitarian and development agencies have frequently ignored the important role of local institutions. If external support is not carried out in a well-informed way there are real risks of exploitation by local elites for their own self-interest. Engaging with such mechanisms requires careful situation analysis and monitoring to ensure that efforts to improve the wellbeing of the broad population are addressed appropriately. Experiences from a number of countries demonstrate how investments by government, civil society and development agencies can build on and amplify local social and institutional changes (see box).

Farmer field school initiative in Sierra Leone

The farmer field school initiative in Sierra Leone is a good example of how investments supporting local institutions and rural initiatives are helping to address some of the food security related structural drivers and impacts of the conflict. The government and its development partners launched the initiative immediately after the end of the war in 2002. The core objectives of the programme were to rebuild trust among members of rural communities ravaged by the civil war and to train farmers, many of whom were young and inexperienced, in basic practices related to agricultural production, processing and marketing. Part of the rationale was also to increase the accountability of service providers, whether in government or civil society organizations, to the farming community. This was seen as a way to strengthen and decentralize government institutions that, already weak before the war, had been further weakened during the war.³

Farmer field schools also provided a unique opportunity to help young people who had never received any formal training during the war years to become viable farmers. Since the inception of the initiative approximately 75,000 farmers from about 3,000 rural groups, have graduated from such field schools run under either Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security (MAFFS) or NGO extension programmes. Youths accounted for 60 percent of participants in field schools carried out by UNDP-funded programmes between 2004 and 2007. Most graduates either returned to work for existing organizations or went on to establish new farmer-based organizations in their communities.

12. In going forward it is crucial that humanitarian and development agencies base their actions during and after conflict on an assessment that goes beyond immediate humanitarian needs and includes an analysis of the evolving local socio-economic and institutional contexts.

Aid flows to countries in protracted crisis

13. Despite an overall global increase in humanitarian and development aid between 2000 and 2008, total Official Development Assistance (ODA) - but especially development aid- to countries in protracted crisis remains exceptionally low on a per capita basis when compared with other Least Developed Countries, especially in light of the issues faced by this set of countries. For countries in protracted crisis humanitarian assistance makes up a significant percentage of their total annual ODA received, not surprising as this is one of the identifying criteria for countries in protracted crisis. The relatively low levels of development assistance and the overall structure of the aid architecture is a critical problem that must be addressed so that not only relief needs are supported, but also, assistance results in long-term development and food security. Furthermore aid is not distributed evenly across countries in protracted crisis.

³ FAO/MAFS (2002) Sierra Leone Special Programme for Food Security: Community-based Extension and Capacity Building. Plan of Operations. Rome: FAO Investment Centre Division/Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security of Sierra Leone.

14. Agriculture and the rural economy are key sectors for supporting food security in protracted crises because agriculture accounts for a third of protracted crisis countries' gross domestic product and two thirds of their employment. Agricultural and rural-based livelihoods are critical to the groups most affected by protracted crises. Despite this fact agriculture accounts for only 4 percent of humanitarian ODA received by countries in protracted crisis and 3 percent of development ODA.

15. These current trends of the low level of ODA to countries in protracted crisis needs to be seriously reconsidered given that most of them are still highly dependent on external aid for a large part of their pro-poor public investments. At the same time humanitarian assistance, which has increased very rapidly and has been a major source of aid over prolonged periods of time, should be better integrated with development assistance, situated in a longer-term policy and planning framework and ultimately bridging the gap from relief to development.

Humanitarian food assistance in protracted crises

16. Humanitarian food assistance is a significant feature in protected crisis environments. The largest share of the commitments made in response to UN appeals for emergencies worldwide goes to food assistance, which includes in-kind food aid, cash contributions for the regional and local purchase of food, food vouchers and cash provided directly to beneficiaries (US\$3.1 billion out of \$7 billion sought in the 2009 UN humanitarian appeal). At times, it is the most valuable resource in underserved, remote and often protracted crisis environments. The World Food Programme's (WFP) shift from standard food aid to a varied set of food assistance tools, including cash and vouchers, has made it possible to tailor humanitarian interventions to specific contexts. Humanitarian food assistance not only saves lives, but also helps to preserve the human assets that are a necessary foundation for a country's food security and future development.

17. Emergency food assistance given to safeguard mothers' and young children's nutrition can be a powerful basis for longer-term development, since even a few months of inadequate nutrition in young children can have irreversible, life-long negative effects on health, education and productivity⁴. In an emergency or protracted crises context, school feeding encourages children to enter and remain in school by providing food to the household on condition that children attend class. In a post-crisis or transition context, school feeding programmes can revitalize the education sector, sending an important signal of normalcy and hope to IDPs and refugee and encouraging their safe return, as was the case in rural areas of Liberia after the war. Because school meals are often one of the few existing safety nets in a fragile state, they are a vital tool to address various objectives related to education, gender, nutrition, peace-building and the wider economy through local sourcing, providing an important foundation for recovery and development.⁵ Food-assisted safety nets also include productive activities such as food- or cash-for-work to rehabilitate community assets, preserve livelihoods and increase households' resilience. In Haiti, food- and cash-for-work are used to meet the immediate needs of food-insecure populations while supporting the rebuilding of vital economic and social community assets that will increase households' resilience to future disasters.

18. The operational and strategic challenges of working in many of today's protracted crises should not be underestimated. Agencies are confronting increased risks to the safety of humanitarian workers and more frequent, deliberate attacks. Perceived or actual association with political actors (the military, government forces) that may facilitate access to vulnerable populations can ultimately damage the capacity of agencies to work effectively with the populations that they are trying to reach. WFP and other humanitarian actors have been working

⁴ Estimates of GDP lost to malnutrition range from 2 to 3 percent in many countries. World Bank. 2006. *Repositioning Nutrition as Central to Development: A Strategy for Large-Scale Action*.

⁵ World Bank and WFP. 2009. *Rethinking School Feeding: Social Safety Nets, Child Development and the Education Sector*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

to integrate a protection lens into food assistance activities in recent years – including how to balance meeting people’s immediate need for food and adhering to the humanitarian principles of neutrality and independence. Further innovative and principled approaches and programming are required to address the challenges of working in protracted crisis environments.

Towards social protection in protracted crises

19. Social protection systems lay an essential foundation on which to rebuild societies in protracted crisis. In general, they include safety nets, insurance products, labour market interventions, and provide access to social services. The interest of humanitarian actors in wider social protection measures is growing dramatically. Yet, many countries in protracted crises face significant challenges in reconciling humanitarian and development approaches. This includes the generation of possible trade-offs between broad-based productivity enhancements and measures to reduce inequality; and between necessary short-medium external funding and longer-term sustainable domestic financing. Yet, there are innovative ways to mitigate some of those trade-offs.

20. In complex situations, safety nets – provided primarily in the form of cash or food-based transfers – are a key building block in social protection. Safety nets can improve child nutrition, enhance cognitive development, school attainments and future labour productivity, thereby enhancing earning potential. For example, in Guatemala it is estimated that nutrition interventions in early childhood led to higher wages to the order of 46% when adults compared to non-recipients⁶. Similarly, in Zimbabwe lifetime earnings of children affected by droughts in the 1980s was reduced by nearly 14%⁷. Safety nets can also contribute to the adoption of higher-risk but higher-income livelihood options and alleviate some market failures. In Tanzania, a shift into low-risk, low-return crops by poorer households resulted in 20% lower incomes per unit of land for households in the lowest quintile compared with the richest quintile⁸.

21. Social protection initiatives can provide the opportunity to transform humanitarian assistance for chronic needs into predictable, longer-term development approaches. However, elements of social protection are often uncoordinated, short-term, externally-funded, and not adequately reflected in food security and poverty reduction strategies. In order to be effective and efficient, key trade-offs around social protection policy and programs need to be recognized and addressed as part of government-led development plans.

Using short-term responses to support longer term recovery in agriculture and food security

22. Most responses to protracted crises take place in a humanitarian context, limiting the possibility of addressing the different drivers of the crisis in a more coordinated and holistic way. With detailed case studies from Afghanistan, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Tajikistan and Haiti, evidence shows how linking short- and long-term responses in protracted crises, and undertaking or promoting responses that address structural causes of the crisis, can support longer-term recovery in agricultural and rural livelihoods and food security. Appropriate responses include increasing food availability, restoring local markets, promoting urban gardening, encouraging improved land and natural resource management, increasing availability of and access to food through conservation agriculture and supplying agricultural inputs to strengthen private-sector seed production. These activities must be undertaken in a synergistic way, involving both humanitarian and development agencies so as to maximize efforts and ensure sustainable results.

⁶ Hoddinott, J., Maluccio, J., Behrman, J., Flores, R., & Martorelli, R. (2008) “Effect of a nutrition intervention during early childhood on economic productivity in Guatemalan adults”. *The Lancet* 371(9610): 411-416.

⁷ Alderman, H., Hoddinott, J. & Kinsey, B. (2006) “Long term consequences of early childhood malnutrition”. *Oxford Economic Papers* 58(3): 450-474.

⁸ Vargas Hill, R., & Torero, M. (2009) “Innovations in insuring the poor: overview”. Washington, DC, International Food Policy Research Institute.

Global Food Security Cluster

The “cluster approach” is a key element of the 2005 Humanitarian Response Review, commissioned by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and the subsequent Reform Initiative for improved efficiency, increased predictability and higher accountability in international responses to humanitarian emergencies. FAO and WFP have been fully engaged in the process since the onset; WFP as global lead of the logistics and emergency telecommunications clusters and as lead for food assistance at the country level, and FAO as global lead of the agriculture cluster.

Country-level clusters or coordination arrangements for food security have long existed between FAO and WFP. For example, in late 2009, FAO and WFP were already co-leading food security-related clusters in 11 countries and co-leading along with other partners in a further 5 countries. The Phase 1 cluster evaluation by the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee, completed in late 2007, proposed that WFP and FAO give consideration to the co-leadership of a global cluster on food security, together with other partners. The provisional report of the Phase 2 cluster evaluation recommends that this now be implemented. Similarly, the 2008 conference on Rethinking Food Security in Humanitarian Response encouraged FAO, WFP and key partners to move ahead in establishing such a global cluster. Since February 2010 WFP and FAO have embarked on a structured process to establish the Global Food Security Cluster .

23. To appropriately respond to protracted crises situations, policies and programmes should aim at building more sustainable and durable food production and access in volatile and uncertain environments. As other elements of the report highlight, too often in protracted crisis contexts, responses are focused on short term solutions driven and defined through inappropriate aid architecture and competing agendas. One way of overcoming this is through humanitarian food-security clusters (see box) in protracted crises which provide important platforms for strengthening linkages between immediate humanitarian responses and longer-term development assistance aimed at addressing underlying structural factors limiting livelihoods. At a more global level similar arrangements could further facilitate these efforts and bring together the main national and international partners active in the food security sector.

III. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

24. One of the greatest challenges in trying to turn around countries in protracted crisis is to overcome the erroneous understanding that the crisis is simply a series of one-off, short-lived phenomena. This is far from the case for countries in protracted crisis, for which crises are not a slight interruption in their process of development but are instead a continuous and prolonged state of disaster which pose threats not only to peoples’ lives but also their livelihoods, the capacity to provide for themselves and live the lives that they value.

25. In particular there is a need to gain a better understanding and build a broad consensus over the food security issues in countries in protracted crisis and the implications in terms of national and international actions. The recommendations below call for further analysis and understanding of food security in protracted crisis situations, with special attention given to livelihoods and local institutions as well as a revision of the current aid architecture. More specifically it is recommended that the CFS organize a High Level Forum on Protracted Crises from which a new “Agenda for Action for Protracted Crises” could be established to address appropriately the pressing needs of countries in protracted crisis.

- A. Support further analysis and deeper understanding of people's livelihoods and coping mechanisms in protracted crises in order to strengthen their resilience and enhance the effectiveness of assistance programmes**
- B. Support the protection, promotion and rebuilding of livelihoods, and the institutions that support and enable livelihoods, in countries in protracted crisis**
- C. Revisit the architecture of external assistance in protracted crises to match the needs, challenges and institutional constraints on the ground.**