

FOOD INSECURITY IN PROTRACTED CRISES



HIGH-LEVEL EXPERT FORUM

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FOOD INSECURITY IN PROTRACTED CRISES - AN OVERVIEW*

The purpose of this brief is to set the scene for the High Level Expert Forum on food insecurity in protracted crises. It presents an overview of the main defining characteristics of countries in protracted crises and their consequences particularly regarding food insecurity. It pinpoints key issues that are common to protracted crises including the fact that addressing food insecurity in protracted crises rather than short term emergencies has become the norm rather than the exception. The current situation in such countries results in a number of challenges and policy implications that will be discussed during the HLEF. These include the need to rethink the current mainstream approach to relief and development and related aid delivery mechanisms and the necessity to build government ownership in contexts characterized by poor governance. Other emerging important issues include the need to mainstream the food-security and protracted-crises discourse into other key streams of intervention such as the Busan New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States as well strengthening coordination between humanitarian and development actors and involving non state actors.

BACKGROUND

Countries and areas in protracted crisis are “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. The governance of these environments is usually very weak, with the state having a limited capacity to respond to, and mitigate, the threats to the population, or provide adequate levels of protection.”¹

Although protracted crises are diverse in their causes and effects, food insecurity is a common feature². The prevalence of undernourishment in countries in protracted crisis is three times that in developing countries as a whole (37% compared with 13%)³.

In addition to food insecurity, protracted crises share some or all of the following characteristics:

- Long duration. A crisis is defined as protracted when it spans several years. Afghanistan, Somalia and the Sudan, for example, have all been in one sort of crisis or another since the 1980s – nearly three decades.
- Multiple causes. Violent conflict is often one cause of protracted crises but others include climatic, environmental and economic shocks and stresses. Conflict itself may be a symptom as much as a cause of protracted crises.
- Weak governance or public administration. In protracted crisis, constraints, shocks or stresses often overwhelm the capacity of governance institutions and this may also reflect deficits of representation, legitimacy or accountability of these institutions, or lack of political will to address this problem.
- Breakdown of local institutions. Traditional institutional systems commonly break down under protracted crises and state-managed alternatives are rarely available to fill the gap.
- Unsustainable livelihood and food systems. Deterioration in the sustainability of livelihood and food systems can be both a symptom of and a contributing factor

to protracted crises, which can lead to conflict or increase the vulnerability of food systems to other kinds of shocks (e.g. climatic events, price shocks) that then trigger a crisis.

In *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2010: Addressing food insecurity in protracted crises* (SOFI 2010),³ FAO and WFP used three criteria to identify countries in protracted crises:

- Declared a food crisis (reported in FAO's Global Information and Early Warning System on food and agriculture [GIEWS] list) requiring assistance in 8 of the previous 10 years
- 10% or more of external assistance received as humanitarian aid since 2000
- Included on FAO's list of low-income, food-deficit countries.

Countries in protracted crises in 2010

Afghanistan	Haiti
Angola	Iraq
Burundi	Kenya
Central African Republic	Liberia
Chad	Palestinian territories
Congo	Sierra Leone
Côte d'Ivoire	Somalia
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	Sudan
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Tajikistan
Eritrea	Uganda
Ethiopia	Zimbabwe
Guinea	

Source: FAO. 2010. *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2010: Addressing food insecurity in protracted crises*. Rome, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and World Food Programme.

1. A. Harmer & J. Macrae, eds. 2004. Beyond the continuum: aid policy in protracted crises. HPG Report 18, p. 1. London, Overseas Development Institute.

2. P. Pingali, L. Alinovi & J. Sutton. 2005. Food security in complex emergencies: enhancing food system resilience. *Disasters*, 29(S1): S5–S24.

3. FAO. 2010. *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2010: Addressing food insecurity in protracted crises*. Rome, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and World Food Programme.

KEY ISSUES

Protracted crises are becoming the new norm – that is to say, short, acute crises are the exception, not the rule. More crises are considered protracted today than in the past. Data from FAO's GIEWS shows that in 1990 only 12 countries were facing food crises, and only five of those were in protracted crisis. In contrast, in 2010 a total of 24 countries were in food crisis, but 19 of those had been in crisis for 8 or more of the previous 10 years. The nature of crises is also changing. While in the 1980s many crises in Africa were mostly due to natural causes, by 2010 all were recorded as being due to human-induced factors (conflict or socioeconomic difficulties) or a combination of natural and human-induced factors.

Protracted crises have effects beyond the immediate human suffering that captures headlines and prompts the international community into action. According to the World Bank, a civil conflict “costs the average developing country roughly 30 years of GDP growth”.⁴

All countries listed in SOFI 2010 have suffered human-induced emergencies (especially conflict) and most also suffered natural disasters, such as droughts, earthquakes or hurricanes. Both natural and human-induced disasters can lead to political instability (e.g. the Haiti earthquake in 2010 and the famines of the 1970s and 1980s in Ethiopia), particularly in political situations that are already fragile. Indeed, most countries suffering from protracted crises are “fragile” or “failed” states, according to World Bank indicators. As a result, their governments are unable, or unwilling, to deal with the causes and consequences of the protracted crises they face.

Protracted crises, by their very duration, lead to the weakening or breakdown of many of the institutions and support systems that provide the foundations of society. This in turn often leads to increasing levels of conflict between different segments of society, adding to the crisis. Intrahousehold power relations can also influence women's and girls' access to food, with related negative outcomes. In Northern Uganda, for instance, many women have lost husbands through war or displacement (one-third of all households are female headed) and many children have lost fathers. Because of the failures of both state and customary justice to protect women's legal rights, most widows, single women, orphans and fatherless children face attempts at land grabbing that go unchecked⁵ with dramatic consequences on their livelihoods and food security.

The crisis can be further deepened as people use up their reserves, of food, money, assets, and turn to unsustainable livelihood practices, such as cutting trees on marginal lands for fuel, to cope with short-term deficits, which further harms the already vulnerable environment. Livelihoods that might have been able to withstand a drought or recover from a flood without external help are rendered fragile and the slightest shock can cause widespread destitution.

Haiti provides a recent example. Years of political instability and crisis had destroyed institutions and social structures in the country, and had exhausted all reserves. The earthquake in January 2010 (7.0 on the moment magnitude scale, MMS)

brought the country to its knees and deepened the persistent crisis. In contrast, Chile, which was hit by an earthquake of greater magnitude (8.8 MMS) in February 2010 was able to respond rapidly to the needs of its population and restore the functioning of its institutions and services in a short time without external assistance.

Complex emergencies, fragile states and protracted crises

There is a certain amount of overlap between complex emergencies, fragile states and protracted crises, but the classification of the situation is critical as it can have significant implications for policy and programming. For example, characterizing a situation as a complex emergency brings to the forefront humanitarian issues and often leads to a response led by the international community with an emphasis on emergency food assistance. In contrast, intervention in a fragile state focuses more on developing the state's capacity to deliver services to its citizens. Finally, intervention in protracted crises focuses on understanding and addressing longer-term issues and multiple causes at play in prolonged emergency situations.

Source: L. Alinovi, G. Hemrich & L. Russo, eds. *Beyond relief: Food security in protracted crises*. Rugby, UK, Practical Action.

DEALING WITH PROTRACTED CRISES

There are several issues that make it difficult to intervene effectively in countries in protracted crisis.

One issue relates to the way in which governments and the international community perceive protracted crises and the relationship to the development process. The prevailing view is that “development” – the continuous upward progress in society – is the norm, and that this is intermittently interrupted by disasters or acute crises, following which the “normal” upward trend is resumed. But in protracted crises the trend line is likely to be unpredictable for an extended period – not necessarily sharply downwards as in an acute emergency but not upwards either at least not for a significant period of time. And as the data from GIEWS show, protracted crises are increasingly becoming the norm, not the exception. This requires a radical rethink of our approach to “relief” and “development”.

Another issue is the way in which aid is used to respond to protracted crises. The current aid architecture is not well suited to supporting the needs of countries facing protracted crises, as these needs range from addressing the acute manifestations of the crises to broader peacebuilding and development issues. The current system uses humanitarian assistance to support short-term efforts to address the immediate effects of a crisis and development assistance for long-term interventions (including those that seek to address the underlying causes of crisis). Protracted crises need a combination of both humanitarian and development assistance – an option that is generally not available in the current architecture. Humanitarian agencies (and humanitarian budgets) are often the only ones available for protracted crisis situations even though the intervention needed goes beyond protecting lives or one-year project cycles. As a re-

4. World Bank. 2011. World Development Report 2011: Conflict, security, and development. Washington, DC, World Bank.

5. J. Adoko & S. Levine. 2004. Land matters in displacement. The importance of land rights in Acholiland and what threatens them. Kampala, Civil Society Organisations for Peace.

sult, areas of intervention that are crucial for longer-term resilience, peacebuilding and development (including social protection, institution building and risk reduction) are often underfunded. Most countries in protracted crises receive less official development assistance than the average for developing countries and investments in education and agriculture are particularly low.³ This is particularly true in the case of countries whose crises do not capture the media headlines and tend to be forgotten.

Another issue relates to how actors and stakeholders engage in addressing the crisis. Engagement, especially international engagement, in protracted crises is often not well matched to the problems and the approach used is not sufficiently flexible to adjust to changing realities. In many cases, the state apparatus of the affected country is undermined by a protracted crisis, leaving a lingering question about the priorities for engagement. Is the priority to strengthen or, in some cases, rebuild state institutions, or to strengthen or rebuild livelihoods (which often includes also strengthening local institutions that support livelihoods, including those that are not state-related)?

There are also issues around how best to integrate relief and development efforts with peacebuilding and security programmes, especially given that protracted crises commonly occur in “fragile” or “failed” states. This need is recognized in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States⁶ and the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States presented at the Fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan, the Republic of Korea, in December 2011. Both focus on state building and peacebuilding as central objectives and highlight linkages between humanitarian, political, security and development objectives.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

Much is still to be learned about how best to intervene in protracted crises. Key to this is to learn from each protracted crisis as an individual case and ensure a deeper understanding of livelihoods, conflict, gender dynamics, the social context, local and national institutions and identifying what the roles for the different actors should be. Similarly, more needs to be done to assess the impact of interventions, and to learn what works best.

In terms of interventions, countries in protracted crisis need support from the international community to build more sustainable livelihood and food systems, to establish social protection programmes, and to mainstream risk management and risk reduction into their economic and social investments and programmes. This support needs to both help countries climb out of crisis and to enable them to avoid falling prey to crises in future which means building resilience in their governance and institutions and the capacity to predict and deal with crises. Making progress in these areas will be achieved only if the responses to protracted crises are modified to better address both immediate needs and the structural causes of protracted crises. Mechanisms are needed to coordinate the efforts of all actors involved in relief, transition, development and peace-building and those

that are involved in the different elements of food and nutrition security, while keeping an overall focus on promoting country ownership and development effectiveness.

Recent collaboration between FAO, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme in Somalia shows what can be done to coordinate between international agencies, but this is the exception rather than the rule. The establishment of the Global Food Security Cluster⁷ in December 2010 brings an opportunity to further consolidate food-security-related humanitarian work, although the linkages with longer-term interventions or responses may require further attention. In recent years, governments of many countries in protracted crises have played an increasingly constructive role in promoting food security rather than being passive recipients of assistance. This is epitomized, for instance, in the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States presented at Busan.

In terms of the mismatch between short-term funding mechanisms and long-term needs, there are examples where programmes have managed to work around this, linking short-term funding to longer-term strategies. This is only a stop-gap measure. Donors should allocate – and account for – funding according to assessed needs and programming opportunities, with enough resources to respond to conditions in protracted crises. In particular, funding commitments should take into account the long time needed to overcome protracted and often forgotten crises.

NEW VOICE FOR FRAGILE STATES THROUGH THE NEW DEAL

Ample evidence shows that fragile states are disproportionately susceptible to globally driven resource and commodity price shocks and depend heavily on food imports. It is also well known that several countries experiencing food security crises are conflict affected or fragile and many have experienced both for more than a decade. Often dysfunctional institutions are at the root of structural food insecurity.

A key problem is that in international dialogues, including those on issues such as food security, fragile states have weak voices, and their interests are not adequately represented (FAO, Economic and Social perspectives, February 2010; WDR 2010; WDR 2011; WFP 2011).

The International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, the G7+ group of fragile states, and the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States agreed at the Busan High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in December 2011, give a new voice to fragile states. They provide a new framework for effective support to peacebuilding and statebuilding and build a stronger partnership for results between fragile states and international partners. This new voice, framework and partnership can significantly change the context within which food security is addressed.

The five peacebuilding and statebuilding goals (PSGs) in the New Deal aim to guide the identification and allocation of resources for peacebuilding and statebuilding priorities at country level. These include security, the generation of employment and the improvement of livelihoods, and capacity building for accountable and fair service delivery. These goals both complement and also enable achieving the MDGs. The other elements of the New Deal provide a framework for country led assessments of fragility, provisions to reduce aid volatility and increase its timely delivery, and a new focus on building and using local institutions, capacities, and systems to manage resources transparently and deliver services. All these are critical to reduce food insecurity. Lastly, by calling for stronger partnerships through country compacts, the New Deal leads to greater focus on supporting country-led priorities and mutual accountability for results.

6. OECD. 2007. Principles for good international engagement in fragile states and situations. Paris, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

7. <http://foodsecuritycluster.net/>

RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

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