Food security and protracted crises in Africa: managing economic security in rural areas

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Abstract

Protracted crises have a devastating effect on already precarious food security situations. Survival is difficult for many Africans because of the deterioration of public services such as health, education, banking and law and order, and this is only made worse by factors such as ethnically or politically motivated massacres, economic isolation and minefields rendering farmland inaccessible. However, remarkable resilience and an astonishing capacity to adapt have proven to be the keys not only to people’s survival, but also provide entry points for future rehabilitation efforts. The concept of food security, enriched by the livelihoods approach and a wider understanding of economic security have been important elements in the response to the needs created by complex political emergencies and their aftermaths. The situation has been made worse in the last decade by the growing threat of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and, more recently, by land grabbing by rich nations and companies looking to secure their food supply at the expense of rural smallholding communities. Only by analysing survival strategies thoroughly and including both physiological needs and current local coping mechanisms and innovative capacities will it be possible to alleviate suffering and pave the way to restore and reinforce rural economic security. This first step towards societal recovery encompasses nutritional security and safety as well as secure access to appropriate seeds, agricultural inputs and markets.
1. Introduction

This paper analyses the theoretical, operational and methodological challenges currently facing aid agencies regarding highly food insecure populations in insecure environments caused by complex political emergencies (CPEs).

Section 2 examines the current definitions of “food security” and “complex political emergency” and how they apply to contemporary Africa. Section 3 looks at crisis and displacement dynamics and the way they affect food security. Section 4 reviews several cases in Africa where food security issues have been at stake. Section 5 presents a series of methodological tools for contextual diagnosis, and section 6 concludes on the need to be site and context specific in any attempt to deal with food insecurity in the context of CPEs.

2. Definitions

2.1. From “food security” to “livelihoods”

For a long time, the concept of “needs” in the nutritional sector was based only on a dietary approach. The benchmarks for needs were calorie and micronutrient intake, and food production was considered to be the only relevant mechanism to ensure access to food. This narrow approach was then challenged and replaced by the more holistic “food security” approach, largely based on issues related to production and access to food. Food security is variously defined as a state when “all people at all times have both physical and economic access to the basic food they need” or “all people, especially the most vulnerable and least resilient, have dignified and unthreatening access to the quantity and quality of culturally appropriate food that will fully support their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health”. The concept of “livelihoods” then took the debate one step further in the direction of “economic security,” as defined by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Indeed, food is not only produced; it can also be acquired. The other channels used to access food (markets, bartering etc.) function on the basis of monetary means or in kind exchanges, which can be acquired through labour, asset depletion or decapitalization/destitution. Restoring food and economic security not only provides fuel for physiological survival; it is also the source of vital energy for a society to function.

2.2. Deteriorating food security in Africa

Crisis and food insecurity in Africa have a long common history. Their roots can be found both in natural factors (the existing resource base and the risks related to climatic vagaries and the increasingly worrying consequences of long-term climate change) and in human determinants (how the resource base is used, competition between groups, market mechanisms and land grabbing). As far back as we can go in history, documents show that stories of famine have always been part of the African collective memory. The colonial period probably had a dual effect on the occurrence of famine: on the one hand, famine increased due to the slave trade, the development of cash cropping and the drawing of natural resources from Africa to urban centres; and on the other hand, famine was reduced by the injection of capital for infrastructure development. This dual effect has continued during the postcolonial period with unequal terms of exchange and development aid. Economists and experts on these issues continue to debate whether development aid has made any positive difference in terms of food security and well-being.

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The immediate post-colonial period often took the form of “Socialist experiments.” In many African contexts, the ideology was anti-farmer, farmers being seen as retrograde and reactionary. But scientific socialism, based on state farms and large-scale mechanization, did not produce the miracles predicted by the regimes. In Algeria, Ethiopia, Guinea and Mozambique the remains of many such projects can be seen in the middle of tropical evergreen forests or in the sands of arid plateaux. Not only was this a tragic misuse of financial and human resources, it also resulted in the loss of indigenous knowledge in relation to farming.

Long before the beginning of modern history, climatic changes and human activities profoundly modified the vegetation cover of large parts of sub-Saharan Africa. In recent decades, these changes have tended to accelerate. This has had an aggravated impact on agro-ecosystems and has further challenged food security. Desertification is encroaching on more-humid agro-ecosystems, increasing risks and diminishing food production. As a consequence, many parts of Africa are more and more prone to natural disasters.

Urbanization has also accelerated over the last 20 years. Africa is less and less rural and increasingly urbanized, with large populations concentrated in cities and towns. However, the food productivity of the countryside, rendered more fragile as food crops have been replaced by cash crops over the years, is often unable to keep up with the growing food requirements of the expanding urban population. These burgeoning urban centres increasingly rely on either food imports or structural food aid, two sources of food that are largely dependent on commercial and political parameters.

Of course, there has been very noticeable economic development in some parts of sub-Saharan Africa. The discovery of resources such as oil, gas and rare minerals has changed some of the patterns of development, and poor countries such as Chad Niger and became oil exporters. This new wealth has not benefited everyone in these countries, where there is growing inequality and where acute rural poverty and food insecurity remains the rule rather than the exception.

2.3. Africa and complex political emergencies

Decolonization wars, Cold War-related conflicts and more recent ethnic conflicts destroyed the fragile balance that existed between nature and mankind. Population displacement within states and across international borders as a result of these crises has reached unprecedented levels. The wars that have affected these often poor countries have caused major destruction. Food insecurity currently affects millions of people across the continent. In the early 1990s, with the involvement of troops led by the United Nations (UN) under Security Council resolutions, some of these crises began to be referred to as “complex political emergencies” (CPEs) (Goodhand and Hulme, 1998; Dolan, 1998). Some of these CPE have been short lived. Most of them last longer. They become “protracted crises”. Several factors have to be taken into account.

Political factors

Since the end of the Cold war, the political ramifications of conflicts have changed dramatically. The two-block system of East and West has been replaced by a multipolar world where there is one super power, a first circle of secondary powers and a second circle made up of a multitude of actors with different agendas. Though the search for political power remains at the centre of most of these crises, it is less the power of a political party or individual which is at stake than the power of a specific group identifiable by an economic position or an “ethnic posture.” Complex emergencies, especially when they become protracted crises, obey a new set of rules that have major consequences for conflict management both for national and international actors. The political landscape has also been changing recently due to the growing involvement of new actors, such as Brazil, China and India, as well as Kuwait, Qatar and Turkey. And African geopolitics, which for so long only involved the former colonial and Cold War powers, is now much more open. The rules, therefore, are continuing to evolve.
Protracted crises and the control over resources

War is often just a way of gaining control over natural resources whether above or below the ground and protracted conflicts a way to ensure that these resources can be exploited without external interferences. The first category of resources at stake includes rich or rare agricultural land in areas where scarcity has become a constraint. The second category, no less valuable, includes diamonds, oil, gas, gold, uranium and rare metals: to some, these are well worth launching a war for. Weak law and order, which often goes hand in hand with conflict, creates conditions where it is easier for those in power to take control of these resources. Examples of this are military forces taking control of land ownership or local elites enriching themselves via the extraction of oil or diamonds.

Ethnic and historical factors and how they are manipulated to trigger “never ending conflicts”

Ethnic issues have always existed in Africa, but these became political weapons in the hands of the colonial powers who aimed to “divide to rule.” A full range of ethnic theories emerged from the brain of colonial scientists and Africa is still paying the price for their pseudo-scientific ideas. Ethnic issues continue to be used to trigger crises and this has a very specific effect on the way wars are conducted. In an ethnic conflict, war is not carried out to “win” but rather to “eliminate” the other side, either by obliging them to leave for good, or by actually killing them. Unfortunately, it is very easy to manipulate ethnic issues for political ends.

Regional factors and the prolongation of crises

In a geopolitical context largely predetermined by the borders inherited from the colonial era and the Berlin Conference, it is not surprising that conflicts sometimes spill over these borders. When rivers were the backbone of a “nation” (a term used here as an alternative to “an ethnic community living in a territory”), they were seen as natural obstacles and thus proper physical limits for the delineation of borders. In areas where pastoral groups have been travelling for centuries following the grass front, post-colonial international borders sometimes separate winter and summer pastures. In addition, river courses and mineral deposits can also cross borders. Attempts to control these can easily cause an internal conflict to become international. The long list of examples of such contexts includes Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Senegal and the Sudan. In contexts of this kind, it is not possible to manage the crisis at a local or national level. As it is in the nature of food and economic flows to extend from local to regional and international levels, the impact of regional factors on food security cannot be overemphasized.

Long lasting phenomenon

Paradoxically, duration is also one of the characteristics of complex emergencies. Indeed, most of these crises are the result of a long gestation and are often prolonged. Many of them involve recurring crises, alternating periods of remission and periods of crisis. There are many examples of countries where hopes that peace has finally come have been dashed, such as Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and Uganda. The duration or recurrence of these crises leads to two opposing dynamics. On the one hand, there is a profound and systematic erosion of all the acquired social and human capital. On the other hand, there is an enhanced capacity to survive and often increased resilience. African people are survivors who can adjust to dire circumstances, sometimes paying a high price for this due to coping strategies with negative short term and long term impacts.

Socio-economic conditions

The impact of any war on a poor country can be devastating, not only due to the destruction it entails, but also due to the resources it diverts from development activities to war efforts and the
discontinuation of most international development aid programmes. This is made worse the longer it lasts. Social and human capital which has been accumulated over generations is often deeply eroded even though it cannot be totally destroyed by military activities. The whole social and economic fabric can be ruined. The level of food security can be seriously affected and surpluses to feed the towns are often reduced to nil. Urban sectors are deeply affected by the disappearance of economic activities and urban populations find it more and more difficult to gain access to food. A reversal of village to city migration is often observed, unless towns have been transformed into food distribution sites attracting populations who have lost their access to food in the villages.

**Conflict with their own fuel supply**

For a long time, traditional conflicts, decolonization confrontations and civil war were related to the Cold War. Thus each of the parties involved had a “godfather”. With the end of the confrontation between the East and West, it was no longer in the interest of the godfathers to pay for costly conflicts. However, these conflicts remained unresolved and those involved were not necessarily prepared to lay down their arms when they were so close to taking power, but they had to find alternative sources of funding. The establishment of economies of scarcity and the collapse of the states which accompanies complex emergencies is a highly favourable context for illicit economies. Stateless leads to the rise of parallel economies based on the trafficking of drugs and small arms and illegal trade in oil and precious stones, etc. Multinational corporations are often involved in these contexts where there is little law and order as there are substantial profits to be made. It is not in the interest of those who benefit from the crisis to find a solution. The ongoing crisis in Mali is largely sustained by the transcontinental drug roads inducing massive flows of resources in the concerned countries.

**Multiplicity of actors**

One of the key components of long lasting complex political emergencies is the large number of actors involved: bilateral as well as multilateral, civilian as well as military and international as well as local. A growing trend is the involvement of private for-profit corporations. In many instances, mandates are unclear; agencies are unpredictable and inconsistent, this being largely due to the games played by the various donors. At the end of the day, what people see is a fleet of white Land Cruisers with strange logos and flags. However, in our world of instant communication, information reaches the last village in the bush and local armed groups are all aware of possible hidden agendas and conflicts of influence.

**The increasing occurrence of asymmetric wars and transnationalization of al Qaeda’s particular variant of jihadism**

With the extremist versions of the Jihad and its most violent expressions (in Kenya, Nigeria, Somalia etc.) and the related response in the form of the global War on Terror (not less violent but probably more targeted), large tracts of sub-Saharan Africa are becoming less open to Western powers and humanitarian/development aid. The situation in northern Mali and Niger has clearly deteriorated and this is particularly so in situations where African Islam is being modified due to the influence of more fundamentalist vision of Islam. The turning point in many areas is when Al Qaeda’s influence, with its view of a worldwide Jihad, overwhelms all the other more moderate forms of Islam. When this happens, economic conditions and access to economic resources, trade, tourism and development aid can be significantly impacted.

**A complex legal framework**

In war situations, the law of war and international humanitarian law should be applied. The main instruments available are the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Additional Protocols of 1977. Article 3 which is common to the four Conventions and Protocol 2 is especially relevant in the context of internal conflict while the four Conventions, especially the fourth one, are to be
used as a reference when dealing with international conflicts. The 1951 Geneva Refugee Law is also an important tool when part of the population has crossed international boundaries. This is the incompressible legal framework to be used in times of war, when other rights can be set aside during special regulations, such as states of emergency or martial law. However, another set of ad hoc instruments are regularly added, which, on the one hand, give additional operational direction, and, on the other hand, tend to make already complicated contexts more complicated. Among these new legal or pseudo-legal elements which add complexity are UN resolutions based on Chapter VII of the UN Charter, various ground rules set up locally (e.g. for Liberia and for South Sudan) and lately the UN Guiding Principles for internal displacements. In natural disaster contexts, the State should take the leading role, as it is responsible for the wellbeing of its citizens and should provide and coordinate relief.

### Insecurity for aid actors

Analysis of security incidents in recent years shows that most have taken place during protracted crises and long lasting complex political emergencies. Indeed, issues such as the deterioration of social norms, the increasing politicization of ethnic issues, the deterioration of economic conditions and the presence of groups who want to attract attention to themselves create conditions in which security incidents are more likely. This increase in the number of security incidents is closely linked to the large-scale and widespread violation of the rights of civilian populations. In CPEs, the protection of civilian populations and the security of humanitarian workers are intimately linked. The new post-cold-war and post-9/11 international environment, where UN-mandated international forces are faced with no-go areas, can be seen in contexts such as Somalia (Operation Restore Hope), Rwanda (Operation Turquoise), the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1996 and more recently Darfur in the mid-2000s, Chad after 2008 and the African Union Mission in Somalia since 2006.

What is the connection between these different factors of complex political emergencies and food security? In many of the crises which fall into this category, there have been systematic attacks on the civilian population and their means of subsistence, placing large numbers of people in danger. This can lead to two types of scenario: massive displacement or the deterioration of the economic and nutritional situation of the population. Food insecurity is one of the key facets of protracted crises.

### 3. Food security, crisis dynamics and displacement

#### 3.1. Crisis dynamics: explosion, continuum and contiguum

CPEs can take many forms and have a variety of root causes, catalysts and dynamics. They sometimes concern fast-evolving situations where needs, access, security and coping strategies change from one day to the next. In many cases, a crisis explodes after a period during which there has been a deterioration of national governance and growing political instability due to clashes between groups vying for power or control over resources. Unfortunately, early warning signals have sometimes either not been heard or have been ignored, such as in Rwanda in 1994 and in the Congo in 1997.

In other cases, CPEs have been resolved more successfully and their crises have followed the linear progression of the continuum, a concept inherited from studies of natural disasters. Too often, there are no rapid solution and the crisis becomes a proracted one.

More often they take the form of frozen situations that can last several years and induce a dramatic erosion of the local resource base. In most instances, protracted crises result in a significant reduction in most human development indicators. South Sudan has been until recently a very sad example of the “protracted crisis syndrome”. In some instances, protracted crises go through a series of phases, where peace and war alternate over a long period: Angola is a famous example of
this “recurring crisis syndrome”. In addition, and to make things even more complicated, a single country can be engulfed in different conflicts or have very different conflict levels in its different regions. Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo are two interesting examples of this “contiguum syndrome”.

Though the elaboration of a model is always a difficult – and sometimes risky – exercise, it can also be useful to clarify complex concepts. The following series of diagrams compares different forms of crises, with the horizontal axis representing “time” and the vertical axis representing “socio-economic indicators.”

**Modelling crisis dynamics**

**Case 1: The theoretical model of the “continuum”**

![Diagram of the continuum model]

**Case 2: Protracted crisis**

![Diagram of the protracted crisis model]

**Case 3: Crises which appear to have begun to be resolved but where a lot of uncertainty remains**

![Diagram of the resolving crisis model]

**Case 4: Recurring crises**

![Diagram of the recurring crisis model]
Case 5: Combining various options: the “contiguum”

3.2. The dynamics of displacement

One of the most striking features of almost all of these complex political emergencies is the fact that they are often determined by, are the result of or are aggravated by large-scale population displacement. This, of course, has devastating repercussions on food security for both the displaced people – be they refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs) – and the surrounding communities. Again, a model can help to guide thinking and analysis.

People in stage 1 are IDPs or refugees in the early phases of displacement. Still in very precarious and unstable situations, they have not yet been able to identify suitable survival strategies and are thus often very vulnerable. Uprooted people in stage 2 (either refugees or IDPs) have already learned that the crisis will last a long time. Protracted conflict results in well-established refugee/IDP camps or refugees/IDPs being relatively well integrated into the local population. Stage 3 (repatriation/resettlement) is often a precarious situation where social links have to be re-established while food and economic security need to be rebuilt from scratch. Both the process of healing the wounds inherited from the conflict and the recapitalization of economic entities have to start during this stage. Stage 4 is the time of sustained reconciliation and viable economic reintegration of returnees, IDPs and demobilized soldiers into mainstream society.
4. Food security issues and the crisis cycle

4.1. Food security and the hunger for land as a root cause of conflict: the case of the Great Lakes area

As Dolan (1998) rightly explains, the search for root causes is a risky endeavour. The multiplicity of possible causes, the complexity of causal relations and the multi-layered historical roots of various phenomena all add difficulty to this exercise. However, even despite the added complexity of distinguishing causes and effects, it can still be worthwhile.

For a long time, debates about the ethnic causes of the crises in Burundi and Rwanda dominated all other attempts to look at possible root causes. However, analysis of changes that took place in the second half of the 20th century in the Great Lakes region regarding economic patterns in general and the micro-economy and agro-ecosystems in particular can provide another level of explanation. Theories based on land availability and population pressure overlook the fact that
land productivity was highest in some of the most densely populated areas as the result of initiatives of small-scale farmers, such as in Bujumbura Rural in Burundi and Byumba in Rwanda. In addition, the direct causal relationship between high population density and deforestation did not apply in these areas as the small-scale farmers were planting trees on their own initiative. Added value was created and soon this became a source of conflict. Indeed, the transfer of property during the various phases of the crisis represents a transfer of added value. Analysis of land allocation in Gikongoro prefecture provides a telling example: most extensively-managed, Tutsi-owned pastures were transformed into intensively-managed agricultural fields after the 1959 Hutu revolution and the subsequent violence of 1961 and 1971 resulted in an additional exodus of Tutsis.

### 4.2. Food insecurity as a means of identifying a crisis in the making: the case of northern Mali

Food insecurity is probably as old as the precarious conditions in the desert and Sahelian regions. However, it can be made worse by various natural and man-made factors. In an area where the management of scarce natural resources, such as water, pastures and trees requires balanced inter-community negotiation, the disappearance of a certain equilibrium can be both a cause or an indicator of a developing crisis. An imbalance in the relations between humans and nature can often be identified relatively early, even when a crisis is still in its initial stages. The observable consequences of such an imbalance can indicate that there is a crisis in the making. Northern Mali is a good example. Indeed the root causes of the so-called “Touareg crisis” can be found in the overall deterioration of the economic situation, including its food security component, in the 1980s, following the region’s incomplete recovery from the droughts of 1974–75 and 1979–80. The United Front of the People of Azawouat was not formed on the basis of ethnic recriminations but rather represented the recriminations of all the people of the north against the central government. With food security deteriorating by the day, it became easy for Bamako to turn the debate into one about access to land and access to food, which then led to ethnic bloodshed in a few towns in the north. The so-called “Touareg crisis” which started a few decades ago is still far from over as the majority of people in the region still suffer from poverty and food insecurity, despite various programmes by the UN, bilateral agencies and non-governmental organization (NGOs).

### 4.3. Food insecurity and the paroxysm of the crisis: when famine becomes a weapon – the case of the Sudan

For a long time, food aid (especially from the USA and the European Union) was considered a weapon at the global level to gain access to markets and keep them captive. Later on, famine and food aid were used more and more frequently as weapons. A telling example of this is the case of South Sudan during the 1990s.

Historically, food insecurity has been more the norm than the exception in the large Nilotic depression formed by the watersheds of the Bahr al Jabal, Bahr el Ghazal and Sobat rivers. It is no wonder that the people living there have adopted pastoralism, one of most resilient agrarian systems in the world. It is no wonder that for the Dinka and the Nuer of South Sudan, life, death, weddings, birth and livestock are symbolically and intricately linked on a day-to-day level. Agriculture in this context is highly opportunistic and wild food gathering, hunting and, above all, fishing complement the daily ration of milk, blood and meat.

A sophisticated network of family, clan and tribal ties creates a safety net for people on the condition that they are symbolically related to the social network through regular contributions. This social safety net, which is essential for survival in a hostile environment, was often wrongly
interpreted and sometimes totally overlooked by aid agencies. It was also manipulated by belligerents who found it an easy mechanism to drain resources.

In the mid-1980s, the northern army in South Sudan used classical warfare methods. During the dry season, tanks and armoured vehicles were used along the main roads and tracks. During the rainy season and the floods throughout the lowlands bordering the Nile, the army withdrew its troops and left the initiative to the air force. But with the predominantly pastoral economy, based on herds, fish and wild food, these efforts had less effect than drought or locust infestations. In the early 1990s, warfare methods changed with the alliance between certain southerners and the authorities in Khartoum: who knows better how to eliminate a Nilotic group from the Toïc than another Nilotic group from the Toïc? The first large-scale massacres of herds took place at this time in places such as Kongor and Madiet. Opportunistic agriculture or increased fishing could not compensate for the loss of herds, the central pillar of food security. Food aid became necessary, but its control became another objective of the war. Human-caused famine and the related population displacement towards food aid distribution sites became a daily feature of the war in South Sudan.

To survive on local resources, low population density is necessary: between 20 and 50 inhabitants per square kilometre. Due to the promise of food aid and pressure from local armed forces, tens of thousands of people gathered in single locations. If, for various political, climatic or technological reasons, the air drops did not take place for a few days, the local Lu-Lu nuts and wild grains were quickly eaten and the last birds and fishes were caught and cooked. The local carrying capacity of the agro-ecosystem could not cope with the protracted presence of such a massive population. Additional delays would mean that hunger was on the horizon and a few more days would lead to an increase in the death rate. This, therefore, is famine initiated by food aid.

The seven pillars of food security in South Sudan

This model of food security in the Nilotic depression of South Sudan, presents the pillars of survival, in order of importance from the bottom to the top. It is interesting to note that, in many instances, interethnic conflicts were partly solved by reaching agreements on pastoral lands and in the payment of blood debts in the form of livestock donations.

4.4. Managing food security as part of humanitarian aid and methodological
challenges: the case of Somalia

The war in Somalia started at the end of 1991 when President Siad Barre was overthrown. Somalia became embroiled in a long civil conflict with terrible humanitarian consequences. Food aid was supplied on a massive scale but slowly became both a part of the solution and a part of the problem. Faced with this dilemma, the aid community started to explore other avenues which were more adapted to pastoral Somalia.

Was the support provided to the veterinary network in Somalia in 1992–93 of a humanitarian nature? This question was often raised by those for whom the solution for a food problem in a crisis context should be food aid. However, the answer is clearly “yes” if one takes into account the difficulties involved in providing food to all those in need. These variously were political (linked to the history and the clan fabric of Somali society), logistical (as a result of the geographic dispersal of human settlements and the rough conditions of the bush and desert roads and tracks) and security-related (as a result of the war and the break-down of law and order). The support to the veterinary network meant that there was increased availability of meat and milk from flocks in better health while money from the camel trade with the United Arab Emirates and Yemen and from the rapidly re-emerging goat and sheep sector provided in a decentralized manner more calories than could be brought in by the fleet of Hercules C130 airplanes. In parallel, a sophisticated seed and tools programme was run in areas more prone to cereal production and specific ad hoc assistance was provided to the mainly fishing Bantu communities. These different elements constituted an integrated food security package, as opposed to mere food aid. What is more, there is no comparison between the cost effectiveness of the two types of approach.

Of major importance is the question of when the disaster takes place relative to the agricultural, pastoral and non-farming calendars. Indeed, the consequences will be different if it takes place before sowing, while the crops are growing, at harvest time or when the granaries are full.

Example: Somalia, the April 1992 war in Baidoa and the central sorghum belt

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<td>Sorghum crop calendar</td>
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<td>Weeding</td>
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<td>Storing and consuming</td>
<td>Sowing</td>
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<td>Effects and impact</td>
<td>No plantation, Food and seed stocks destroyed or consumed.</td>
<td>The little that was sown could not be weeded and taken care of.</td>
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In the above example, it is clear that the war would have had a very different effect if it had taken place at another time of the crop calendar. Establishing the calendar of the various productive and non-productive activities and the positioning of the disaster vis-à-vis this calendar should be a compulsory methodological tool in all situation assessments and for the planning of activities. Unfortunately, it is seldom done. Many setbacks in humanitarian programmes are caused by the disconnection between aid activities and the local calendar of planting, harvesting, moving the flocks from seasonal pastures to other areas, etc.

4.5. Food security, crises and large-scale displacement

Population displacement is one of humanity’s oldest coping mechanisms: when human insecurity increases, and food security decreases, people start to move. In recent decades a corpus of
practices to assist displaced people has been developed. More recently, interest in displaced people has broadened to also include the local communities affected by displacement; their economic situation and, more specifically, their food security can be deeply affected by a large influx of people.

One of the effects of the Rwandan genocide was the huge influx of refugees into neighbouring countries, particularly the Congo. This placed enormous pressure on the resource base of local communities who were already competing with each other over land. This is one of the key parameters of the ongoing inter-community confrontation in Eastern Congo. The Hunde-Mandre-May-May war in Massissi was reactivated by the 1994 flow of refugees into the Congo and the civil war reached new levels after the 1996 Baynamulengue war and Tutsi-led herds moving into the Congo.

Different waves of refugees from Liberia and Sierra Leone have settled in forested Guinea since 1991 and have been generously welcomed by both the Guinean authorities and local farmers. Many of them have managed to complement humanitarian aid with additional items via wages, exchanges, labour, trade and wild food gathering and in some cases have been able to reduce their dependency on aid.

This has not been without a price. Large parts of the forest have been turned into rice fields. Many palm trees have been overexploited, some to the extent that they have been irreparably damaged. And yet the hospitality of the local farmers has remained solid.

Under pressure from donors, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) have claimed that most of the old refugees are now integrated and have reached self-sufficiency and that only new refugees will now receive assistance. A study carried out by Action Contre la Faim (ACF) under the methodological supervision of Groupe URD seems to indicate that the situation is not that bright (Grunewald and Clamagirand, 2000). If food aid is further cut, the refugees will have to rely more and more on local resources which have already been weakened. In such a context, it is likely that the Guinean farmers will not have any other choice but to restrict refugees’ access to the fields and the bush. Food security, but also human security will be jeopardized. Is this measure being taken to encourage the refugees to go back home? At the time of writing, the news from Sierra Leone’s border districts is not good. Where will the refugees be able to go?

4.6. Food security and post-crises phases

Most post-crises phases include a series of elements, including the repatriation of returnees, the demobilization of former fighters, mine clearance and the liberation of prisoners. The demographic weight of these different categories can become a burden for the communities who have to cater for them. In addition, these categories are often political targets in electoral processes which are often included in peace packages. These various post-crisis processes often bear heavily on the economic situation at large and food security in particular. Yet, the longer the crisis was, the more difficult these processes are.

The repatriation of refugees, the return of IDPs and their possible reversals: the fragile dynamics of displacements in protracted crises:

At the end of conflicts, repatriation becomes a viable option. Refugees from Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Namibia started to go back home in their hundreds of thousands in the early 1990s. With the end of the Taliban era in Afghanistan and the positive result of the Naivasha process in the Sudan, another series of massive repatriations took place, but at these crises are not fully terminated, other movements can take place. In addition, in most of these crises, there is a lot of internal displacement. Depending on the context, the returnees are either given a warm
welcome or are seen as potential traitors to be kept under control. The repatriation of people who have sometimes spent more than a decade in camps, and their reintegration into the social fabric, which has often been deeply modified by years of conflict, are not easy processes and their access to food security and sustainable livelihoods can remain elusive for a long time. Behind the success or failure of these reintegration processes often lies the possibility of reconciliation.

**Demobilization: lost soldiers**

One of the most complex challenges is providing those who have been involved in the conflict with a future. In certain contexts, hundreds of thousands of armed men, some of whom have had a gun in their hands for more than a decade, have to be demobilized. For those who have been used to being fed and taken care of because they have been part of armed forces, or those who have been used to taking what they need from the civilian population through extortion (voluntary war tax), devastated post-war economies do not provide much incentive to engage in a peaceful life. Failure to integrate these men into the socio-economic mainstream can create tension, and can even jeopardize a peace process. In many cases, unsuccessful demobilization and a low level of social reintegration of former soldiers into productive lives has led to rampant banditry. The difficulties involved in reintegrating former soldiers or guerrilla fighters are seen by the World Bank Post conflict units as a critical challenge. In contexts such as Eritrea and Ethiopia, where armies were highly organized, the draconian discipline was a key factor for the success of the demobilization programme. In other contexts, where there was a loose and permissive military order involving regular predatory activities, it is much less easy. Yet, for peace to really prevail, former soldiers need to be treated like any other citizen under public national law and penal laws. But who will disarm them? In fact, in many protracted crises, as currently seen in Congo, inefficient or incomplete demobilization and disarmament processes are just contributing to the prolongation or the reactivation of the crisis. Improper management of armed is the catalyst for a protracted crises.

**Inmate population and liberated prisoners**

International and national law, including international humanitarian law also apply to prisoners who are jailed for conflict-related reasons. They are normally released as part of a peace agreement, sometimes after years of internment. War prisoners, jailed resistance fighters and imprisoned political opponents have sometimes not seen the light of day or received news from their families for years. Their relatives may even think they are dead as they may not have been able to communicate during their time in custody (unless the ICRC has been able to gain access to them, register them and facilitate the exchange of family messages). Their return to productive life is often very difficult, and years after their liberation many of them still live in precarious situations. This sizeable population is also unable to contribute to the hard agricultural work at the peak of crop calendar activities. The longer the crisis, the more difficult the reintegration of prisoners in their families and societies.

### 4.7. Food insecurity and the HIV/AIDS epidemic

**The impact of HIV/AIDS on population**

In peace time, and in terms of population alone, HIV/AIDS has had disastrous consequences. Since it was first discovered, more than 70 million people have become infected with HIV, with millions of new cases every year. AIDS has had a particularly significant impact on the mortality rates of children aged 1–5 yrs. The majority of children infected during pregnancy or via breastfeeding will die before their fifth birthday. In seven countries in southern Africa, the mortality rate of under-fives has increased by 20–40 percent due to AIDS.

Trends in life expectancy give a significant idea of the impact of the HIV epidemic on the African population. In most countries, AIDS has reversed decades of progress in terms of life expectancy.
Average life expectancy in sub-Saharan Africa today is around 47 years, whereas it would have been 62 years had it not been for the outbreak of AIDS. In the same region, the number of deaths is 39 percent higher due to AIDS.

**Life expectancy in high and low HIV-prevalence countries (1950–2005).**

The above diagram allows us to compare life expectancy between three countries where HIV is prevalent and three where it is not. Average life expectancy in Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe plunged in the 1980s, whereas for the second group, Madagascar, Mali and Senegal it continues to rise. This gives some indication of the considerable impact that HIV/AIDS has had on life expectancy.

**HIV/AIDS, disasters, wars and post-crisis contexts**

Conflicts take an extremely barbarian form when rape is used as a weapon. Mass and individual rape has been on the rise and its consequences are now seen as one of the most dramatic components of protracted crises and post-crisis contexts. Similarly, food crises which result in displacement and the establishment of IDP and refugee camps lead to “de-socialization” and promiscuity which, in turn, lead to an increase in improper sexual behaviour, including sexual assault.

Women were more physiologically resistant to famine before the AIDS epidemic, but women who suffer from HIV are more vulnerable to malnutrition and famine. HIV infected people need large quantities of food in order to fight against the disease and maintain weight. Macronutrient requirements are increased, notably protein requirements, in order to encourage muscle tissue reconstruction while carbohydrates and lipids are required to maintain weight. It is estimated that HIV sufferers require 50 percent more proteins and 15 percent more energy-rich nutrients than normal intake. Moreover, it has been established that shortages of nutrients affect the immune system and other functions. HIV/AIDS reduces people’s capacity to respond to crises. Many traditional coping mechanisms that are usually adopted in situations of food insecurity have proved ineffective since the outbreak of AIDS. The epidemic has weakened traditional coping mechanisms and even if these mechanisms are initiated more rapidly, they are too fragile to respond to additional threats, such as armed conflict and natural catastrophes.
Many traditional coping mechanisms are based on returning to the family unit. Many infected people choose not to remain isolated and without resources in the city but return to die in their native village and so benefit from help from the community. Nevertheless, it can be observed that, whereas family and community assistance represent the main coping mechanisms, they are currently stretched to their limits. In fact, the depletion of family and community resources is so great that basic needs are no longer met during a crisis. The disintegration of family structures and the coping mechanism framework can be widely observed. Traditional adaptation mechanisms, which enabled populations to overcome the impacts of crises, have been levelled due to the seriousness of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Survival strategies (such as foraging for food, collecting sticks, making charcoal, etc.) often require a lot of time and/or manpower. As the HIV/AIDS epidemic wipes out the active population, so it becomes more difficult for individuals to adopt these traditional means of providing a small income.

As a result, the range of strategies people can resort to is limited, leading them to turn to more costly and risk-prone strategies. Furthermore, the HIV/AIDS epidemic also increases the risks associated with certain behaviours, notably the risk of HIV infection. A vicious circle is thus put in place, linking HIV/AIDS, accelerated destitution and increased exposure to the disease.

**Commercial sex:** In refugee or IDP situations, or in very poor urban contexts, commercial sex often appears to be the only option for survival open to women. Many women, and particularly widows, resort to prostitution to earn money and support their households. Women sometimes even accept to have unprotected sex in order to be paid more, thus increasing the risk of HIV contamination and transmission.

**Child labour:** Households who suddenly find themselves in precarious situations are often obliged to remove their children from school so that they can work and earn money. In Zimbabwe, 18 percent of households have removed at least one of their children from the education system in order to cope with food shortages. Children are thus denied an education and are often given heavy manual jobs in agriculture, etc. Children who are removed from school also become involved in increased high-risk behaviour, such as theft and poaching.

**Impact on agriculture:** In response to the drop in the agricultural workforce, labour-intensive crops are replaced by crops that are less time-consuming and that mature more rapidly, whilst attempting to maintain a minimum nutritional quality. As local agricultural systems become less diversified, the soil becomes increasingly impoverished and its water retention capacity is depleted.
Process of dismantlement of livelihoods and social support networks (from Save the Children, UK).

5. Crises and food insecurity: management tools
5.1. The holistic approach: a key to situation assessment

For a long time, the concept of emergency aid was associated with the provision of emergency medical aid, food aid and emergency shelter. This narrow vision has shown its limits in many non-refugee situations. While the above mentioned items are indeed sometimes required, emergency response can include many other activities. The Pyramid of Assistance is a model that the ICRC has been using for some time. It is particularly relevant to protracted crises.
Presenting the various types of assistance that could be used in times of crisis in this way shows clearly that in order to ensure that an intervention strategy is solid, it is important that it is based on solid ground. What is the point of operating on someone if they then die from infection or hunger? What is the point of feeding someone if they then become so dependent on food aid that the day the supply is interrupted for reason x or y, they die? This model also shows that food security and its related coping mechanisms are central to the survival of people during emergencies. Supporting them can, in many instances, contribute much more to their survival than traditional humanitarian aid itself.

5.2. Food security and the food production/exchange system

Though food security is not only the result of production, it is often, at least in rural settings, the failure, weakness or disruption of the production process which affects it the most. Thus, food security derives largely from access to land, means of production and man-power. However, the way the results of this production process are used, shared, given and traded are other key components of food security. It is therefore fundamental to understand the nature and magnitude of the impact of a crisis on a system or society. The following model attempts to provide a systemic approach to analysing this impact.
6. Conclusion: developing resilience where it is needed most

6.1. Pre-set imported solutions are of limited use

Food security and, more broadly, "economic security", are central to the management of protracted crises in Africa with their attendant refugee camps, IDP settlements and affected populations still at risk inside the affected areas. Programmes which aim to build food security are a powerful means of reinforcing, and even sometimes restoring, the dignity which has been lost due to war, mudslides or hurricanes. Food security cannot be reduced to a specific number of calories: it has a cultural, site specific and agro-ecological definition. If humanitarian actors arrive in
complex crisis situations with pre-set recipes, they will focus on applying them, and not on analysing real needs and capacities.

They will identify the need for food rations of a certain quality, not how to support people’s initiatives. In the context of a protracted complex emergency, where access to victims is often jeopardized, the overall approach should focus on limiting people’s dependency on aid and strengthening their resilience.

6.2. Restoring food security in long-lasting crises

The issue of food security in long-lasting crises needs to be tackled using a much broader approach than just food aid and agricultural recovery. Such an approach must incorporate the main key areas of the crisis response management cycle: analysis of causes, prevention, early warning, mitigation, emergency operation, post crisis strategy and global response evaluation.

Early warning systems: too much information and insufficient political courage

Early warning systems for “natural disasters” have existed now for many years and are becoming more sophisticated. The most sophisticated and reliable of these to date have been the ones which specifically target climatic disasters (droughts, floods, etc.) and the ones which concern locust infestations. Early warning signals also exist for social unrest, internal conflict and international wars, having been the basis of intelligence and diplomatic activities for centuries. However, most of the early warnings issued in the last decades have not been taken seriously, or responded to, by the international community. In many instances, they were totally neglected. More sadly, some of them have been purposely ignored. Reports on the developing famine in Ethiopia were available and circulated months and months before the situation turned into the most well-known famine of the mid-1980s (the WFP/FAO donor conference on Ethiopia had been held, but there was no response until BBC footage showed the developing horror in October 1984). When early warnings have been related to ethnic or social crises, they have either not been noticed (Rwanda, in the early 1990s a few years before the genocide actually took place) or have prompted inappropriate measures. In most instances, the logical consequence of an early warning, which is a rapid response, has not materialized.

The 2005–06 crisis in the Horn of Africa was tragic in the sense that most of the warnings were there, but the reaction was not forthcoming. It took months and the broadcasting of terrible images on Kenyan TV before the public and donors began to react. Similarly, most of the necessary information was available before the recent crises in the Horn and in the Sahel, but political priorities often prevented these from being used properly. It should be said, however, that the situation is improving and several states in the Sahel reacted relatively quickly in mobilizing their national food reserves. There is room for improvement, at least in the way pre-crisis information is collected and used before disasters strike.

Disaster preparedness in protracted crises: A forgotten priority, but a very difficult endeavour

Disasters do not wait for peace. They take place in Afghanistan (Narhin earthquake, drought in the 90ies, floods), in Somalia (drought in 2005 and 2010, floods in 2009). In peace time, the problem with preparedness measures is easy that they are an investment which only pays off if and when a disaster actually strikes. In conflict time, this is even more complicated: the conditions often simply prevent for the disaster prevention activities to be carried out. This explains why neither local authorities nor donors are very keen to finance them. Unfortunately, when disaster strikes, it is often too late; as a consequence, costs are high, the response is often of limited appropriateness and suffering reaches peaks that could have been avoided. However, there is a lot of confusion
about the term “preparedness”. It is often only understood in logistical terms. The pre-stocking of goods (and, in relation to this paper, seeds) and the transportation means are, of course, important. However, “preparedness” is more a state of mind than a physical state.

Relatively simple cost-effective measures could have been taken in terms of setting aside local seeds and increasing the land allocated to seed production locally, nationally or regionally. More importantly, in situ measures to protect biodiversity could have been implemented in a certain number of cases. In fact, most of these measures should be part of any agricultural strategy aimed at promoting sustainable development. Many information systems related to disaster situations exist, but they are not used properly, in that they are rarely heeded.

**Acquiring knowledge**

In many protracted conflicts, there will be no ministry of agriculture to work with and no technical decision-makers to talk to and promote agricultural recovery. Farmers may be the only source of information for designing an appropriate strategy for re-establishing a certain degree of food security and all efforts should be made to try to reach them, even if conflict situation are not conducive for indepth field work. However, the information generated at the farmers’ level (site-specific, limited global view and limited knowledge of the world seed system) rapidly show some limits. The context-specific knowledge of the humanitarian sector is also far from sufficient, and often already “predefined”, thus leading to very biased assessments. And yet, disaster-prone areas have often been studied in great detail. How can this information be collected, compiled and made available before a crisis, so that when it occurs useful information is immediately accessible? Information systems connected to the Internet are one of the most recent assets of the international community. Increasingly, groups, NGOs and local institutions use the internet to look for the information they need, although in the context of protracted crises, the destruction of telecommunications and energy distribution systems can mean that this source of information is not available. Structures like the FAO Global Information and Early Warning System on food and agriculture (GIEWS) or specialized centres can ensure that this information is available in a ready-to-use form. Trusted and tested solutions often do exist. What counts is the availability of the information about them. Local seed banks have been set up in Western Africa. Trial and error programmes in this domain are already in place in various areas of the world. There is no need to repeat the same errors, but avoidance of doing so depends largely on whether or not actors are aware of past lessons and make use of them.

**Think ahead**

With a bit of proactive thinking, a lot can be done before and during the development of a protracted crisis. During the post-conflict or post-disaster period, access to traditional varieties is crucial to re-establish farmers’ food security mechanisms and restore risk minimization mechanisms based on socially-owned knowledge. The establishment of various types of food-security-restoring mechanisms before a crisis, such as national food stocks and seed banks and biodiversity gene banks, is crucial for post-disaster recovery. Regional cooperation is needed. Connecting national strategies and perspectives to regional ones helps to distribute risk and share costs. Experience in Angola has shown that this can be done in a cost-effective and efficient manner, provided that certain resources are available and that there is real will on the part of local actors. Among the many factors which contribute to the success of a humanitarian response and successful food security recovery, one of the most important is the quality of the initial situation diagnosis.

Among other factors, this initial diagnosis should include:

- analysis of the nature and characteristics of the situation and the protracted crisis (political parameters, in particular);
- analysis of the system that existed before the conflict started, including the production processes (in terms of timing, requirements, relations with other sectors, etc.);
- an in-depth assessment of the way the protracted crises has affected life in rural areas, including agricultural cycles, especially in the long run; and
- the identification and appraisal of the coping mechanisms put in place by the affected population and have evolved over time.

Crisis response management cycle

**ENTERING THE CRISIS**

- **CRISIS INCEPTION**
- **DIAGNOSIS**

**DIFFUSING STAGE**

- **EARLY WARNING**
- **DIFFUSING STAGE**
- **DIAGNOSIS**

**MOBILIZATION OF RESPONSE CAPACITIES**

- **EMERGENCY RESPONSE**
- **RESPONSE THROUGH THE SUPPORT TO LOCAL CAPACITIES**

**CRISIS RESPONSE PARADIGM FOR LONG TERM PREVENTION**

- **INTEGRATION OF THE CRISIS INTO THE DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM FOR LONG TERM PREVENTION**

**LEARNING PROCESS AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES**

- **EVALUATION OF THE RESPONSE**

**REHABILITATION RECONSTRUCTION**

**TOWARDS THE END OF THE CRISIS**

**CRISIS - DISASTER IN MOST INSTANCES, CRISSES ARE LONG LASTING**
Additional reading

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