Agenda for Action for Food Insecurity in Protracted Crises

Addressing food insecurity in protracted crises: Resilience-building programming

Online discussion: 17 June – 7 July 2013

The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) launched a two-year consultative process to develop an Agenda for Action to address food insecurity in protracted crises. This e-discussion is one of a series exploring critical topics on how we can improve food security in protracted crisis situations.

Let’s hear your voice on how to build resilience in protracted crises - this is your opportunity to tell us about actions, principles, recommendations and good practices.

Ultimately, this discussion will inform and shape the elaboration of an Agenda for Action for Addressing Food Insecurity in Protracted Crises, to be considered by the CFS in 2014.

Discussions about resilience have come up with a number of definitions. While they are different, references to resilience of countries, communities and individuals in the face of protracted crisis tend to share two common elements: 1) the capacity to cope with shocks, and 2) the capacity adapt to changed circumstances.

Definitions are not the biggest issue. Most practitioners know resilience when they see it. What is much more of a challenge is to be able to predict, in advance, what sort of policies and programmes will produce resilience, even when shocks, and their precise effects, are difficult to predict in advance.

There is a wealth of evidence on the kinds of activities that can increase resilience to specific shocks; soil and water conservation, social protection, functioning markets, education and health services are just a few of the building blocks for resilience that have been identified. Yet even though development policy makers often have a shrewd idea of the kinds of shocks that are likely, there is still no shortage of protracted crises around the world. Once people's ability to maintain their livelihood has been eroded to by repeated shocks, they have little or no prospect of graduating from the grinding poverty in which they find themselves. The global community, faced with such suffering, responds with much needed humanitarian aid. This is expensive and is ultimately doomed to fail as a long-lasting response, as it does nothing to rebuild livelihoods that will be resilient in the future.

This e-discussion seeks to tackle the 'wicked problem' of building resilience in protracted crises head on. We would like to bring together ideas of what has worked, and how strategies and action can be made to predictably add up to greater resilience. We would like some practical recommendations as to how we should act differently in the future.

In addressing this problem it is clear that we need to move on from a collection of evidence of individual programmes that can demonstrate results in a particular sector (e.g. social protection). Important though these are, this discussion will look at how action, or sets of actions, can start to engender the quality of resilience to both known and unknown future shocks. We are looking for

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practical suggestions that are relevant to areas that are currently prone to recurrent crises, or are in a protracted crisis situation.

So, let's hear your voice in this discussion. What have we learnt to date? What are the “biggest challenges” to producing resilience in areas subject to protracted crisis? How can we choose the right set of strategies for each situation?

Based on your knowledge and experiences consider the following questions:

- What are the strategies that have been successful in building resilience? Can we build resilience in general or does it always have to be in relation to a (known) type of shock?
- What programming has improved food security in protracted crises?
- How will we know we are on the right track to produce resilience?
- Can we predict and quantify the effects of action across a number of sectors in advance? Do we need to?
- Why have we not done better to date?
- Is it just about scale? Do we just need bigger programmes? Is this affordable?
- Demographic and ecological changes are probably the most predictable causal factors that will have a major impact on resilience in the future - how should we plan for this? Can we predict the consequences of inadequate action? Should we try to?

I look forward to your insights and contributions, a stimulating discussion and a creative search for solutions. Thank-you in advance for your time and thought.

Malcolm Ridout

These discussions are led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP) and facilitated by the Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition (FSN Forum)

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