

FOOD INSECURITY ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ IN PROTRACTED CRISES



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ADDRESSING FOOD INSECURITY IN PROTRACTED CRISES: WHAT HAS BEEN LEARNED*

This brief provides an overview of lessons learned about food security in protracted crises, drawing on both interdisciplinary academic research and reflections “from the field”. These insights provide a deeper understanding of threats to food security and actions that can be taken to help individuals, groups (including households and communities) and systems (social, environmental, economic and political) manage and resolve protracted crises. Governments are becoming more proactively assertive in developing and leading initiatives to address the underlying causes of protracted crises and to address their tragic manifestations. There are increasingly sophisticated understandings of how poor, marginalized and at risk populations manage risk and vulnerability. There is growing evidence of the positive effects of peacebuilding on protracted crisis and of conflict-sensitive food-security programmes on peacebuilding. Encouraging innovations in humanitarian and development practice include meaningful and strategic coordination, more effective transitions within national and international humanitarian and development cooperation, and the development of a broader set of interventions to address all aspects of food insecurity in protracted crises. Lessons have been learned about areas for improvement. This includes a stronger focus on investing in agriculture in protracted crises, more effective strategies for protection of people and their assets, the importance of humanitarian principles, and the challenges of supporting and rebuilding institutions eroded and destroyed by protracted crises.

FROM “AFFECTED” TO “ENGAGED” GOVERNMENTS

In recent years, governments of many countries in protracted crises have played an increasingly constructive role in promoting food security. This is epitomized, for instance, by the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States¹, which propounds a vision of country-led and country-owned actions to build peaceful and stable societies, in partnership with the international community. The African Union's establishment of regional mechanisms to address issues of drought and climate change and of conflict early-warning systems are further examples of efforts by states to work in partnership to address the underlying causes of protracted crises.

In violent crises, it is vital that humanitarian organizations are able to safely and effectively assist affected populations. Lessons have been learned about the importance of – and limits to – working with governments to deliver humanitarian assistance and the humanitarian action pursued. This reflects a growing realization that international institutions are most effective when they augment strong national and subnational systems rather than substituting them. It is clear that humanitarian assistance cannot substitute political engagement locally, nationally, regionally and internationally to bring an end to protracted crises.

Recent innovations are designed to improve the role of humanitarian work. For example, the Humanitarian Reform agenda, launched in 2005, includes four areas: 1) the cluster approach; 2) a strengthened humanitarian coordinator system; 3) more adequate, timely, flexible and effective humanitarian financing; and 4) the development of strong partnerships between United Nations (UN) and non-UN actors. In

some cases, humanitarian actors are the targets of violence, kidnapping and intimidation, with national humanitarian staff bearing the brunt of these attacks. In order to minimize risk, some humanitarian operations are managed with “negotiated access” and are run by “remote management”, including being based in other countries.

Badly informed or poorly executed humanitarian and development initiatives can cause or exacerbate protracted crises, including prompting urban food riots. Conflict risks can be elevated by, for example, increasing social exclusion, undermining the natural resource base, disrupting traditional pastoralist routes or displacing communities. Further, protracted crises bring opportunities to challenge poor people's access to land through seizures, leasing and occupation, leading to long-term destitution. Protracted crises are frequently characterized by the absence of distinctions between war and peace, violence targeted at civilians their livelihood systems and social networks, and public services and institutions. Humanitarian aid for the poor and marginalized can be exploited by the strong, such as when warring parties raid communities in the wake of food aid distributions.

Humanitarian, development and peacebuilding strategies must be designed to mitigate risks before, during and after protracted crises. One area of focus is to ensure tenure and access rights to land, water and other key resources. In May 2012 the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) endorsed the *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security* (VG GT)², which aim at helping governments

1. Presented at the Fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan, the Republic of Korea, in December 2011.

2. <http://www.fao.org/nr/tenure/voluntary-guidelines/en/>

safeguard the rights of people to own or access land, forests and fisheries. Application of the Guidelines, particularly Section 25 on Protracted Crises, is essential. In a similar vein, the Hyogo Framework for Action³ highlights the importance of risk reduction, including the role of strong legal, policy and institutional frameworks governing local, national and regional development. Development initiatives in agriculture and food systems supported by the international community increasingly integrate elements of risk reduction and risk management, particularly in areas exposed to repeated shocks that characterize protracted crises.

Humanitarian, stabilization, development and security institutions, and other actors, are involved in countries in protracted crises. For humanitarians, the integration of humanitarian and security objectives can run counter to humanitarian principles of independence and neutrality. Coordination and respect for humanitarian principles are key to effective collaboration. Experience has demonstrated the importance of building on existing coordination mechanisms rather than creating parallel systems, ensuring that coordination adds value across sectors, investing in preparedness measures and coordination mechanisms in advance of crises, and building specific coordination skills at subnational, national and international levels.

SHOCKS, HAZARDS AND VULNERABILITIES

Poor and marginalized people are particularly susceptible to shocks and hazards. They bear a disproportionate share of the costs of global stress factors such as climate change, global economic financial, food and fuel crises, the HIV and AIDS pandemic and the global trade in small arms and light weapons. In many places, the capacity of populations, institutions and ecosystems to absorb and manage shocks has been severely undermined by the cumulative effects of protracted crises. This has eroded livelihoods and caused destitution. In turn, it is both fed by and feeds into the unsustainable use of natural resources, multiplies risks and further deepens individual, household and communal vulnerability. This is most serious when institutional environments fail to protect, preserve and promote communal and household resilience.

In the face of multiple constraints and limited opportunities, people, households and communities have to rely on their own resources in order to survive. There is deepening appreciation of how poor and marginalized people engage in complex short-term (and often risky) coping strategies combined with longer-term adaptation to new livelihood pathways to deal with protracted crises. In rural areas, for instance, food insecure households may turn to risky coping strategies, such as cutting down trees to make charcoal, cultivating poppies for opium, selling breeding livestock or sending family members on long (and dangerous) migrations to search for work, wild foods, pastures, firewood or water. Some strategies have clear negative consequences for specific groups within households such as children taken out of school, the elderly deprived of food, women unable to access health care, young men abducted into rebel movements, girls forced into prostitution and so on. Many individuals and households take on debts that they have no possibility of repaying, ultimately leading to seizure of as-

sets such as farmland or the imprisonment of debtors.

While many of these risks and stresses are common to numerous protracted crises, their manifestations are highly location and context specific. There are varied implications for groups within communities and households. All programmes designed to address protracted crises must be based on a solid understanding and analysis of coping strategies and the complexities, characteristics and causes of each crisis.

Another key lesson is that the links between the nature and amount of capital owned or accessible and vulnerability to violence are complex. Asset ownership (including social capital) can increase both resilience and vulnerability. Owners of valued assets, such as money, food, land, labour, jewellery, livestock, fishing grounds and crops, or resources that may be seen as threatening, such as status, knowledge, education or weapons, are likely to be attacked by those who lack or desire such assets. It is also increasingly clear that poverty is not the only – nor necessarily the most important – source of vulnerability in protracted crises. Powerlessness is also a key source of vulnerability in violent contexts and must be addressed by efforts to promote food security.

Vulnerability to food insecurity in protracted crises is also influenced by factors such as gender, age, educational level and socioeconomic status that influence access to resources. Patterns of vulnerability, moreover, may change during crises.

Adults and children can face new roles and responsibilities as a result of the impact of protracted crises on their livelihood patterns. For example, women may have to assume responsibility as heads of households or become the family's sole breadwinner. They must do so often without acquiring greater rights of access to productive resources and while being particularly at risk of gender-based violence, including rape as a weapon of war. Effective interventions must recognize and build on these changed roles within households and communities while also addressing the prevailing and emerging vulnerabilities accompanying them. Specific food security assistance and protection strategies also are needed to support people living with HIV and AIDS to prevent its spread and to reduce discrimination.

Engagement in a conflict, e.g., sending a child to join an armed group, can be a form of protection insurance, as well as a way of fighting grievances, a social obligation or an economic strategy. Breaking these loops may require improved services and food security. —

S. Levine, HLEF Background Paper

Given the threats facing poor and marginalized people and their assets, markets, public services and infrastructure in protracted crises, there is an urgent need for a robust protection agenda for agriculture and food security based on international humanitarian and human rights frameworks. Mechanisms should be put in place to monitor, document and address violations by states and other stakeholders, ensuring reparation and restitution. Humanitarian principles

3. United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. 2007. Hyogo Framework for Action: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters. New York, USA, UNISDR. Available at: http://www.unisdr.org/files/1037_hyogoframeworkforactionenglish.pdf.

must be respected by all parties operating in protracted crises.

INNOVATIONS IN ASSISTANCE AND PROTECTION.

The humanitarian and development communities are changing their approaches from short-term, supply-driven relief response dominated by food aid to more balanced and strategic approaches that address the pillars of food security using a combination of short-term and long-term measures. Effective early warning, assessment, analysis and monitoring systems have been critical to ensuring that balanced approaches are based on prevailing vulnerabilities, capacities and opportunities. Humanitarian and development practitioners agree that it is as important to support livelihoods as it is to save lives in protracted crises. Protection of livelihoods can be a cost-effective means of saving lives, preventing destitution, minimizing distress migration and related loss of both labour and access to land, pastures and water, and facilitating the recovery of agricultural production and marketing systems.

There has also been a welcome shift in focus from exclusive attention on ameliorating vulnerability to more support for protecting and promoting resilience: resilient individuals, communities, ecosystems and countries are better able to withstand the shocks inherent in protracted crises. This means that limited humanitarian resources can focus on acute vulnerabilities that threaten lives and livelihoods.

With this change in focus there is a move away from the mind-set of a linear logic of crisis response, including the notion that development work starts only after humanitarian assistance has ended. Rather, the full range of humanitarian, development, peacebuilding and investment resources, expertise and political will is required from the outset to prevent, address and end protracted crises.

Deeper understanding of coping strategies and the recognition of the effects of overly supply-driven humanitarian assistance has led to a broader range of interventions in protracted crises. This includes expandable safety nets (e.g. school meals, cash-for-work, food-for-assets, vouchers, etc.). Where markets are or can be made viable, increased access to cash can save lives by increasing access to resources (such as food and water) and services (health care, education and veterinary services) while supporting livelihoods (by increasing access to agricultural inputs, purchase of replacement stock and hiring of machinery).

Support for agricultural production and marketing systems contributes to food and nutrition security of rural and urban populations alike. Several decades of experience with protracted crises has generated innovations to support crops and farmers, fisheries and aquaculture, and livestock and pastoralists (e.g. seed security assessments, input trade fairs, commercial off-take of livestock, community-based animal health, conflict resolution, etc.). Experience from development efforts in support of food and agriculture systems in protracted crises has generated a wealth of innovations. This includes measures to generate more shock-resilient production practices and technologies, mitigate and manage resource-based conflicts, apply financial and other tools for risk management, and build institutions to counter social exclusion and other conflict drivers. Innovations in mainstreaming risk-management tools in development

activities focused on smallholder agriculture, for instance, have drawn significant international attention and support.

Over time, food security analysis has been complemented by greater understanding of the underlying or proximate causes of malnutrition. Strictly food-based approaches have been replaced by balanced interventions aimed at improving dietary quality, increasing micronutrient supply and providing support to the caring environment. Such interventions include promoting diversified and nutritious crops for home consumption and sale and supporting child care for women engaged in cash-for-work programmes. The interplay between malnutrition and diseases is now well understood, raising awareness of the importance of measures to improve basic health, water supplies and sanitation in protracted crises.

The duration of protracted crises means that humanitarian programmes are often sustained for years instead of months. This requires humanitarian, peacebuilding and development actors to find more integrated ways to work together, including both programme and financing mechanisms. Despite accumulated knowledge and experience and, in many cases, proven cost-effectiveness, humanitarian funding remains biased against support for agricultural livelihoods. This needs to be urgently redressed.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

Lessons learned from protracted crises highlight the need to challenge assumptions that there is a linear progression from “relief to development” or that there are clear distinctions between humanitarian and development work or between war and peace. Where hazards were once fairly localized (and, in rural areas many remain so), shocks and sources of risk and vulnerability also emanate from complex, often interconnected, global systems of production, consumption and exchange. Where once livelihood systems were seen as existing in geographically distinct zones and being characterized by a delimited range of strategies (e.g. “agropastoralist” or “cattle–cassava–millet farmers”), it is now recognized that they are more complex, involving webs of networks linking relatives, friends and business partners within and across urban, peri-urban and rural households.

Challenging such accepted wisdom calls for support for continuous learning and innovation. Research and applied learning should better explore the policy and operational implications for protection and assistance for the poor and marginalized populations in protracted crises. Specific consideration is needed for how protracted crises induce changes in market-related mechanisms that, in turn, undermine agriculture and food and nutrition security. More investment should be focused on the documentation and analysis of the breadth of impacts of interventions, including economic cost/benefits, social implications, environmental sustainability, etc. More specific conclusions include the following:

Context is important. Even when sources of risk are similar, their manifestations differ from context to context, with specific implications for groups within communities and even households. A solid analysis of the complexities, characteristics and causes of each crisis must provide the basis for tailored strategies for assistance and protection. Risk reduction and resilience programmes should incorporate and

build on an appreciation of change, risk, and uncertainty, and rely on strategies reflecting the inputs of diverse stakeholders.

Sequencing is not linear. Institutions and actors engaged in assistance and protection in protracted crises must resist the allure of adopting a linear logic of crisis response. Instead, the full range of humanitarian, development and investment resources, expertise and political will is required to prevent, address and end protracted crises through prevention, preparedness, mitigation, response, recovery and rehabilitation.

Agriculture and food-security programmes can contribute to peace. Programmes that aim at improving food security can also have positive effects on the conditions for sustainable peace through its impact on social cohesion, the amelioration of drivers of conflict, the development of capacities, and strengthening of the trust in and legitimacy of governments.

Gender and age are critical factors of differential vulnerability and resilience in protracted crises. Gender analysis reveals that women and girls tend to have less power and resources in most food and agriculture systems and societies around the world. More attention needs to be paid to gender and power relations in programmes dealing with protracted crises to ensure that the different needs, capabilities and aspirations of all poor and marginalized people are recognized and addressed.

A renewed focus on rights-based protection is needed. Tremendous innovations have been developed in the way assistance is provided to populations that depend on farming, livestock, fish, forests and other natural resources for food security in protracted crises. Given the threats facing poor and marginalized people and their assets, markets, public services and infrastructure in protracted crises, there is an urgent need for a robust protection agenda for agriculture and food security based on international humanitarian and human rights frameworks. Mechanisms should be put in

place to monitor, document and address violations by states and other stakeholders, ensuring reparation and restitution. Humanitarian principles must be respected by all parties operating in protracted crises.

A party to the conflict cannot "attack, destroy, remove or render useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs, agricultural areas for the production of foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works, for the specific purpose of denying them for their sustenance value to the civilian population or to the adverse Party, whatever the motive, whether in order to starve out civilians, to cause them to move away or for any other motive." — Additional Protocol I, art. 54(2)

Support continuous learning and innovation. Research and applied learning should better explore the implications for protection and assistance of the violent exploitation of agriculture and natural resources as coercive tools against poor and marginalized populations in protracted crises. Specific consideration is needed for how protracted crises induce changes in market-related mechanisms that, in turn, impact on agriculture and food and nutrition security. More investment should be focused on the documentation and analysis of the impact of interventions in different contexts, including analysis of comparative values of different approaches from a broad perspective (economic cost/benefit, social implications, environmental sustainability, etc.).

Beware the normalization of crises. The long-lasting nature of protracted crises means that the suffering of those living with extreme risks can become "invisible". Protracted crises are an outrage against human dignity and we must not allow ourselves to be desensitized to this by the "normalization of crisis". "Common" or "normal" does not mean "acceptable" and we must do all in our power to identify and address the underlying causes of protracted crises to alleviate the suffering of those affected.

RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

- Frankenberger T.R, Spangler, T. Nelson, S. & Langworthy, M. 2012. Enhancing resilience to food insecurity amid protracted crisis. Paper prepared for the High Level Expert Forum on Addressing Food Insecurity in Protracted Crises, Rome, Italy, 13–14 September, 2012.
- Lautze, S., Raven-Roberts, A. & Holleman, C. 2012. Agriculture, conflict and stability: A call for renewed focus on protection and conflict sensitive programming in agriculture and food and nutrition security. Paper prepared for the High Level Expert Forum on Addressing Food Insecurity in Protracted Crises, Rome, Italy, 13–14 September, 2012.
- Levine, S., 2012. Livelihoods in protracted crises. Paper prepared for the High Level Expert Forum on Addressing Food Insecurity in Protracted Crises, Rome, Italy, 13–14 September, 2012.
- Biong Deng, L. 2012. Confronting civil war: The case of risk managing strategies in South Sudan in the 1990s. Paper prepared for the High Level Expert Forum on Addressing Food Insecurity in Protracted Crises, Rome, Italy, 13–14 September, 2012.
- Keen, D. 2012. Aid and development in the context of conflict: some problems and pitfalls. Paper prepared for the High Level Expert Forum on Addressing Food Insecurity in Protracted Crises, Rome, Italy, 13–14 September, 2012.

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