

4. Food aid in emergency response⁹

Transitory food insecurity is associated with risk and shocks that cause “temporary sharp reductions in a population’s ability to produce or purchase food and other essentials [that] undermine long term development and cause loss of human capital from which it takes years to recover”, if indeed recovery is feasible (World Bank, 1986). The sudden, dramatic collapse of food availability, access or utilization can cause permanent problems, even death, for those suffering such shocks, even if the underlying disruption is short-lived.

Food aid has been invaluable in providing basic nutritional needs to shock-affected people, saving untold millions of lives over the past half century or more (Barrett and Maxwell, 2005). The most vulnerable members of shock-affected populations – children and women, in particular – typically suffer disproportionately from food consumption shortfalls during episodes of transitory food insecurity, and often suffer even when other members of the household are able to cushion themselves against shocks (Hoddinott, 2006). Food aid can be particularly effective in meeting the needs of these vulnerable groups.

Equally important, timely delivery of food to acutely food-insecure people relieves pressure to liquidate scarce productive assets, enabling recipients to resume progress towards a fully secure livelihood as soon as the shock passes. Food aid is important in meeting the right to food and in protecting productive assets, especially the human capital that is the principal wealth of the poor.

The crucial humanitarian role of food aid has been explicitly recognized in the context of the WTO negotiations on agricultural subsidies, which have agreed on a “safe box” for emergency food aid (discussed in

Chapter 2). The increasing dominance of emergency food aid within global food-aid flows over the past generation reflects the widespread recognition of the effectiveness of emergency food aid relative to other types of food aid. Emergency food aid continues to grow in absolute volumes and as a share of global food-aid flows, reaching 64 percent of the total in 2005.

Emergency food aid accounts for an even larger share of the financial resources devoted to food aid because it is more expensive than non-emergency aid.

Emergency flows include a far larger share of the most expensive commodities, those used for therapeutic feeding. Transport and associated delivery costs are also much higher in emergencies, due to the use of extraordinary delivery means, the greater need for security in conflict-associated emergencies and slower delivery times when natural disasters have damaged infrastructure used for distribution.

There has been considerable progress over the past generation in the programming of food aid in response to transitory food insecurity. WFP is the dominant player in emergency food aid, although much of the aid it handles is distributed locally through NGO partners. WFP and its partners have made much progress in the development of early warning systems, emergency needs assessment practices and nutritionally appropriate emergency and therapeutic feeding rations. They have also pioneered the use of modern communications, information and financial technologies for emergency response. The progress made over the past two decades has been impressive and bears reinforcement and further investment.

Chapter 2 introduced the concept of social protection and discussed the role of food aid within a broader set of social safety nets aimed at ensuring a minimum level of well-being, including food security.

⁹ This chapter is based on a background paper by Barrett (FAO, 2006g) and Flores, Khwaja and White (2005).

It also introduced some key considerations in designing food safety nets, particularly in crisis situations. Chapter 3 examined the economic impacts of food aid, concluding, among other factors, that poorly timed and targeted aid was the most likely to be associated with negative outcomes. Emergency aid was found to be least likely to cause harm, largely because it is targeted to people in crisis. This chapter builds on the conceptual and empirical analysis of these previous chapters by examining a large number of recent case studies in emergency response.

Beyond the physical and political challenges involved in responding to humanitarian emergencies – inherently difficult and often dangerous circumstances – emergency response is plagued by a host of institutional, conceptual and policy challenges. These challenges are manifest in three main areas:

- Resource constraints, rigidities and gaps that lead to: (i) excessive reliance on food aid in the overall response to emergencies; (ii) inadequate and inflexible funding for crises that lack media appeal; and (iii) bottlenecks and delays that cost lives and waste resources.
- Inadequate information, analysis and monitoring systems – and insufficient attention paid to available knowledge – in designing response options to address the real, priority needs of vulnerable people and groups.
- Policy gaps, which are part of the “humanitarian–development divide” that prevents response options that address the dynamic nature of crises and their interconnections with the underlying social, political and economic conditions.

In a very real sense, every emergency is unique and overgeneralization is dangerous because response must be context-specific. Nonetheless, there are some useful distinctions to be drawn among three broad classes of emergencies: sudden-onset emergencies, slow-onset emergencies and complex and protracted emergencies. The following case studies, grouped by class, reveal both an increasing degree of difficulty and a descending scale of success in meeting immediate humanitarian

objectives while building the foundations for sustainable, long-term food security.

Sudden-onset emergencies

Sudden-onset emergencies typically arise in response to natural disasters that strike with little or no warning – examples include cyclones, earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis and many floods – although sudden-onset emergencies can also arise in response to disease epidemics or violence.

As the label suggests, the key feature that distinguishes sudden-onset emergencies from slow-onset ones is the time available to prepare for the event. Although one can certainly prepare for general contingencies – and the emergency professionals who increasingly staff operational agencies within the United Nations system, governments and the many private voluntary organizations generally do an outstanding job of this – sudden-onset emergencies allow little or no advance warning with respect to critical details that must shape response.

One early consequence of many shocks is the collapse of food production and distribution systems. This sometimes disrupts the *availability* of food in the affected area, and it is typically accompanied by deterioration in people’s ability to *access* adequate and appropriate food. Along with damage to the food system, many shocks also disrupt water and sanitation facilities and hinder delivery of medical services, which can create problems for the proper *utilization* of food.

Food aid is often an essential component of humanitarian response in such emergencies. For example, populations caught in a conflict are often unable to pursue their usual livelihood strategies and become either refugees or internally displaced persons lacking both food and the cash necessary to procure it. In the short term, food aid may be the only option for protecting the right to food for such groups, and it is often a critical element in preventing the emergence of malnutrition-related disease and the sale of critical, productive assets that compromise vulnerable people’s future well-being.

Although it may be necessary in some situations, food aid – especially food aid

sourced from donor countries – is often overemphasized in response to sudden-onset emergencies. Massive shocks that devastate local infrastructure and agricultural production almost invariably leave large populations in dire need of food assistance. However, transitory food insecurity more often arises from a crisis of food access, not food availability.

Even in emergency situations, established commercial trading networks commonly maintain or can quickly recover their distribution capacity, especially in urban areas, and can be enlisted to help provision more inaccessible areas where food insecurity has become most acute. This limits the need for slow and expensive transoceanic shipment of food aid and puts a premium on effective use of local and regional supply networks. Where trading networks have been disrupted by damaged infrastructure or a breakdown in civil order, for example, interventions to restore roads and security may be more effective and cost-efficient than food aid shipments (Levine and Chastre, 2004).

Asian tsunami – the Christmas crisis

Response to sudden-onset emergencies can be highly effective in spite of the inability to plan all the essential details in advance. The experience following the 26 December 2004 Asian tsunami offers perhaps the best recent illustration of effective response to a sudden-onset emergency (Cosgrave, 2005; Webb, 2005; WHO, 2005). This was one of the greatest natural disasters in recorded history, the fourth largest earthquake of modern times and the most devastating resulting tsunami recorded.

As many as 300 000 people were lost or missing, more than 1.7 million were displaced and many more were left unemployed or without crucial livelihood assets (e.g. fishing boats, stores, livestock) that were destroyed by the earthquake and subsequent tsunami. Roughly \$10 billion in damage was incurred on two continents (Asia and Africa), all in the span of one day, and mostly within two hours after dawn on the west coast of Sumatra.

The resulting food insecurity was quite severe and widespread, with sharp falls in food access and utilization, and in some cases in food availability, due to massive disruption

of livelihoods and infrastructure. The potential for a humanitarian disaster and far greater loss of life in the weeks and months following the tsunami was very real.

Yet the response to the tsunami was nearly as awesome as the event itself. International donors, both private and public, responded quickly and generously, contributing an estimated \$15.5 billion internationally, most of it unrestricted in form. Moreover, donors were unusually quick to translate pledges into actual disbursements, closing the critical gap between the publicity-attracting pledge and the operations-enabling disbursements to a matter of days or weeks, rather than months or years, as too often happens in the wake of disasters.

This prompt and generous response allowed widespread relief efforts in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami, followed by rapid transition to rehabilitation, permitted more flexible use of cash and non-food resources to meet specific, local needs, and attracted more organizations to participate than is the norm. Food aid deliveries were quickly tailored to ensure not only that sufficient food energy was made available to recipients but also adequate micronutrient availability through fortified biscuits, noodles and vegetable oil, iodized salt, etc.

The most devastated areas were able to begin the process of reconstruction quickly in spite of the horrendous losses caused by the earthquake and ensuing tsunami. Remarkably, some humanitarian organizations faced the extraordinary problem of having to contact donors to return unneeded funds or to ask that they redirect the funds to other distressed regions for which pledges did not come close to meeting needs. Most importantly, widespread early predictions of massive subsequent excess mortality due to infectious and hunger-related disease never materialized.

As frequently occurs in sudden-onset emergencies, coordination of needs assessment and interventions was sometimes insufficient, with excess supply of popular services, such as medical teams, and some underprovision of essential but less glamorous needs, for example potable water. Some promised interventions, such as house and boat construction, were not

promptly or appropriately realized, and some allegations of human rights violations in tsunami-affected areas have also been made, including discrimination in aid distribution, forced relocation, arbitrary arrests and sexual and gender-based violence (ActionAid, 2006a).

Although there remains room for improvement even in effective responses such as to the Asian tsunami, this episode vividly demonstrates the capacity of the international community to respond to a humanitarian crisis. Unfortunately, the response to the tsunami is somewhat atypical. A number of special circumstances contributed to the extraordinary success of the tsunami response: the timing of the disaster the day after Christmas and at the end of the calendar year, the vivid imagery of the catastrophe, the relatively strong institutional and physical infrastructure in place in much of South and Southeast Asia and the presence of many international tourists were among the factors. In particular, the tsunami captured the public attention that too often proves elusive in cases of emergency, generating tremendous political will to respond quickly, generously and flexibly – with cash.

Earthquake in Pakistan – ensuring access

The October 2005 Pakistan earthquake response provides an excellent example of the need to tailor emergency response efforts to the specific aspects of food security affected by the emergency (Nyberg, 2005). Pakistan was a net food exporter before the earthquake hit and had just enjoyed an above-average crop harvest. The most affected regions, the Northwest Frontier Province and Azad Jammu and Kashmir, were two of the most food-insecure regions of the country before the natural disaster, already importing foods from areas of surplus in the country and from neighbouring countries. The earthquake massively disrupted infrastructure in these regions, necessitating extraordinary logistical efforts to deliver food.

But food remained readily available in Pakistan, with minimal if any effects on local prices, production incentives or urban residents outside the immediate impact zone. The Government of Pakistan appropriately launched cash compensation schemes to

restore food access for affected persons in urban areas and targeted relief food to those in areas where market access had been substantially disrupted. With some important exceptions, donors mainly provided cash for food aid procurement in local and regional markets, expediting response and enhancing the resource efficiency of the operations. While no substantive evaluations of this operation have yet been made available, initial indications are that it too was generally successful.

Silent emergencies – households in crisis

One final form of sudden-onset emergencies typically attracts less attention: household-specific shocks due to accidents, sudden severe illness (e.g. malaria, cholera, dengue fever), mortality, precipitous crop failure or livestock loss, fire, theft or sudden unemployment. Such shocks are commonplace, especially in poorer communities. Moreover, recent empirical studies suggest that they typically account for most household-level collapses into long-term poverty (Barrett *et al.*, 2006).

Because these are largely household-level shocks, with considerable variation of experience across households and individuals within a given region, the resulting acute food insecurity is often overlooked by humanitarian and development agencies in the course of standard planning for emergency response. These are the ubiquitous but silent emergencies that do not make it onto television screens in the world's financial and political capitals, but nevertheless constitute serious emergencies indeed for affected households. When formal and informal social protection mechanisms fail to provide adequate insurance coverage in the wake of such events, the longer-term human suffering and economic losses resulting from short-lived shocks can be considerable (Dercon, 2004).

Examples of social protection mechanisms that can be effective in such situations were discussed in Chapter 2. Properly conceptualized and designed, safety nets can protect the destitute, prevent people from *becoming* destitute and provide the insurance needed to encourage vulnerable populations to choose higher-risk, higher-reward livelihood strategies that can facilitate their climb out of chronic poverty

through steady accumulation and improved productivity of productive assets (Barrett, 2005; Carter and Barrett, 2006).

Safety nets based on food aid, such as food-for-work or food-for-school, can be helpful, but they almost always require other, complementary inputs or activities to protect the productive assets of vulnerable people. The record with respect to food-for-work efficacy is checkered (Ravallion, 1999; von Braun, Teklu and Webb, 1999; Barrett, Holden and Clay, 2004). Little empirical evidence directly compares the costs and benefits of food versus cash-based interventions, and this is a serious gap in the literature (Save the Children UK/HelpAge International/Institute of Development Studies, 2005).

A key determinant of efficacy of food-based interventions has been established: the reliable presence and functioning of government or NGO providers. Food-for-work or other food-based safety nets must be ready when households find they need assistance. Whereas donors and operational agencies often have time to field new programmes to respond to slow-onset disasters, sudden-onset, household-level emergencies require pre-existing response capacity in order to succeed. This typically does not occur where vulnerability results from conflict or poor governance associated with a failed state, but can work effectively in insuring against climatic, economic, environmental and health shocks experienced by some households within a region.

Lessons learned in sudden-onset emergencies

Food aid in response to transitory food insecurity associated with sudden-onset emergencies based on regionwide shocks such as cyclones, earthquakes, hurricanes and tsunamis appropriately focuses on the direct protection of human lives and the productive assets of vulnerable people, primarily through support for the nutritional status of groups directly affected by disasters.

The effectiveness of response depends on the rapid identification of affected people and an understanding of which aspects of food security have been compromised. Is food availability compromised through disruption of local production or marketing

infrastructure? Whose livelihoods have been disrupted? Is this causing acute problems of food access?

The required balance between food and non-food (e.g. health, shelter, water, cash) resources must be accurately assessed, and the response must be mounted at sufficient scale, with minimal lags between pledges and disbursement of resources. Interagency coordination on professional needs assessments across multiple sectors and interventions is essential in order to avoid costly duplication of efforts and dangerous gaps in coverage.

Close attention typically needs to be paid to specific micronutrient requirements of affected populations, not just raw food-tonnage gaps. Engagement with local institutions and markets can effectively multiply the human, financial and logistical resources available to address pressing human needs.

Supply chain management is critical, especially as many low-income countries have limited port and bulk rail or road capacity, often leading to bottlenecks in transport that slow down commodity distribution. This has repeatedly proved a problem in landlocked countries in central and southern Africa over the past decade. On balance, however, major advances have occurred in international food-aid response to sudden-onset emergencies.

Progress has been somewhat less significant, however, in addressing transitory food insecurity that originates with shocks affecting specific households or individuals. Food-for-work and other employment guarantee schemes have proved reasonably effective as insurance mechanisms for such situations, but more needs to be known about the relative merits of food-based and cash-based initiatives, and the needs of households facing severe labour constraints must also be considered.

Much has been learned about how to design and operate these projects: how to set appropriate wage rates, proper oversight of targeting, ensuring availability of complementary, non-labour resources and technical oversight of projects, etc. The main challenge is to design, staff and provide resources for reliable, standing programmes that are accessible to households when they need them. Such safety nets must

provide predictable response mechanisms to help households cope with adverse shocks effectively and without compromising their future well-being.

Slow-onset emergencies

Slow-onset emergencies are, as the name suggests, disasters that emerge slowly and predictably over time. The primary examples are climatic shocks such as drought, macroeconomic crises (e.g. those associated with hyperinflation and other financial crises), conflict and disease pandemics that build slowly (for example HIV/AIDS). With slow-onset emergencies, there is time to prepare before the full force of the shock hits.

Many slow-onset emergencies happen with advance warning of several weeks or months. These include seasonally recurring crises – such as monsoon flooding in coastal areas of South Asia or dry season hunger in arid and semi-arid regions of Africa – that are regular and predictable phenomena. Such emergencies offer the opportunity for advance planning, and operational agencies often pre-position supplies in such areas months ahead of the anticipated period of need.

Unfortunately, the lead time available for preparing for slow-onset emergencies is not always well used. Monitoring and evaluation systems are often inadequate, and donors routinely fail to respond until a problem becomes a full-blown crisis worthy of international media coverage.

Financing is a common problem in effective preparation for slow-onset emergencies – far more so than for sudden-onset emergencies. The problem is one of political will and the challenge of capturing policy-makers' and the public's attention in slowly developing crises, and what Moeller (1999) refers to as "compassion fatigue".

In one innovative pilot effort to address this common problem of political will and timely financing, in March 2006, WFP announced that it paid the French insurance company AXA Re US\$930 000 for an insurance policy against drought in Ethiopia that would pay up to \$7.1 million to help up to 67 000 households in the event of inadequate rainfall during the critical March–

October period. The idea of such index insurance is to use independent, objectively verifiable indicators of impending transitory food insecurity to trigger prompt payout according to pre-specified contractual terms.

Drought and locusts in the Sahel – opportunity squandered

The drought and locust infestation in the Sahel in 2004–2005 provides an unfortunate example of effective early warning squandered. Damage to crop and livestock production was widely predicted at least six months in advance of the crisis, with an international appeal issued for the Niger in November 2004. In spite of this early warning, the emergency went unheeded until television images of starving children began appearing in June and July 2005. Only then did global cries for action rouse donors into rapid, if belated and terribly expensive, response.

The drought reduced the availability of good grazing land, especially in the Niger, forcing poor pastoralists to sell their livestock at depressed prices and leading to a collapse of their livelihoods. Although the overall availability of food supplies declined only moderately, some countries in the region banned exports to neighbouring countries, creating severe localized shortages in the Niger. This forced food prices sharply higher at a time when incomes had fallen drastically. Deep and widespread poverty quickly led to a humanitarian crisis whose origins lay primarily in the chronic food insecurity that the poor of the region have suffered for years. Their precarious circumstances left millions critically vulnerable, and just a mild shock away from life-threatening nutrient deficiencies.

Early interventions to protect the livelihoods of pastoralists could have prevented the crisis. Relatively small, targeted assistance in the form of livestock feed, food or cash early in the drought could have averted the crisis. Keeping regional borders open for trade would have mitigated the price impacts of the moderate, localized supply shortfall. This was a classic case where lack of accountability and political will led to unnecessary human suffering and inefficient resource use.

Flood in Bangladesh – preparing for disaster

In some relatively slow-onset disasters, the lead time is well-used. For example, from July to November 1998, Bangladesh experienced its most disastrous seasonal flooding in modern history.¹⁰ At the flood's peak in mid-September, water inundated 66 percent of the nation's land. Although the country is regularly affected by floods from overflowing rivers and coastal tidal rises, this flood substantially exceeded previous ones in 1954, 1974 and 1988.

Crop losses were extensive. In the autumn of 1998, the country faced a 22 percent shortfall between food production and national consumption, while 20 million people were made homeless. The magnitude and duration of the flooding raised the grim prospect of famine, as occurred in 1974–1975, when 30 000 to 100 000 people died in the wake of more modest flooding.

In spite of the magnitude of the flood and the associated production losses, interruptions to transport and displacement of households, no major food crisis emerged. The primary reason is that massive private sector imports – made possible by market and trade liberalization earlier in the 1990s and by government investment in marketing infrastructure – stabilized rice markets, enabling government and international NGOs to focus effectively on reaching about four million of the most desperate households with direct food transfers.

The rice harvest in November/December 1997 had also been poor, so stocks were relatively low, prices rose and the private sector responded by importing nearly 900 000 tonnes of rice from India in the first five months of 1998. Private sector imports resumed at an accelerated pace as the floods began. The Government of Bangladesh removed rice import tariffs and facilitated speedy transshipment and movement of grains into and across the country.

Prices of food grains that had escalated just before the floods remained relatively steady during and after the floods, rising only 7 percent in August–November over the May–July period. In contrast, in 1974–1975

rice prices jumped 58 percent over the same period and most famine mortality arose because staple foods were priced beyond the reach of the poor. The 1974 price spike cannot be explained by production shortfalls – which ultimately proved less than in 1998 – but were instead the consequence of poorly functioning domestic food markets and inadequate efforts to harness the potential of local markets and institutions to help avert an impending crisis.

The timely availability of food in 1998 was undoubtedly helped by the immediate food aid pledge of 650 000 tonnes when the government finally sought international assistance in late August. But ultimately the government distributed less than one-sixth as much rice as the private sector, and households relied far more heavily on private borrowing than on government or NGO transfers to cope with the flooding. The key to averting a humanitarian disaster was the quick response of the private sector – actively encouraged and facilitated by government – which effectively stabilized rice prices during the crisis, thereby protecting many poor households' food security through the worst of the flooding.

Drought in southern Africa – markets and mixed signals

The southern African region can expect droughts of varying severity two or three times per decade. White maize comprises a high share in the food budgets of middle- and low-income consumers in the region. Because white maize is relatively intolerant of drought, these events may adversely affect the food security and future livelihoods of millions of people (Tschirley *et al.*, 2006).¹¹

The food shortage that occurred in much of the southern African region in 2002 and 2003 was caused by back-to-back below-average production over several years. The authors argue that the food crisis, on the other hand, was caused by the failure of governments and donors to respond to early warnings and, in some cases, the crisis was made worse by government interventions that inhibited traders from responding to the emerging shortages.

The early warning and response system worked during this period. It alerted

¹⁰ This narrative is based on Barrett and Maxwell (2005), which draws on Ravallion (1987), Khan (1999) and del Ninno *et al.* (2001).

¹¹ This narrative is based primarily on Tschirley *et al.*, 2006.

local governments and the international community to looming food shortages at the time of the harvest and provided quantitative estimates of the number of affected households and the need for food aid and commercial imports. The system regularly updated these numbers, and mobilized public opinion and resources to meet enough of those estimated needs to mitigate the crisis.

But the authors argue that the humanitarian toll was higher than it should have been and that food prices were needlessly destabilized because governments intervened erratically in markets. They argue that if markets had been allowed to work, with clear signals from the government regarding the size and timing of food aid distributions, the humanitarian crisis could have been alleviated without negatively affecting markets.

According to the authors, the Government of Malawi failed to take into account informal trade (which had been a regular feature of deficit seasons for several years), and imported excessively large amounts of grain as food aid and for commercial distribution. Grain imports arranged through the informal private sector arrived before the official imports through government channels. This left the government with considerable amounts of grain that it could sell only at a loss and, as a result, prices in Malawi throughout the 2002/03 and 2003/04 seasons were exceptionally low, making private storage unprofitable and reducing production incentives for farmers.

The private sector in Zambia has the capacity to import substantial quantities of grain when needed, but the authors report that confusing signals arising from past government mistakes caused the private sector to reduce imports during the food shortages rather than increasing them. As a result, prices rose steeply. Better coordination and communication between public and private sectors would enable the Zambian private sector to import the quantities needed to keep prices stable in many future crises.

Tschirley *et al.* (2006) argue that Mozambique provides evidence that markets can manage crop fluctuations on a regular

basis when government simply stays out of the way. Of the three main regions in Mozambique, the north produces a surplus of maize every year, the centre is usually but not always in surplus and the south is always in deficit. In response to this production pattern and to the long distances and high costs of transporting maize from the north to the south, Mozambique has maintained open borders, regularly exporting from the north (to Malawi) and importing (from South Africa) to the south. Largely for this reason, prices in Mozambique remained relatively stable during this crisis. Prices stayed well below those in Zambia in both the 2001/02 and 2002/03 marketing seasons. They were below the inflated prices in Malawi in the 2001/02 season and well above the very depressed Malawian prices towards the end of the 2002/03 season.

Drawing on a number of case studies in southern Africa, Takavarasha (2006) emphasizes the serious negative effects that unpredictable market interventions by one government can have on the food security of other countries in the region. Shepherd (FAO, 2005d) offers a number of recommendations to improve the capacity of the private sector to respond to food emergencies in southern Africa, including among others: improved market information systems, better communication between the government and the private sector, abolition of import and export controls and trade facilitation through improved infrastructure.

HIV/AIDS – a new kind of famine

Just as there are idiosyncratic forms of sudden-onset emergencies, so too are there individual- and household-specific forms of slow-onset emergencies. These are mainly associated with slow-onset infectious disease, especially HIV/AIDS, which gradually and predictably compromises food access and utilization for affected people and their dependents. The insidious nature of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa has led some commentators to label it a “new variant famine” (de Waal and Whiteside, 2003).

Since the HIV/AIDS pandemic began, 25 million people have died of the disease.

Another 42 million are now living with HIV (FAO, 2003b). Unlike many other kinds of shocks that cause transitory food insecurity, HIV/AIDS is often hidden in a shroud of stigma and silence while it gradually undermines established coping strategies for dealing with shocks (e.g. labour migration). Moreover, because HIV/AIDS primarily infects and kills people in the sexually active age bracket, which is of course the most economically active demographic group, communities hard hit by the HIV/AIDS pandemic tend to be left with households disproportionately heavy with very elderly and very young members (hence with a high dependency ratio). Such households are especially vulnerable to modest interruptions in food access (Haddad and Gillespie, 2001; UNAIDS and WHO, 2002).

The southern African food crisis of 2002 and 2003 highlighted the complex interaction between transitory food insecurity associated with a classic slow-onset emergency – drought – and this new variant of slow-onset disaster, due to HIV/AIDS (Barrett and Maxwell, 2005). For a number of years, the main emphasis of intervention in the pandemic was on awareness and prevention, and on interventions to assist affected individuals.

More recently, the broader impacts of the pandemic have been recognized, as well as the need for a broader set of interventions focusing on the affected population, and at the levels of the prevention and care of people living with AIDS, as well as mitigation of its broader effects. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is now seen by many observers as representing a new and completely different kind of emergency, one requiring novel approaches and thinking in terms of both humanitarian response and mitigation.

There is not yet, however, an accepted set of protocols on how best to address this most recent form of slow-onset, idiosyncratic emergency. Food aid is widely used as a major component of safety nets to mitigate the impact of the pandemic in important cases in sub-Saharan Africa, although it is unclear how appropriate or effective food-based responses to HIV/AIDS are relative to alternative interventions (Barrett and Maxwell, 2005).

Lessons learned regarding slow-onset emergencies

Individuals and communities are resilient. Proactive behaviour by recipients who are given the means to cope with shocks while they still have time to do so can often avert crises at much lower cost – in human and financial terms – than that exacted by a full-scale emergency. Large food-aid shipments are often unnecessary if timely deliveries of appropriate resources (often including but not limited to food) are made available in order to equip communities, households and individuals to manage the oncoming shock before they collapse into crisis.

This is the core motivation behind the emerging concept of “productive safety nets”, currently being piloted in Ethiopia, which has experienced recurrent problems with slow-onset disasters, massive food aid shipments and increasing numbers of destitute people. It is also a key lesson learned from more successful episodes, such as during the Bangladesh floods of 1998. Reinforcing local institutions and markets is central to the strategy of harnessing the natural resilience of social systems.

Information systems, supply chain management and quick disbursement of pledged funds play an important role in ensuring timely and cost-effective provision and targeting of resources to protect food security and livelihoods. In slow-onset emergencies, early warning systems play a far greater role, buying time for the international humanitarian community and recipient country governments to design and implement appropriate responses.

This underscores the importance of political will to respond promptly and substantively to warnings. The Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) established by the United Nations in 1991 to mobilize resources in response to emergencies has largely proved ineffective. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan reported in October 2005 that flash appeals had generated on average only 16 percent of the requested funds (Fleshman, 2006).

Timely resource mobilization has proved especially problematic for complex emergencies and protracted relief and recovery operations, which are discussed more fully in the following section. The world must develop a more effective means

of addressing slow-onset emergencies, which should, in principle, be easier to handle than sudden-onset disasters.

Complex and protracted crises

Complex and protracted crises constitute a special type of slow-onset emergencies. They are understood here to entail situations in which large sections of the population face acute threats to life and livelihoods over an extended period (years, or even decades), with the state and other governance institutions failing to provide adequate levels of protection or support. The term has been applied most often where vulnerability is associated with violent conflict or political instability, such as in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and the Sudan. Some would argue, though, that countries like Malawi and Zambia, afflicted by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, whose effects are compounded by weak governance and periodic economic and natural shocks, are also in a state of protracted crisis.

The number and scale of complex crises associated with violent conflict have risen sharply over the past decade, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Many factors, including political interests, control of resources, ethnic and historical rivalries, regional differences and socio-economic conditions, are among the underlying causes of these complex crises (Grunewald, 2003).

The growing prevalence of such protracted and complex crises has created particular problems for the international humanitarian community because resources for addressing emergencies tend to wane after a period of months. For example, there have been regular problems of ration cuts in refugee camps in southern and western Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and elsewhere, caused by ebbs in food aid pipelines for protracted and complex crises.

In complex and protracted emergencies, resource availability commonly falls below half of assessed needs, forcing aid agencies to impose drastic measures, such as the halving of rations, intended both to husband scarce resources and to shock donors into attending to pressing needs. These problems are compounded by the challenges of

safety issues for emergency personnel, and the political problems associated with humanitarian agencies' operational independence from political entities, especially warring parties.

Concern with protracted crises is of two kinds. One relates to their prolonged and indefinite duration: these are situations in which no smooth or automatic transition from humanitarian emergency to "normal" development can be counted on. The needs and priorities of affected populations are diverse. Appropriate responses range from immediate lifesaving interventions in which food aid plays an important role, to the promotion and protection of livelihoods, to support for infrastructure, institutions and services. Quite apart from issues concerning humanitarian principles, this raises difficult questions as to how different objectives, time frames and agencies and organizations should relate to each other at a technical and managerial level.

The second kind of concern pertains to the political character of protracted crises and the challenge this presents for agencies seeking to uphold the fundamental humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence. Where there is conflict and instability, not only are interventions complicated by institutional collapse and insecurity, but there are major risks of unintended consequences, both for aid workers and target populations. In particular, relations between aid providers and local political actors are fraught with ethical and practical dilemmas.

The case studies below reveal that all the challenges associated with emergency response are intensified in the case of complex and protracted emergencies. Resource constraints, analytical limitations and policy gaps pose serious obstacles to effective response. Notwithstanding the inherent difficulties in these situations, efforts to overcome the institutional, conceptual and policy limitations are urgently required.

War and food security in Eritrea and Ethiopia

The 1998–2000 war between Eritrea and Ethiopia, two of the poorest and most food-insecure countries in the world, claimed an estimated 80 000 lives and displaced more

than one million people. White (2005) assessed the economic and humanitarian costs of the conflict. He found that the economic costs to both countries were enormous, and the political implications remain unresolved. Even before the war the two countries faced successive food crises triggered by drought, rural overpopulation and land degradation.

As a direct result of the war, over one million people were displaced from agricultural lands and deprived of assets and livelihoods; humanitarian operations were constrained by security conditions, the border closure and Ethiopia's inability to access Eritrean ports; and many people experienced loss of food entitlements in terms of their ability to produce food or to acquire it through trade, sales or transfer.

Indirectly, the war exacted an even greater toll on food security. The scale of conscription and displacement in the two countries constituted a massive diversion of personnel away from productive activities. National expenditures on the war effort were huge. Estimated costs to the Ethiopian exchequer range between 7 percent and 20 percent of GDP. The percentage is far higher in the much smaller Eritrean economy. This level of public expenditure could have had substantial positive impacts if devoted to longer-term food security.

What is more, development aid to the two countries fell dramatically during the war period because of donor countries' disapproval of the conflict. This "principled conditionality" severely impeded improvements in measures to tackle extreme chronic poverty and boost resilience of livelihoods to drought and other periodic shocks. Another result of this "principled conditionality" was donors' reluctance to respond to appeals for humanitarian assistance, despite signs of a developing famine. The deliveries of food aid accelerated only after the media story on the famine broke. The sluggish donor reaction deepened the crisis.

The two governments have not yet started to normalize bilateral relations after the peace agreement in 2000, resulting in considerable economic costs to both countries as well as direct effects on the food security situation. For Eritrea, the closed border means the loss of its main export

market and an important source of imported grain and livestock. For Ethiopia, the boycott of the ports in Eritrea leads to widening of the gap between import and export parity prices for cereals and a consequent increase in price instability.

Both countries have lost external trust and support at a time when they are sorely needed to address food insecurity. The border war and its unresolved tensions have had adverse effects on livelihoods that continue to be felt in many ways. The effects of the war are not easily separated from other political, social, demographic and environmental factors. Food and other emergency aid can successfully treat periodic crisis, but reversing the long-term decline necessitates a longer-term commitment. Against this backdrop, current needs in the region are being neglected (Box 13).

Chronic conflicts in Afghanistan, Somalia and the Sudan

Both information systems and responses often reflect an inappropriate dominance of short-term approaches. Such weaknesses are typical of aid interventions to support livelihoods and food security in long-running crises, and are not confined to Africa. A study of livelihoods programming in Afghanistan found that:

The dynamics of the chronic conflict in Afghanistan have been poorly understood, not least in terms of its effects on livelihoods. Aid practice has been driven by simplified stories about the country reinforced through short-term humanitarian based programming that has emphasized delivery and paid little attention to learning. The result has been a monotonous landscape of interventions.

(Pain, 2002, p. vi).

Aid policy in Afghanistan still tends to be grounded in the assumption that agriculture is the mainstay of food security and that agricultural investment will itself address livelihood needs. This is in spite of contrary evidence that suggests that households are diversifying their income-generation strategies so that food security is now based more on trade, seasonal migration and remittances (Pain and Lautze, 2002).

Aid interventions conceived and implemented as technical projects, without

BOX 13

Critical response gaps in the Greater Horn of Africa drought, 2005–2006

A recent study undertaken by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) examines the disconnect between long-term programming and the emergency response during the Greater Horn of Africa drought in 2005–2006. The UN estimates at least 11 million people are in crisis in Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. The study questions why accurate and timely early warning (e.g. Famine Early Warning System [FEWSNET], FAO/Food Security Analysis Unit [FSAU] Somalia) did not lead to a rapid and appropriate response. It highlights how inadequate contingency planning, limited capacity in livelihoods programming and inflexible funding mechanisms led to delays and deficiencies in livelihood interventions and the predominance of food assistance in the emergency response.

Drawing on secondary data and interviews, the analysis points to the misunderstood nature of pastoralism, particularly across the Ethiopia–Kenya–Somalia borders, and reports malnutrition levels far beyond emergency thresholds,

with livestock losses of up to 70 percent and the mass migration of pastoralists in search of water, food, jobs and relief aid.

The crisis reflected a context of chronic food insecurity where emergency alerts were signalled repeatedly, yet humanitarian and development actors found it difficult to distinguish the symptoms of chronic destitution from those of a critically unstable situation. In particular, the chronic vulnerability of pastoralists in East Africa has been seen as an indicator that livelihoods are unsustainable and that they should be helped to undertake farming or other productive activities. This ignores the range of external factors that have contributed to undermining their resilience. Pastoral groups suffer from political and economic marginalization in most countries in the Horn of Africa. Few national governments or external actors recognize this by appropriate policy responses, e.g. addressing access to natural resources such as land and water.

Source: ODI, 2006.

regard for the political context, run the risk of deepening relations of exploitation for intended beneficiaries. Examples of this are many. The attempt by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in 1992–1993 to undermine warlords in Somalia by flooding the country with food aid to bring down food prices had the perverse effect of increasing the amount of food they appropriated, while also undercutting local farm produce (Natsios, 1997).

Similarly, attempts by aid agencies to boost the self-reliance of displaced Dinka communities in Southern Darfur, the Sudan, in the mid-1990s by replacing food aid with agricultural inputs and loan programmes neglected the relations of subjugation in which Dinka were trapped vis-à-vis surrounding (mostly Baggara Arab) communities and actually increased their dependence (Duffield, 2002). A case study of

the Nuba Mountains in the Sudan suggests the kind of sensitive analysis that is required to respond constructively in such complex environments (Box 14).

Conflict in the Great Lakes region of Africa

The Great Lakes region of central Africa has been engulfed in conflict for more than a decade. With 3.8 million casualties since the beginning of the conflict, the crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is the deadliest since the Second World War. An estimated 1 200 people continue to die every day from the consequences of the conflict, primarily from preventable and treatable diseases. The maternal mortality rate, estimated to be 1 837 deaths per 100 000, could be one of the highest in the world, and HIV/AIDS prevalence rates continue to climb.

A study for Save the Children UK examined food security interventions in seven case-

study areas in three countries in the Great Lakes region of central Africa: Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda (Levine and Chastre, 2004). The appropriateness of interventions to address the food security constraints faced by people in these areas was examined. Different types of crises were covered, from ongoing severe insecurity involving population displacement, to rural post-conflict environments marked by drought and an influx of returnees to urban settings affected by conflict or a natural disaster.

Levine and Chastre (2004) found that many, if not most, food security interventions failed to address the priority needs of people affected by crises. Agencies used the same narrow range of responses in nearly all circumstances; these approaches dealt with symptoms not causes, focused narrowly on food aid and food production and often were not cost-effective. Because of various pressures, organizations were unable to think through the appropriateness of responses, so that even where considerable information was available about the affected people and the ways their livelihoods had been disrupted, this was not factored into the response.

The study showed that seed and tool distributions occurred in all emergencies, yet it had never been established that targeted households' access to seeds or tools had hindered production. This had simply been deduced from the fact that many households did not produce an overall marketable surplus. Seed distributions and nutrition interventions were based on a series of dubious assumptions, primarily that the affected people were subsistence farmers disconnected from markets and broader livelihood strategies.

More appropriate in most cases would have been cash transfers to boost entitlements, and road reconstruction to improve security and market access. Unfortunately, donor funds for cash transfers were limited, and measures to improve the functioning of markets were rarely included in programming aimed at food security. Likewise, "non-relief" interventions were on a much smaller scale than was necessary to confront crisis conditions. This situation is characteristic of the broader failures of the

funding for humanitarian interventions (see also Box 15 and Chapter 5).

According to Levine and Chastre (2004), although rapid assessment was shown to be possible in the Great Lakes region despite insecurity, such assessments were rarely done, and when they were done, they were neither adequately consulted by the responding agencies nor shared among agencies. Those designing the response often simply failed to question what the real needs were. More worrisome, most gave a low priority to learning lessons and finding out the impact of interventions.

Pottier (2003) studied the conflict in the Ituri region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Disputes between the Hema and Lendu people led to open conflict in 1999. Access to land and its rich resources was central to the conflict. Under the 1973 Bakajika land law and in return for political support, Hema elites had been allowed to acquire land that Lendu farmers considered ancestral and inalienable. The Hema established cattle ranches, many of which were encouraged by international aid projects during the 1980s. The rebel factions with which the Hema are associated now control the land's mineral wealth. Lendu agriculturalists have been reduced to squatters on their former lands, working as miners and performing other services under a variety of forced labour regimes (driven by the threat of eviction). Allegiance to warlords is changeable and induced more by poverty and food insecurity than by political beliefs.

Pottier argues that those involved in peace building and agricultural rehabilitation must examine the social dynamic that gives warlords their iron grip on the population. They need to look at land, institutionalized vulnerability, the resulting need for institutionalized protection and labour. The challenge is to plan for the removal of the conditions of insecurity that give warlords coercive leverage over so-called ethnic followers. In addition to measures to protect and stimulate the post-conflict resumption of local food markets, a commitment by agencies to land reform in Ituri would help to reverse the region's extremely high levels of livelihood and food insecurity and thus weaken this stranglehold.

BOX 14

The Nuba Mountains Programme Advancing Conflict Transformation

The Nuba Mountains have some of the Sudan's richest and most fertile rainfed areas. In the past, surplus food production was registered frequently. But the conflict between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and the Government of the Sudan led to massive internal displacement, a total breakdown in the local production system and recurrent food insecurity.

Since the late 1980s the Nuba Mountains region has been divided between the government, controlling most of the farmland on the plains and the urban centres, and the SPLM, which controls the crowded hilltops. In government-controlled areas, people had access to external assistance, such as food relief, throughout the 1990s, while the government did not allow dissemination of external aid into the SPLM-controlled areas. Thus, external assistance largely stopped in 1999–2000, when a number of aid organizations withdrew from the region because they were unable to reach the people with greater needs in the SPLM areas. This situation led to the initiative

of the Nuba Mountains Programme Advancing Conflict Transformation.

Humanitarian aid based on policy dialogue

A humanitarian response had to take into account the difficulty of operating in an environment where aid served as a weapon of war. Only a concerted effort based on policy dialogue between the belligerents and key external players could end the impasse regarding humanitarian assistance. A high degree of mistrust between the belligerents and the international organizations working on the two sides of the political divide required attention. To reduce the level of suspicion, and to develop the intervention for the region, the United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator (UN RC/HC) initiated an intensive, year-long consultation process involving all potential programme partners. These included 9 UN agencies, 16 international NGOs, 24 national NGOs as well as the Government of the Sudan and the SPLM. The programme was aimed

Lessons learned regarding protracted and complex crises

These examples point to a number of particular challenges for addressing food insecurity in protracted crises, all of which have to do with responsiveness and international engagement in complex, fluid contexts.

Donors and implementing organizations routinely fail to "think beyond the box" of standardized interventions, usually decided on at a distance. There are shortcomings in information and early warning systems but, more fundamentally, the willingness to analyse and respond creatively to real needs and to monitor impacts and learn lessons seems to be missing. Agency interventions are usually based on experience gained in other environments (in many cases, natural disaster zones), and lessons from these experiences have tended to be uncritically

applied to the situation at hand. Yet it is also the case that food insecurity encompasses a very diverse range of circumstances, which vary greatly between contexts and over time and cannot be adequately addressed using a narrow, standardized portfolio of policy responses.

Rigid, antiquated funding mechanisms make it almost impossible for the international humanitarian system to respond rapidly, flexibly and proportionately to complex and protracted emergencies. At an institutional level, humanitarian agencies are often unwilling or unable to appreciate that aid interventions in protracted crises inevitably have sociopolitical as well as technical and economic consequences, which can pervert intended benefits for affected populations. Neglect of this political dimension means that interventions can at best have mixed impacts, and at worst can

at enabling all stakeholders to engage and contribute to a Nuba-led response to address the short- and long-term needs of the Nuba Mountains' people.

Successes

- All parties have endorsed the programme. This is the only joint initiative the belligerents have signed while the conflict was still active.
- The programme was a key factor in the early phase of the Sudanese Cease-Fire Agreement.
- Partners invested significant resources in gaining a better understanding of the local food economy and identifying points of entry to strengthen it. This led to a strong sustainability focus and an emphasis on capacity building.
- Assistance is provided on the basis of need, prioritizing people in replacement camps and poor farmers.
- Land tenure issues have become part of the wider Sudan peace process.
- More use could be made of local purchases of food from the Nuba

Mountains. Food aid should be limited to areas of extreme need, where cultivation is not possible.

- A dedicated coordination structure facilitated greater efficiency of assistance through information-sharing and mainstreaming of approaches.

Lessons to be learned

This type of framework can incorporate long-term perspectives into an emergency context through engagement of all parties and emphasis on national ownership, participatory development vis-à-vis programme design and decision-making and collective advocacy. In this way, it is possible to break the pattern of traditional externally driven responses to food insecurity, and to adopt approaches concentrating on capacity building, sustainable agriculture and market revitalization, alongside conflict transformation and peace building.

Source: Pantuliano, 2005.

exacerbate the plight of the most food-insecure people.

The progress made in humanitarian response, discussed earlier in this chapter in the context of sudden-onset emergencies, has sparked major improvements over the past decade in conditions within camps for refugees and internally displaced persons. Nevertheless, there remains a significant policy gap in addressing the needs of people affected by complex emergencies.

Conclusions

The global humanitarian community has developed an extensive experiential base for responding effectively to transitory food insecurity associated with emergencies, though it is less able to deal with slow-onset crises, particularly those that are silent,

low-profile, complex or protracted. As cases such as the December 2004 tsunami vividly illustrate, humanitarian agencies can respond with impressive timeliness and skill when they have the resources to do so.

Food aid is often a key element of a rapid-response portfolio. Well-targeted and well-timed emergency food-aid interventions are vital for boosting short-term food availability and improving access for those in immediate need. However, such interventions are relatively expensive and prone to procurement and logistical delays, and if not well timed and well targeted they may have adverse production, market and livelihood impacts.

It is possible that, with the right kind of support early in an emerging crisis, many who become dependent on food aid might have avoided needing it in the first place, or might be able to recover their livelihoods

BOX 15

Chronically underfunded crises

There are gross inequities in the way humanitarian funds are raised and applied. The situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in particular is characteristic of such an imbalance. Despite the horrendous toll of the conflict there, the UN consolidated appeal for \$212 million for the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2005 managed to raise only 51 percent of the required amount. The response to the 2006 Action Plan, which requested \$681 million to address humanitarian, recovery and poverty reduction needs, had garnered only \$30 million, or 4 percent, by mid-May 2006.

Humanitarian aid flows have been inconsistent and unpredictable over time for other crises as well. While the humanitarian crisis in the Sudan received 75 percent of its funding requirements in 2004, it only received half in 2005, and less than 20 percent in 2006 at mid-year. Such downward trends are threatening

the viability of humanitarian activities as humanitarian organizations have commitments and obligations that they are unable to underwrite. The chronic underfunding of certain sectors has also led to the erosion of capacity and a decline in the quality of assistance.

Humanitarian aid flows are imbalanced for a variety of reasons: lack of media profile, strategic/economic interests, weak political will, differences in social values or a perception by donors that their contributions will be squandered. Whatever the motive, the result is a "humanitarian lottery" that dictates that needy people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo received about \$100 of relief assistance per person in 2005, while the victims of the Asian tsunami received more than ten times that amount.

Source: ECOSOC, 2006.

and reduce their need for food aid more quickly. Meanwhile, others who are food insecure but beyond the reach of food aid due to resource and logistical constraints might avoid starvation and ill health.

Although often necessary, food aid is often not the most appropriate response and it is never the only needed response. Food aid tends to be overused because it is the most readily available resource and because it is what donors and agencies know how to do. Much more attention needs to be paid to information, analysis and monitoring

systems aimed at assessing the real, priority needs of the affected people and learning lessons about what works and what does not. Effective emergency response must be supported by flexible resources, sufficient and proportionate to the problem.

This chapter identified policy gaps that hinder effective response to humanitarian emergencies. The following chapter considers these policy gaps in more detail, particularly in complex and protracted emergencies, and offers some insights for bridging them.