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System failure?

Revisiting the problems of timely response to crises in the Horn of Africa

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In brief

• Humanitarian response in pastoral areas in the Horn of Africa has consistently been late, despite an enormous investment in early warning. Attempts to improve early response focus on improving the performance of one or two actors, or introducing new tools.

• Such approaches are needed, but they are not enough: what is needed is an overhaul of the response system as a whole.

• This Network Paper sets out three ideas for moving forward: a new framework for livelihoods programming and contingency planning; a new approach to preparedness; and a new conceptual framework for thinking about the response system as a whole.

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Contents

Chapter 1
Introduction

Humanitarian response in pastoral areas in the Horn of Africa has consistently been late. An enormous investment in early warning over a number of years has brought great improvements: mass human fatalities have become rarer in the past 25 years. However, humanitarian response now aims to prevent not only large-scale loss of life, but also the destruction of livelihoods. Our response has not kept up with this ambition. Evaluations have shown that interventions to protect and support people's livelihoods have consistently – if not invariably – arrived too late to achieve their intended impact.[1] The fact that response has most consistently been late in pastoral areas should be striking for two reasons: first, because food security crises in the pastoral areas of the Horn are so regular; and second, because droughts in pastoral areas are the slowest-onset crises imaginable. (A true drought is usually the result of more than two successive rain failures.) So, why is response least timely precisely where we have a) most warning and b) the most practice? These questions have been asked for more than 30 years.

This Network Paper examines how one project tried to ask the same questions again, its successes and failures and its attempt at a fresh explanation of the fact that so many apparently simple problems have proved so intractable. It sets out three ideas for moving forward.

- A new framework for thinking about (and doing) livelihoods programming and contingency planning.
- A new way of thinking about (and improving) preparedness.
- A new conceptual framework for thinking about the response system as a whole.

The lessons documented here grow out of work in pastoral areas in the Horn, but none of them relates specifically to pastoral areas, nor do they apply only to the Horn of Africa. They have wide applicability wherever people are thinking about how to support fragile livelihoods during crises.

The context

The inhabitants of the arid areas of the Horn of Africa – much of southern and eastern Ethiopia, much of Somalia (and Somaliland) and much of north and eastern Kenya – live mainly from pastoralism or agro-pastoralism, livelihood systems based upon herding livestock (goats, sheep, cattle and camels, in different proportions according to local conditions), where the key to managing adverse conditions is mobility. Given the arbitrary nature of state boundaries, it is unsurprising that pastoralists frequently move from country to country with their livestock, looking to manage water and range resources throughout the year, and to minimise their exposure to conflict.[2] Additional motivation to cross borders comes from market forces, where livestock of different species may fetch very different prices on either side of a national border.

In recent years pastoral livelihoods have come under increasing threat. Pastoral areas are frequently the main recipients of food aid during droughts, and some pastoral areas have been receiving annual food aid for many years. The reasons for this are subject to a lively discussion between those who believe that pastoralism cannot survive increasing population density and the modern world, and those who believe that many of the problems of pastoral areas are due to under-development, political marginalisation and political decisions which have undermined the economic basis of pastoralism, mobility and the ability to manage the rangeland. This assistance is not linked into any strategy for developing the resilience of pastoral livelihoods. No development actors (including the governments of the states in question) have succeeded in developing a strategy at a cross-border level, and since pastoral livelihoods in the Horn of Africa are intrinsically mobile and cross borders, there is reason to believe that this is a crucial gap.

The programme

The Regional Enhanced Livelihoods in Pastoral Areas (RELPA) programme was a USAID initiative that sought to change the way in which assistance is given to pastoral areas – to include better understanding of the cross-border/regional dimension (both in trade and in the way assistance is given), to provide support for resilience and to ensure that, when crises do occur, support to livelihoods can be given early enough to prevent increased destitution.[3]

One component, Pastoral Areas Coordination, Analysis and Policy Support (PACAPS), included work on this last objective. PACAPS' ambitious aim was to transform food security assistance given in crises to make it earlier, so that it could prevent increased destitution instead of responding to destitution; livelihood focused, to break the cycle of repeated food aid; and regionally coordinated, so that it was appropriate for a regional livelihood system. This paper reflects on the lessons learned during this attempt to transform livelihood assistance in pastoral areas of Northern Kenya, Southern Ethiopia and Somalia.

Postscript

This paper was originally written in 2009 following a late response to a well predicted drought that affected the lives and livelihoods of millions of pastoralists in the Horn of Africa. It grew out of work that had convinced the authors that the same problems were bound to repeat themselves time and again unless far-reaching and fundamental

changes were made to the way in which governments and development partners operated in drought-prone areas – in their development work, their humanitarian work and in the way they linked the two.

The paper was finalised for publication in August 2011, just as a famine was declared in the Horn of Africa. The crisis had been predicted over a year before, and many dedicated professionals did as much as they could to persuade their agencies and others to respond in order to prevent the worst of the crisis, but too little was done too late. Somalia in 2011 suffered from some factors that were not present in previous droughts in the Horn of Africa, in 2003/4, 2005/6 and 2008/9. Conflict was worse, and humanitarian access was more difficult. But there was still a sense of déjà vu that was surely shared by many aid workers in the region. The failure to prevent a food security crisis in Southern Ethiopia and Northern Kenya was a repeat of the failures analysed in this paper.

This latest crisis convinces us of the importance of 'rebooting' the humanitarian system, which has yet again exhibited system failure. This paper was written in the belief that we do not have to live indefinitely in a cycle of crisis, that we know how to avoid repeating our failures and that solving the problem is not a question of resources.

Chapter 2
Diagnosing the problem

In order to avoid repeated crises (e.g. droughts) leaving people destitute and unable to cope with any future hardship, some way of doing more than keeping them alive needs to be found. We need to make sure that the crisis does not destroy their livelihood – in the case of pastoralists, that means protecting their ability to maintain herds. These herds will increase and decrease in good and bad years but they should never become too small to be viable – too small to ride out a bad year.

Increasing attention is being paid to finding the best technical interventions to achieve this, but all potential strategies share one common challenge: they have to be implemented early enough, before things reach crisis point and (in the pastoral context) before livestock begin to die. Early response does not just mean 'business as usual but earlier': it opens up the possibility of new types of intervention, and using interventions to reach different goals. Because it is managed as a response to a looming acute crisis, 'early response' still comes under the humanitarian domain, though the links to disaster risk reduction (DRR) and longer-term structural issues have become increasingly clear.

First diagnosis: a technical problem linking early warning and response

Initial analysis of the problems described in Chapter 1 identified two areas of concern.

- Early warning (EW) of impending crisis had come several months before action was delivered, according to evaluations of humanitarian operations. Early warning reports were not lacking, they were just not triggering response.
- It was taking several months from appeals being issued to the start of on-the-ground implementation of activities. The initial diagnosis was that this was due to technical weaknesses in livelihood analysis and lack of coordination.

The two issues are linked. Early warning bulletins were reporting on rains or on harvest failures, but implementing agencies (UN, NGOs, central and local government) did not know how to turn this information into livelihood outcomes, or at least they disagreed with each other so much that the result was inaction. Instead of using early warning information coupled with livelihood analysis to predict crises, they waited for humanitarian indicators to tell them that a crisis had already arrived, making the expensive EW systems redundant.

Turning early warning into early response needs two sets of 'technical' skills:

- Predictive livelihood analysis so that agencies can use EW information to make better decisions about when and how to respond.
- Contingency planning, to help agencies to achieve faster delivery of aid once they know what to do.

Although the problems of early response were obviously not new, we found a growing consensus that they had to be tackled (again), and we were not alone in trying to do something. Our technical diagnosis seemed logical and, if did not make the solution easy, at least it made the problem clear. (Only later did we discover that this was actually the weakness with such solutions: we are always drawn to the 'clear' problem, when the real issues are far hazier. But that is to anticipate.)

The first thread: livelihoods analysis

We thought the key was to find the 'right tool' for livelihoods analysis. Household Economy Analysis (HEA) seemed to be a promising candidate. Whatever its limitations,[4] HEA offered several advantages:

- It is a tool used both in EW and in response planning, and so can be a common language linking warning and response.
- It is already widely known and used in the region.
- It is simple to use if there is already 'baseline' information about livelihoods before any shock.
- 'Baseline' profiles were available for much of the project area (parts of north-east Kenya, most of southern Ethiopia and the whole of Somalia).
- It offers quantified predictions for an open range of possible scenarios, with a very transparent analysis. Anyone can modify any of the information inputted (either the baseline or the scenarios).

Our first task was to introduce the livelihoods analysis tool (HEA) to regional actors, many of whom were familiar with it in principle, and to present it as a potential common language for EW and response planners. We hoped to encourage EW providers either to use this tool to predict the livelihood implications of their forecasts or at least to provide enough of the right kind of information in the forecasts that would allow others to do so. We hoped to show implementing agencies how to understand such predictions, and how to use them for planning. And we hoped to persuade donors of the case for acting on the basis of such predictions in order to prevent, rather than respond to, crises. We felt that the workshop we held to try to do this drew a good degree of interest and produced interesting discussions. As a workshop, therefore, it was a reasonable success. However, it had very little impact, for reasons outlined below.

The second thread: contingency planning

More and more agencies were becoming engaged in contingency planning in the Horn. Inter-agency contingency plans were being increasingly used for coordination at local

Box 1

Why do contingency plans rarely help people plan for contingencies?

Many contingency plans across Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia are long documents with a great deal of information, but they rarely include the elements that would actually help speed up response if the contingency did occur. Most plans lacked many or even all of the following:

- an overall strategy to which the various planned interventions were to contribute;
- rationale for the interventions;
- justification or rationale for the proposed scale of intervention;
- impact targets;
- clear triggers for deciding when to implement;
- anticipated calendar months for implementation;
- what needed to be monitored to know when to implement;
- a clear link to likely budgets – are the plans realistic?;
- specific actors given specific responsibilities for which they could be held accountable;
- a link to the prevailing situation, or to what was most expected or feared at that time, including issues such as conflict, freedom of movement and food prices;
- a situational analysis that included predictions about what would be going on outside the area, e.g. movement of livestock in or out – without which most pastoral livelihood interventions would make little sense;
- discussion of specific locations within the area – given mobile livelihoods, which strategy would be needed in which location? Which areas would be likely to need most/least help? Where could conflict issues be a problem?;
- a link to an assessment of the degree of help needed (how much livelihood support did people need to protect their herds or to survive?); and
- (most important of all) a link to preparedness: to actions to be taken before the contingency arose in order to be ready to implement the contingency plan on time.

level in both Ethiopia and Kenya (at *woreda* and District level), but they had not yet delivered. We conducted our own analysis of the technical strengths and weaknesses of the contingency plans of agencies and Districts across Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia.

We found that so much contingency planning was being done that it was actually becoming a burden. Time was being spent in training for contingency planning, in contingency planning workshops and in writing lengthy plans every year, which everyone could see did not actually help. In many ways, contingency planning suffered from the same problem as early warning: more and more attention, time and resources were being devoted to improving it, but it was (and is) disconnected from action. The contingency plans, like the EW reports, made very little reference to how or when action would be initiated.

How is it possible for a contingency plan – which has no purpose except to detail future actions in the event of a given crisis – to be disconnected from action? It was during this part of our analysis that we began to see the overall problem in a new way.

The contingency plans we studied were not written for any real situation or place, but for very generic contingencies – 'drought', 'flood', 'conflict'. They did not discuss the situation at the time of writing, or what had preceded it. There were no clear triggers for action or decision-making. Plans would specify that a particular project would be run 'in alarm' or 'alert' or 'emergency' phase, but gave no clear or objective criteria to help one determine whether one was in an alert, alarm or emergency phase, leaving room for

Box 2

Why strategy matters

Area plans are usually the sum of plans by each implementing agency, and not the result of a shared strategy. This was illustrated in a cross-border workshop in Mandera, where the various agencies working in one District in Somalia were planning for possible rain failure. One agency was planning to support the opening up of new pastures, currently unavailable to cattle because there was no water there. Trucking in water would increase the grazing potential, and could be an attractive project to donors. Other agencies' plans were based on the belief that it was best to encourage animals to stay out of the District for as long as possible, so that this untouched pasture could be kept as a last resort for when livestock finally returned after all other options had failed.

Had the agency that wanted to truck water gone ahead, it would have undermined the strategy of everyone else. Whichever strategy was right, this surely was the kind of discussion that contingency planning should have stimulated, and yet it had clearly never been raised. The link between the agencies' plans and the plans of the pastoralists themselves must be made first and foremost at this strategic level. Because there was no strategic discussion, the link was never made.

endless argument – and delay. Inevitably, then, there could be nothing on the most important element of a contingency plan – an indication of how long it would take from the time one indicator or threshold was reached until action would be needed. With neither clear triggers for action nor any indications of when triggers for action might be coming up, what is the point of a contingency plan?

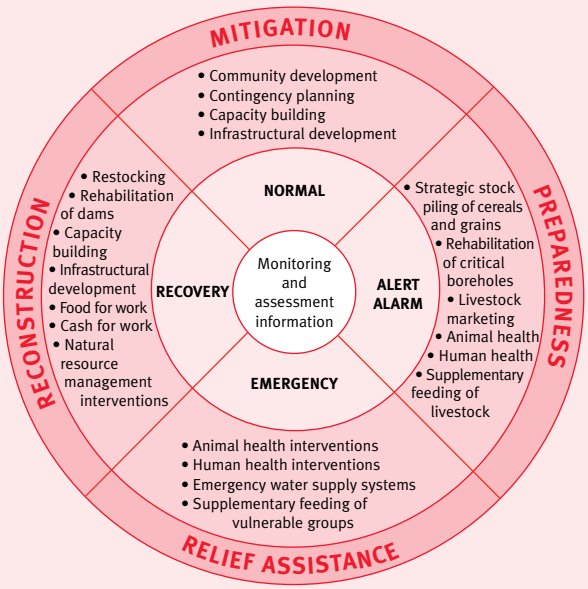
It became clear that the plans were not intended to be taken seriously even by their authors because they always avoided giving any grounds for responsibility and accountability. Plans often listed who would undertake certain projects, but rarely gave *responsibility* to any identified person or organisation. Budgeting lacked any explicit rationale for the scale of planned interventions. (Justification could have been on the scale of anticipated need, the operational/absorption capacity in the District, the funds believed to be available: none of these criteria was used.) Activities were not related to any overall strategy, so that plans were actually a patchwork of the various projects that each individual agency had proposed (see Box 2). This weakness was to become a central issue because it undermined the credibility of the plans in the eyes of donors.

Most worryingly, the plans did not give grounds for holding people to account for undertaking any action before the crisis. Contingency plans did not detail how preparedness would be raised to the necessary level. Again, this is surprising: what's the point of a plan if you don't use it to get yourself ready? Given these weaknesses, it is little wonder that a senior member of one international NGO did not send staff to a PACAPS workshop on contingency planning, arguing that they had been trained for four successive years and he had yet to see any use come out of it.

Box 3

Time to rethink 'drought cycle management'?

The introduction of 'drought cycle management' (DCM) was a major advance in the way people thought about droughts in semi-arid and arid areas – i.e. in areas prone to droughts where livelihoods have adapted to recurrent rain failures. DCM gave planners a single framework for planning both for crises and for 'normal development', seeing droughts as an integral part of the livelihood system rather than a sudden shock that had nothing to do with 'normal years'. That thinking is as relevant as ever. We found, though, that DCM too often was being equated with the overly simplistic 'circle' diagram that everyone in the Horn of Africa is familiar with:



There are several ways in which the model can be improved. The separation of the phases is far from clear-cut, and unfortunately much contingency planning is based around these distinct phases. It is hard to combine a seasonal analysis with the cycle diagram, since phases do not fit neatly into years. The diagram tends to make people think that the choice and timing of activities is determined by the 'humanitarian phase' rather than by the livelihood calendar and by livelihood analysis. (An activity that will make sense in one area may not be appropriate in another.) Preparedness should not be limited to the alert-alarm quadrant. Rather than thinking of specific projects for each 'phase', there is now a more sophisticated approach that sees longer-term programmes continuing throughout the 'cycle', but modified according to the conditions and needs at different times.

Even 'intervention types' cannot be neatly separated. This is seen most easily by looking at recovery interventions. Pasture usually re-grows quite quickly once rains fall, and animal condition can also show fairly speedy recovery. Pastoralists try to acquire breeding livestock to build up their herds as fast as they can – livelihoods are in 'recovery' phase. Pasture is available – but people do not eat grass. Kidding and calving are usually low after a drought, so milk production will be low – leaving a food security problem for several more months. Goats may be born a few months after the drought – but they will not be marketable until almost two years after the rains finally fall. Pastoralists will only have marketable cattle three years after the rains have returned. If pastoralists lost or sold most of their non-breeding animals in a drought, it will be two or three more years until they have livestock to sell to acquire the money to buy food. 'Livelihood recovery' and 'acute food insecurity' may both be happening at the same time.

The DCM diagram was certainly an important step forward in thinking, but an update is badly needed.

How was it possible that all the investment in contingency plans was not leading to timely responses? One underlying technical weakness is that plans to protect livelihoods were not rooted in livelihood analysis. Proposed projects did not draw on any analysis of the implications of inaction (or action) at any particular point in a crisis. A lack of livelihood analysis meant that there was no analysis of what 'being on time' for livelihood protection would actually look like. If 'on time' was not clearly defined, it is hardly surprising that interventions were so often late. This failure was built into the whole way the contingency plans were drawn up. They could not indicate what would constitute being 'on time', because they had used such generic scenarios. To be useful, scenarios would have to be based on specific 'shocks' with a detailed and quantified description, using a real starting point, and then taking into account the best possible predictions of other local factors, such as expected migration of livestock and the likely movement of prices.

So far, we were still trying to address technical limitations in contingency planning. We then began to look at the implications of our critique for the *processes* of contingency planning. It became apparent that, to address the weaknesses, we needed more than just 'technical' solutions, because the problems we were tackling were not just 'technical'.

The new diagnosis: a system problem

Contingency plans were not helping because they were dead – documents that sat on shelves because that was their place. To be useful they had to come alive – be rooted in a real analysis of actual situations and how response would be organised strategically. The problem was not just in the documents but in the whole process of planning. Across the three countries, a wide range of actors (people from central and local governments, UN organisations and NGOs, EW organisations and donors) were giving very similar reasons as to why responses to crises were so often delayed:

1. Structural or institutional barriers within the humanitarian sector as whole

- the need for multiple assessments before people accept there is a problem (delays response by months)
- failure to respond to assessments – a lack of trust
- the lack of agreed standards of assessment, and agencies wanting to use their own approaches
- donors and implementing agencies wait for an 'official emergency'
- the politicisation of EW and assessments
- poor coordination at all levels (regional, national and District)
- lack of funding for preparedness
- high turnover of technical staff, and poor institutional memory/technical experience
- decision-makers have limited understanding of the situation in remote areas
- links between local organisations and (international) organisations at national level are weak.

2. Donor–agency relations

- agencies are measured by donors on 'formal accountability' not impact ('better to be late but with good paperwork')
- there are no agreed standards for 'fast-tracking' accountability
- some specific donor requirements cause delays (e.g. drug procurement, VAT exemption)
- 'donor rationing' – aid is only given for full-blown crises
- donors are unwilling to respond on prediction: they need to see high child malnutrition to believe there is a crisis
- donors and agencies do not have 'pre-approved' proposals, conditions, etc.
- some donors impose rigid terms on fund utilisation and funding.

3. Early warning

- not enough trust in the credibility of EW reports (leads to multiple assessments and failure to respond to assessments)
- there are questions about the validity (i.e. factual basis) of some reports
- there is a lack of transparency about analysis and how conclusions are drawn from information
- there is disagreement about what is a crisis and what is 'normal' for the area and the season
- response is linked to assessments, not to EW monitoring
- there are no agreed 'triggers' or thresholds for different indicators that EW can refer to
- there is little quantified analysis of impact on livelihoods, so it is hard to distinguish seasonal hardship from real crisis
- most EW limits prediction to meteorological factors, with limited predictions of livelihood issues
- relations between communities and local EW: e.g. fear of raising problems, desire to increase aid
- some EW is geared up after the emergency has already developed
- information flows are poor between the field and decision-making centres in capitals (including within implementing agencies).

4. Technical issues around livelihood analysis

- agencies are not confident that they know how to programme adequately for livelihood support
- most specialised humanitarian agencies lack expertise in pastoral livelihoods and so do not recognise impending crises. Specialised pastoral agencies lack expertise in humanitarian response
- there is limited long-term development support to pastoral livelihoods, into which humanitarian action can be incorporated.

Agencies tended not to identify deficiencies in their own systems as a major cause of the problem. This is why they do not appear here, though they too are important.

The list of problems was long – or were these rather multiple symptoms with a common cause? Most of the observations

were about *how agencies work together*. This meant that thinking about how to build individual agencies' capacity to work better was largely missing the point: we needed to think more about how agencies worked together, or in other words we needed to use systems thinking. Rather than thinking about 'capacity', we started to think instead about the way agencies communicate with each other and internally, and about the outputs that they were 'rewarded' by the system for providing. In other words, we started looking at 'system capacity' rather than the capacity of individual agencies or individual people. We could not find much history of the application of 'system diagnoses' or 'system solutions' to the problem of late response. Our emerging diagnosis might therefore go some way to explaining why previous efforts, which tended to focus on capacity-building of individuals or individual agencies, had brought only temporary improvement.

During one workshop, this was captured in the response of a donor to the general criticism given above:

> *How can anyone expect us to respond to requests for livelihood protection when you think of the way in which agencies communicate with us? On the same day, several proposals from different NGOs from the same District can arrive, all with completely different descriptions of the situation and what needs doing, and very little strategic rationale for what any of them are proposing. Given that donors are as short-staffed and over-worked as everybody else, we don't have the technical staff to review them all in detail, so our only choice is to put them all in the bin. On top of that, we need to spend our money on time. NGOs take small amounts of money which they never account for on time. If we give a large cheque to the UN, we can write it off our books straight away. So what do you expect us to do?*

This comment was revealing for two reasons. All present acknowledged this description of the problem at the local level. There was no 'District response system' coordinating analysis and strategy, linking planning to EW information and feeding into a central response system (e.g. government ministries, donors). Second, the comment raised alarms because all the actors present said that this diagnosis was new to them. None of the District-level agencies had realised what donors needed from them to facilitate quicker response. Agencies and donors had never talked to each other about what they each needed, and the government had not brought everyone together within an overall response policy. Despite the myriad coordination structures and forums in Kenya, these most fundamental of all issues had not been raised.

Beyond the technical problems: looking at how the system works

A system simply means that different components (in this case, people and organisations) have to work together in order to work at all (i.e. to achieve the goals that they are all working to achieve). Systems analysis is useful wherever individual 'bits' of a system cannot on their own achieve anything, however well they perform. Early warning can never save lives and nor can donors – on their own. They depend on the system of early warning, governments, donors, the private sector and implementing agencies in order to achieve their objectives. A system perspective can often reveal how behaviour that is competent from the standpoint of each individual actor does not contribute to achieving the overall goals which collectively all the actors in the 'system' say they are working towards, in different ways. System problems often result when different actors do not really share the objectives, or when they do not agree on which elements contribute to a single system.

Early warning

EW is set up to trigger early response but is failing in part because its users do not trust it. Why then do EW actors not see that this makes their work redundant, and engage with information users to examine together which parts of their work are useful and which need changing? Where contradictory reports are confusing the users why are EW actors not talking to each other to see how they can collectively avoid sowing confusion? The behaviour of the EW actors is understandable if it defines its objective as 'the provision of technically sound information, giving the best possible predictions of up-coming events that could affect food security', rather than 'providing the information that will permit early response'. The change needed is in how objectives are defined and which performance is rewarded.

Interaction between donors and international agencies

Each side is frustrated with the tardiness and lack of coordination of the other. Since neither has established a platform for addressing these problems, each side continues to frustrate the other. In system terms, the donors work as part of a system that includes taxpayers and their own governments, whereas NGOs tend to see the donor as an external source of funds into 'their system'. Their working relationship is not designed to minimise human suffering but rather to optimise things like financial accountability. Neither is accountable for what really matters: lives saved, livelihoods protected.

> 'The only time NGOs ever come and talk to us is when they want money.'
>
> – Donor, Nairobi

District level

Effective response is prevented because agencies concern themselves with their own projects. (Local 'coordination' only means information sharing.) This behaviour is understandable, because agencies are only held accountable for money received for their own proposals, and not for the outcomes of the local response as a whole. This determines the way in which both the agency and its individual staff are judged.

Once we started looking at early response as a system outcome, and not as the achievement of an individual agency, then how we saw the process of improving response changed radically. Individual agencies, right up to governments, are managed in some way. The problem with working with systems is that they are often not managed: no one is in charge of the system, even if, in theory, governments take responsibility for the systems within their own countries. Individual agencies may not even see themselves as part of a system and there will often not be agreement about what the 'system' is, who is in it and what it is supposed to do. This makes improving systems much harder than building the capacity of individual agencies. However, though individual agencies can improve their own work, the impact will be limited unless they are then proactive in changing how they all work together. This needs a change in how decisions are made and in how 'system rewards' are distributed.

Chapter 3
New ways of thinking

Much of our work involved getting people together to talk about why things had not always gone the way they had wanted and what might have to change to improve things. We were able to break down the failure of the early response system into three components.

1. Early response was not happening *because it was never planned*. In fact there were no early response strategies at all. All that existed were individual projects for activities that may make sense as early response but which happened ... when they happened. (And we had finally understood why.)
2. Early response projects were always late because the decisions to implement them were being made late. Decision-makers made what they thought were correct decisions and were then frustrated by their inability to get moving quickly enough, because their agencies had not been prepared. (And we had finally understood why.)
3. For the system as a whole to work, early response strategies needed to be developed at local level (this was 1, above), agencies had to be capable of implementing then on time (this was 2, above) – but this could not be done by any one agency alone. Many, if not all, actors in the 'system' would have to agree that this is what they wanted to happen and they would have to work out amongst themselves how to make it happen. (And we knew – in theory – how this could be done.)

What we had to offer were two tools for seeing and doing things differently – for contingency planning for livelihoods interventions (1) and for preparedness (2). Neither of the tools was meant to be technical improvements on what people had been doing before, but were rather vehicles for getting actors to see what they needed to do in a very different way. Crucially, the two tools linked together. We called our approach to contingency planning 'crisis calendar analysis', and our way of seeing preparedness as 'preparedness auditing'.

Tool 1: Crisis calendar analysis

Our diagnosis was that contingency planning was unrelated to real action because planning took place for purely abstract 'shocks'. Contingency planning had not helped people to be on time because it had not told people when action would be needed. The conclusion was simple: get people to stop writing plans and start thinking about what was coming and when it was likely to arrive. This proved to be easy in 2008 because people in the Horn of Africa were very worried about an impending drought.

The approach we used to help people plan was to get them to draw up a 'crisis calendar'.[5] A 'crisis calendar' details a likely scenario on an actual calendar, using very specific, even quantified, estimates of as many parameters as possible. Any scenario can be plotted onto the calendar: we tended to use drought calendar, because drought is what people were worried about in 2008/9. (In 2009 we also used crisis calendar to help in contingency planning for El Niño floods.) Any crisis with a fairly predictable course – even conflict in many cases – can be planned for with a crisis calendar. Different parameters were used according to what was important to livelihoods and according to the nature of the crisis (see Figure 1). We often included pasture condition, water availability, livestock condition, mortality and price (of each important species separately), grain price, milk availability, breeding (conceptions, births) and factors associated with migration (e.g. conflict). In non-pastoral livelihoods, parameters would be chosen to cover factors associated with different food and income sources. The tool can also be used for moving the analysis beyond livelihoods.[6] Note that crisis calendar analysis is a tool for planning, and is in no way specifically for pastoralism.

We always started with a normal seasonal calendar because this focuses attention on the fact that everything is seasonal anyway, and not all change (food price rises, milk yields drying up etc.) is due to a crisis. It is also instructive in revealing knowledge gaps – in our case, few people working on pastoralism knew just how much cattle or food prices tended to fluctuate seasonally, and the calendars quickly revealed a lack of understanding about pastoralists' own strategies in the face of crises – for instance no one was sure when pastoralists would want to sell livestock and when they preferred not to.[7] The planners then estimated what each of the important livelihood parameters would look like month by month or week by week in the scenario they were planning for. The parameters plotted will vary, depending not only upon the scenario and local livelihoods but also on the interests and perceptions of the planners. The crisis calendar can be drawn up by scientists, politicians, NGO staff or farmers and pastoralists themselves – the interaction of all would be the most fruitful arrangement. The fact that drawing up a crisis calendar involves everyone as equals, answering the same questions and discussing the same reality in a single framework, may be the tool's most significant contribution.

There was a tendency for people to hesitate about making detailed forecasts because they could not be sure about what would happen when. We believe that this is a fundamental mistake. The forecast does not have to be correct to be useful. Being specific about the nature, size and timing of any impact of crisis plays two critical roles. First, it enables us to see what may happen in detail, moving away from very generalised and vague conclusions. Response directed at vague problems is less likely to be useful than response directed at a well-diagnosed problem. Second, the contingency plan that results is not meant to be implemented blindly: it is a basis

Figure 1

A typical drought crisis calendar for Horn of Africa

	Mar–Apr	May–June	Jul–Aug	Sep–Oct	Nov–Dec	Jan–Feb	Mar–Apr	May–June
The prediction	**Poor rains**	**No rain**		**Poor rains**	**Poor rains**		**Rainy season**	
The scenario								
Pasture and water		Pasture declining	Pasture very bad	No pasture	Poor pasture recovery	No pasture	Pasture recovery	
			Water scarce	Water very scarce				
Livestock condition		Condition declining		Cattle condition very poor	Livestock mortality increasing	Livestock mortality high	Livestock mortality from cold	Livestock condition improves
Livestock markets			Low demand, low price	Very low demand, very low price				Very high livestock price

for change. Putting down a description of what may happen when gives a basis for monitoring – are things deteriorating in the way expected, does the crisis seem as bad as or worse than feared? Unless the plan starts from a very explicitly described specific scenario, it is almost impossible to review and adapt it. It is people's fear of being locked into a set plan that makes them reluctant to move beyond general predictions, and ironically this fear then makes it much harder to be flexible. The calendar for a drought, taken over two rainy seasons, could look like Figure 1 above.

Using the calendar to plan crisis response

Crisis calendar analysis has not in any way replaced any other livelihood analysis. It provides a framework within which to plan strategies and specific responses, but on its own it does not choose them. Which interventions are actually appropriate and which are justified as humanitarian responses in any situation still needs to be assessed.

The first principle of crisis calendar analysis is that the timing of livelihood protection interventions should depend on the livelihood calendar. An obvious example: seeds have to be distributed before it is due to rain. This may sound obvious, but it is not how current humanitarian response is timetabled. Currently, humanitarian response is triggered by humanitarian indicators. These do not, of course, always go off in time to meet the livelihood calendar's requirements. Ensuring access to seed only when child malnutrition reaches a certain threshold, for instance, may not help farmers plant on time. Using the principle that a livelihood calendar should be used to schedule events makes it a straightforward matter to show on the crisis calendar when different livelihood protection strategies would be appropriate – their 'windows of opportunity'. Each response strategy and each specific intervention have their own windows of opportunity.

This paper does not enter the debate as to which intervention strategies are most appropriate. The calendar allows each group of planners to make their own decisions. Some argued that supporting the feeding of breeding livestock through a drought is a cost-effective measure. Let us assume they are correct. (Others disagreed. It would of course be unlikely for any one intervention always to be effective and cost-efficient.) A feeding intervention would then make sense only from the time that animals are in danger from lack of fodder to the time when their survival is ensured from pasture (around August/September to February on the calendar in Figure 2). Feeding outside this 'window' would make no sense. Similarly, supporting off-take through livestock marketing makes sense from the time livestock prices fall considerably (due to lack of demand, poor body condition and sometimes because traders are waiting for prices to collapse) until the animals are no longer marketable – and certainly when they are too weak to reach the market and be transported long distances (roughly, from August to October or November in Figure 2).

The windows of opportunity for each intervention cannot be known for certain several months in advance, but they can be estimated and these estimates can be progressively modified as the crisis develops (or is averted). That, in short, is the essence of contingency planning and early warning. The range of interventions in one context is always small enough to make it relatively easy to have target dates for activities backed up by sound logic. Planning should be based on the simple fact that, unless we are able to meet the windows of opportunity, it would be better not to implement the interventions at all.

The pink arrows (in Figure 3) indicate the times by which a decision has to be taken to implement an intervention in order to meet its window of opportunity, based on current levels of preparedness. Decisions have to be taken before it is known for certain that the first rains have failed. The red arrows indicate decision deadlines with improved preparedness. These dates are after a first rain failure when there will be reasonably reliable predictions about the coming rains.

Figure 2

Typical crisis calendar for drought in the Horn of Africa with windows of opportunity for sample interventions

	Mar–Apr	May–June	Jul–Aug	Sep–Oct	Nov–Dec	Jan–Feb	Mar–Apr	May–June
The prediction	**Poor rains**	**No rain**		**Poor rains**	**Poor rains**		**Rainy season**	
The scenario								
Pasture and water		Pasture declining	Pasture very bad	No pasture	Poor pasture recovery	No pasture	Pasture recovery	
Livestock condition		Condition declining		Cattle condition very poor	Livestock mortality increasing	Livestock mortality high	Livestock mortality from cold	Livestock condition improves
Livestock markets			Low demand, low price	Very low demand, very low price				Very high livestock price
Animal health								
Animal feeding								
Marketing								

Figure 3

Calendar of typical drought in Horn of Africa with last decision dates for meeting windows of opportunity for selected interventions, with and without preparedness

	Mar–Apr	May–June	Jul–Aug	Sep–Oct	Nov–Dec	Jan–Feb	Mar–Apr	May–June
The prediction	**Poor rains**	**No rain**		**Poor rains**	**Poor rains**		**Rainy season**	
The scenario								
Pasture and water		Pasture declining	Pasture very bad	No pasture	Poor pasture recovery	No pasture	Pasture recovery	
Livestock condition		Condition declining		Cattle condition very poor	Livestock mortality increasing	Livestock mortality high	Livestock mortality from cold	Livestock condition improves
Livestock markets			Low demand, low price	Very low demand, very low price				Very high livestock price
Animal health								
Animal feeding								
Marketing								

Box 4

What can be done to protect pastoral livelihoods?

Protecting pastoral livelihoods during crises is a new science. The number of interventions remains limited, and though consensus is growing on standards in programming there is still little experience in practice and limited knowledge about the conditions under which different interventions will be cost-effective. The current portfolio includes support for maintaining core breeding herds (vet care, fodder supply, water), maximising income from livestock sales (improving their condition and/or market interventions) and maximising the value of unsaleable animals (slaughter destocking).

Much more experience is needed to assess the best implementation modalities of these interventions in different contexts. Some also argue for greater use of cash interventions, to allow pastoralists to use resources in ways they judge most effective. Whatever the merits of this argument, we must increase our understanding of how pastoralists use resources to achieve different objectives over the course of a crisis.

Currently, much of the focus of attention for emergency response is on indicators and thresholds. There is a search for the Holy Grail of the perfect indicator that cannot be manipulated and will tell – in every District – which intervention is needed. We believe that this search is misguided, for two reasons: first, because no indicator will ever be able to live up to expectations – to measure a humanitarian situation in a predictive, transparent and objective way that is both flexible and sensitive to context and also impervious to political manipulation; and second, as discussed above, because livelihood support must be planned according to a livelihoods calendar not a humanitarian calendar. During the course of this work debates on indicators continued endlessly without reaching full agreement. We found that by switching the attention to 'how livelihoods were changing' there was very quick agreement and consensus – both on the problem, on the optimum times for intervention and on what needed doing.

From the start, crisis calendar analysis was well received. At both national and District-level planning workshops, people found that they were talking to colleagues about questions that they had not treated before. Discussions did not start with projects but with people's lives and livelihoods, and counterparts across different agencies found that they then had a framework for discussing coordinated strategies in a new way. National-level planners had a framework for discussing strategies with District-level staff. Feedback from those who used the tool with communities was also positive. The tool was used with disaster response planners from the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) countries (Ethiopia, Sudan, Djibouti, Kenya, Uganda, Somalia), who found that it demystified contingency planning, took the focus away from report production and onto analysis and was actually useful. Senior central government personnel were the most likely to be wedded to the old-fashioned idea of a single grand, national multi-hazard, multi-sectoral contingency plan, but otherwise the consensus was that this was a useful approach. On its own, though, it could not deliver early response. In most of our exercises using the calendar for a looming crisis we found that it was already too late to think about many of the interventions that planners wanted to get off the ground. This surprised them. The reason why they were already too late even before they had started was the next problem to face.

The crisis calendar makes it impossible to ignore a number of challenges to early response that have long been felt but rarely discussed explicitly. The fundamental challenge is that decisions often have to be made to implement an intervention to protect livelihoods before it is certain that a humanitarian situation will arise at all. Donors in particular are understandably reluctant to commit scarce humanitarian resources to a situation that may not materialise. It is only when the underlying logic of timely response is laid bare that the challenge can be addressed. One major challenge is trying to shorten the start-up timelines. These remain so long (several months) principally because agencies have never thought about how long they are or why this should matter. This is why we introduced the idea of preparedness auditing.

Box 5

The difference a day makes

How much does being late matter? We hear about the urgency of humanitarian aid, but surprisingly it is hard to find anywhere where the cost of a day's delay in humanitarian response has ever been calculated. It is well known that late interventions (e.g. therapeutic feeding) are expensive to donors. But what about the costs of 'small' delays to the people affected? Livestock die and lose value every day in a drought. There were an estimated 5.2 million cattle and 6.6m sheep in Somali National Regional State in Ethiopia in 2000. In a serious drought, over 70% can die. A more conservative case of 50% mortality means that, over a three-month period, on average 29,000 cattle and 37,000 sheep die every day. (For simplicity's sake we've assumed a constant mortality.) Even if cattle were worth just $150 and sheep $15 after the crisis, the loss of assets from cattle and sheep mortality in the State could be as much as $4.8m per day. This calculation is of course very approximate, but response would surely be much swifter if all the staff (programme, management, administration and logistics) of every agency (government, donor, UN, NGO) involved in response understood just how much is lost every time they delay their work by a single day.

Tool 2: Preparedness auditing

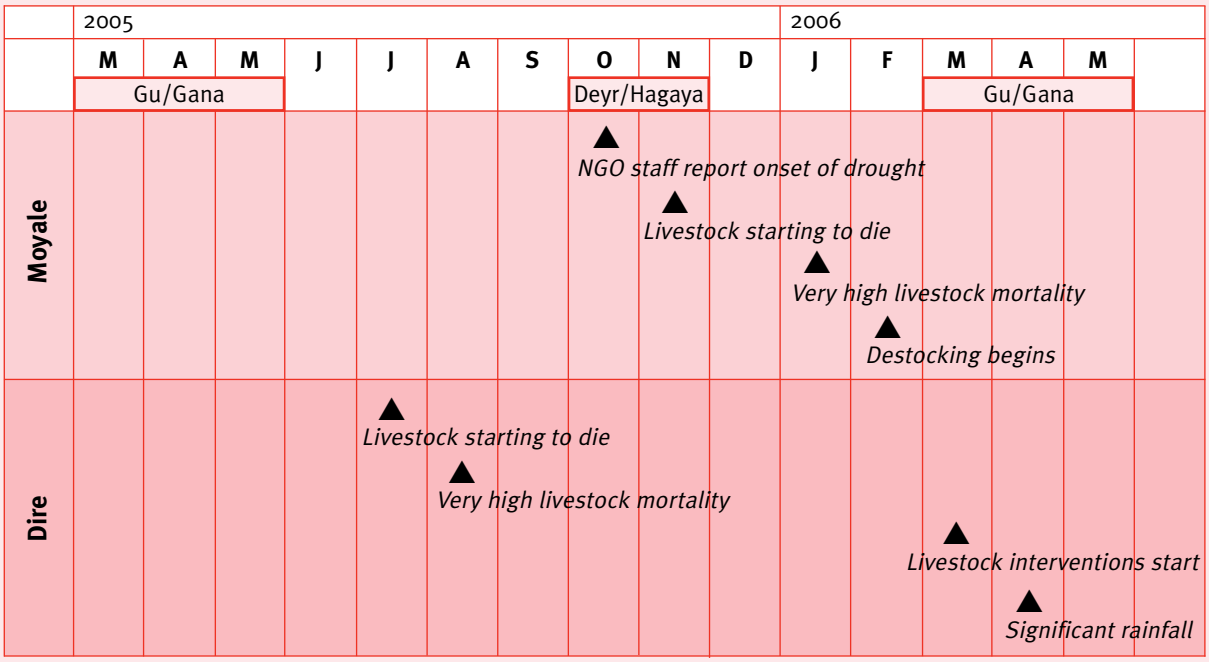
The start-up months (or 'gestation period') are when resources are sourced, staff recruited and trained, purchases made and items transported. Although staff in most agencies could make reasonable estimates of the length of this start-up period, we found no cases where an agency had in fact tried to estimate this start-up period, and to use such an estimate in its planning. This is a critical failing. Take livestock feeding for example. In Figure 3, if the window of opportunity for preventing livestock mortality through livestock feeding is from September to February, then decisions to run feeding interventions would have to be taken by the end of April in order to start feeding in September, because the typical start-up timeline for distributing fodder is 4–5 months. A decision to feed livestock taken when animals are seen to be dying, in November, will result in implementation after pasture has regenerated and guarantees that resources – time and money – will be completely wasted.

Preparedness auditing uses a Gantt chart to quantify an agency's state of preparedness. What is new is not the tool but the approach: agencies were not used to the idea that preparedness should be quantified, or that anyone should or could be held accountable for managing it – by reducing the timeline on the chart. The list of tasks that need to be completed before a project really 'starts' can be long. Preparedness auditing starts by getting agencies to think of

Box 6

Understanding lateness

Several evaluations of humanitarian response in the Horn have shown that agencies were sometimes so late that their responses seemed ridiculous – agencies more than once distributed fodder after pasture was already regenerating after a drought. Using the crisis calendar analysis helped us finally understand how simple mistakes can make such lateness not just understandable, but almost inevitable. First, agencies often wait until it is clear that there is a crisis before deciding to intervene. They then decide to intervene by protecting livestock – logical, but only if they are not thinking about windows of opportunity. According to the calendar below, from an evaluation of the response to the 2005/6 drought in Ethiopia, in Moyale this would have been in October–November, when the rains had failed again and as livestock started to die. As the typical start-up timeline for distributing fodder was 4–5 months, it would have been impossible to start distributing hay before the beginning of April – just after the following rains finally arrived.



all of these tasks, break them down into their constituent tasks and estimate how long each task will take, given the current systems, procedures and state of readiness of the agency. (The 'start-up timeline' was almost invariably between three and five months, though this often used quite optimistic assumptions, forgetting that people go on holiday, meetings get cancelled and that a crisis in one country can happen at the same time as another crisis is happening elsewhere.) It was important to move beyond generic stages such as 'getting money from donors' or 'purchasing equipment' to get to the detailed sub-tasks. Once this is done, a simple question is asked of each sub-task: could it be done before a crisis arrives – which essentially means, could it be done in the absence of a contract and funding to undertake the project in question? Almost all the sub-tasks could in fact be done well in advance. Table 1 shows two examples of how a single task can be broken down into many sub-tasks, and how most of these could be carried out as part of preparedness before any crisis, contract or funding were present.

In all the cases where agency staff analysed their preparedness, it was found possible to reduce a start-up timeline on a Gantt chart to a few days or at most 2–3 weeks. It was more difficult for local government staff to shorten timelines by as much, where they were unable to influence the procedures of their line ministries. Most agency staff felt that that they were going as quickly as they could, and were surprised to find that there was almost nothing in the start-up that could not be done in the absence of an actual decision to run a particular project.

Preparedness could be given a huge boost if everyone took it more seriously. Evaluators of humanitarian response could diagnose the specific causes of late response and identify where preparedness could be improved. EW could include in its reports both the windows for action and signal the likely last decision dates. Coordination forums could be ensuring that forward planning is the main item on the agenda. Donors could demand proof that an agency could respond within the window of opportunity before releasing funds.

Table 1: Taking preparedness seriously: what can be done to shorten a start-up timeline

Obtaining funding from donors		**Purchasing equipment**	
Sub-task	**Can it be done in advance?**	**Sub-task**	**Can it be done in advance?**
Finding which donors are interested in agencies' ideas for response	Yes – ongoing sharing of strategies with donors	List and items prepared	Yes
Preparing concept note	Yes – inc. ongoing contingency discussions with communities, local govt, cluster members, etc.	List and specs shared between field and HQ	Yes – updated periodically
Writing in format of different donors	Yes	List passed to purchasing dept.	Yes
Discussing with donor(s)	Yes – discussing *in principle*	Purchasing dept. checks specs/alternatives with field	Yes
Writing formal proposal	Yes	Purchase order approved by management	Partly – can be discussed in principle
Getting approval from senior management	Partly – getting approval in principle, may shorten total approval time by several days	Purchase request filled in	No
Rewriting in formats of different donors	Yes	Request approved by finance	Partly – discussions can be held so all know financial situation and eventual urgency
Submitting to donors	Partly: draft proposals can be shared and discussed in-country, should shorten discussions on formal submission	Forms passed to purchasing	No – but systems can be worked on
Waiting for donor response	No – but quicker if donor is already familiar with agency strategy and proposal	Tender notice prepared	Yes
Follow-up meetings with donor	As above	Wording of tender checked and approved	Yes
Amending proposal	As above – should be unnecessary if shared in advance	Purchase request for funds for placing tender advert	Usually – by using pre-qualification or selection of preferred supplier
Resubmitting	As above	Funds released for placing tender advert	Yes – as above
Waiting for response	As above	Tender advert placed	Yes – as above
Contracts arranged	No	Wait to give time for responses	Yes – as above
Contracts signed	No	Form tender approval committee	Yes – as above
		Assess bids	Yes – as above
		Contract prepared	Yes – in draft
		Contract discussed with supplier	Yes – as draft
		Supplier's trading licence verified	Yes
		Contract signed	No
		Goods available	No

Some interventions can never be provided adequately as emergency projects, because if decisions about them are only taken in response to a perceived crisis they can never be on time. Such interventions need to be permanent programmes. The crisis calendar clearly showed this to be the case for veterinary care in areas where livelihoods depend on livestock. The same is also true of some human health interventions in emergencies. Agencies in some countries still treat measles vaccinations as an emergency intervention in famines, instead of as a contingency measure to be taken before a famine. Likewise there need to be permanent systems for ensuring fodder availability in times of stress in areas where these problems are recurrent. Either of these can be run in ways that change in times of stress and crisis from non-crisis years. For example, services can be paid for at some times, and subsidised or even offered free at others; some programmes may ordinarily run at a low level and will need to be scaled up in times of crisis. Running long-term programmes that can 'change gears' in this way is feasible, if the various actors involved decide that this is necessary. Government development policy will have to guide this, donors (including the affected state's own finance ministry) will have to support the policy and a strategy for 'gear changing', and implementing agencies will need to find ways of implementing the policy.

Box 7

What is early warning for?

The purpose of EW may seem obvious – to give early warning of impending crises. However, an EWS to support protection of livelihoods needs a different structure, different indicators, different methods of data analysis and different ways of reporting and communicating from an EWS whose job is to support lifesaving interventions. There is now a third demand made on EW systems, which is to report to communities affected by crises. But populations in the affected zone need very different information about an impending crisis from response planners in a distant capital. Until there is agreement about what each EW system is for (and why), EW is unlikely to be designed, managed or evaluated in a way that makes it effective.

Chapter 4
System solutions?

Technical tools were important in helping to reveal the underlying system problems that were constraining any improvement in early response. However, there were limits to the use of specific technical tools, and our system diagnosis demanded a system solution. Since it was not possible to redesign the system from scratch, we had to work with the existing overall design and try to persuade the actors involved to make some necessary changes. Many such actors, who had been frustrated by the repeated failings of early response and the endlessly repeated cycle of humanitarian aid, were very interested. One repeated comment was both encouraging and worrying: 'this needs doing, we never get together to talk about things like this'. A small group in Nairobi, including staff from the government, donors, EW and NGOs, helped to lay out what needed to change and how a small pilot could contribute to that overall change.

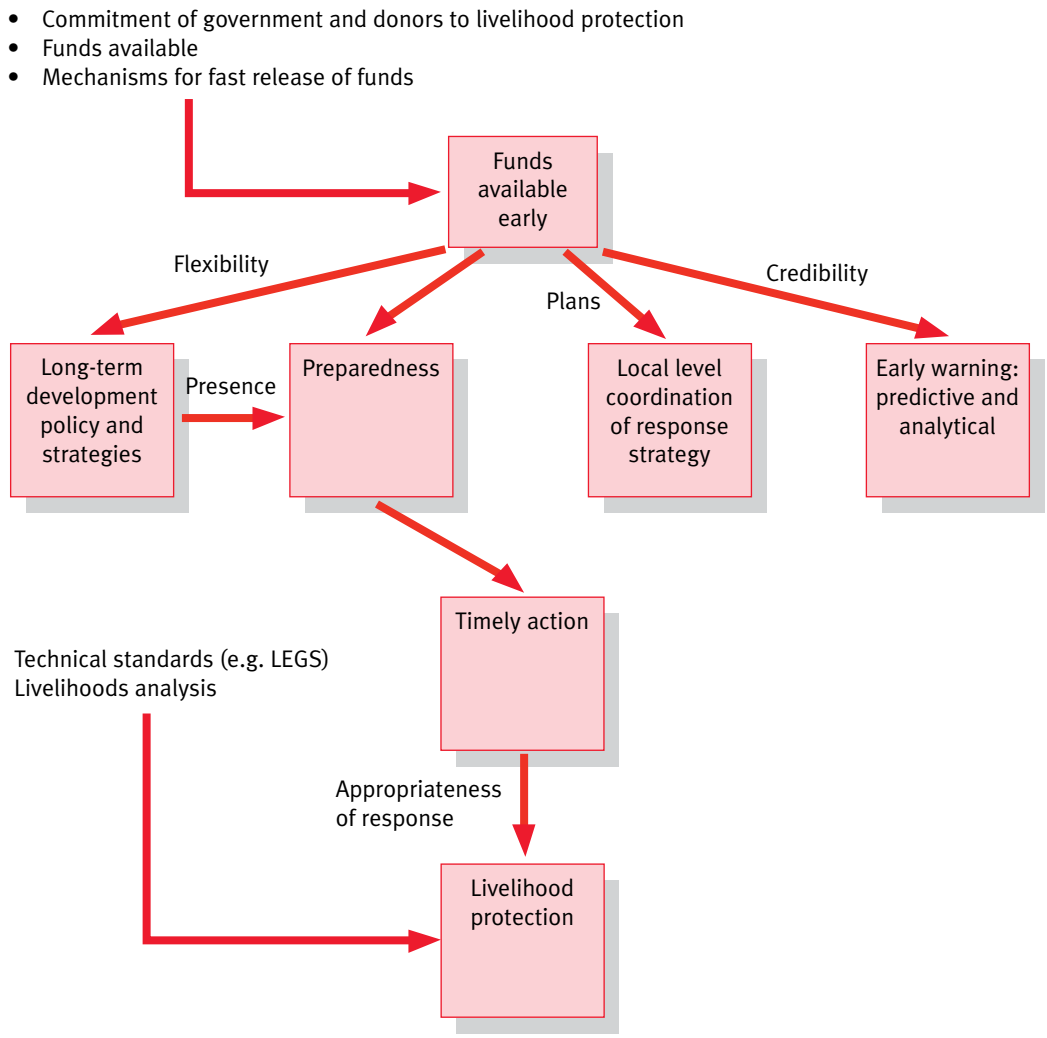
An overall diagram of what was needed to make early response for livelihood protection possible in pastoral areas of Kenya was drawn up (see Figure 4). The list of the changes needed was long and varied.

Challenges included:

- Achieving local consensus about livelihoods. This had to start with a joint analysis of prevailing and predicted situations and of livelihoods, including vulnerability analysis. On this basis, broad response strategies needed to be agreed for defined scenarios.

Figure 4

What is needed for an effective early response system?



- Using the EW information to produce credible predictions with livelihood analysis and a clear calendar. Predictions needed to include their assumptions, for example related to migration, future rains and markets.
- Improving preparedness, at the level of agencies, across actors at the local level, nationally, etc.
- Designing and setting up funding mechanisms that would be responsive and could provide fast, flexible support to livelihood protection.
- Long-term development which could incorporate crisis response.

The most challenging was the 'system dimension', meaning that none of the changes involved one single actor improving its own performance in isolation: necessary changes involved a coordinated and consensual shift in the way different actors worked with each other at different levels. When it is remembered that even getting one agency to change actually involved a complex manoeuvring of many different departments (with different perspectives, objectives and working norms), the complexity became even more daunting. It was easy to see why it is so much more tempting for an implementing agency to worry instead about designing and running its own project. Since no individual or agency was being judged by their overall impact on future crises – i.e. on the system's ability to deliver – and since no individual or agency had the power to impose its management on the system, why would anyone worry about it?

Testing the system cure

We had to test whether a system solution was feasible by piloting an initiative to effect system changes in one area. Our pilot worked at two levels: with individual agencies, to look at their preparedness and how to cut their response times; and we would work to catalyse and facilitate change at system level. The two strands were related. System response is determined partly by the capacity of each element in the system. But the parallels were deeper: both strands looked to help people change how they worked together and how they defined their objectives. Both strands required tools that could establish a common language and a common framework within which people could analyse their work.

The preparedness clinic

The preparedness audit tool had worked well in multi-agency groups, especially at District level. Agency staff had usually been able to find ways, in principle, of preparing for or completing most of the sub-tasks in the start-up timeline and reducing their preparedness audit – in theory – from 4–5 months to 3–4 weeks. Their agencies as a whole had not done so. Why?

It became clear how rare it was for staff members of different departments in an agency to sit together to work as a single team with a single shared objective (to deliver humanitarian assistance on time). We decided to offer 'preparedness clinics' to provide space for senior staff from any organisation to sit around a table, agree on shared objectives and agree how to achieve them. We would use crisis calendar analysis with the preparedness calendar to help them see their own situation and how it mattered, and then facilitate their own discussion around ways to speed up response.

The initial pilot was very interesting. It quickly became clear to the NGO involved that there were no technical reasons why their problems of late response had not been addressed. This was an NGO that had invested enormously in preparedness and in team-building – and very successfully so. Staff had even prepared several 'contingency' concept notes for emergency interventions. However, these were in the desk drawer of one person and no one else knew they existed. They had not been shared with other programme staff or with support/admin staff because the advantages of doing so had not been appreciated. Opportunities had been lost to prepare in advance draft budgets and recruitment plans, to start sourcing possible supplies and, at a quite simple level, to make sure that the logistics department understood any technical issues regarding purchases, specifications and the like. There had been no reason for not sharing the concept notes; it was the usual story of everyone being too busy doing 'their own job' to have the time to worry about 'other people's jobs'.

During the clinic participants very quickly put to one side the 'technical' issues that we had planned to talk about, and instead wanted to analyse the underlying communication problems. They realised – before we did – that if they could get their communication working, then all the 'technical' problems could be addressed very quickly. Simple changes in people's attitude to their work would make a huge difference. One example will suffice. When drilling wells, it was only after knowing the exact depth and flow rates of water from test drilling that the engineers knew what items would need purchasing. Programme staff could only give the purchasing team the details at the very last minute. What they could have done, though, was to keep the logistics team informed about their progress so that they would know when the details would be coming through. This would have enabled the logistics/purchasing staff to arrange their work so that, when those details came in, they could be dealt with straight away. Why had no one thought of this? These are the same questions that arise in every aspect of early response: why do donors not discuss their constraints with NGOs? Why do EW information users not tell EW what they need? No one felt that it was their job to manage the communication, because each team felt its responsibility ended with its own work. Unless the organisation as a whole at the highest level took responsibility for preparedness and response speed, things would never get better. And until senior management had a way of measuring preparedness, and holding their staff to account for improving it, that situation was not going to change.

Preparedness and contingency planning had been put on the agenda in the Horn of Africa. Many agencies had shown interest in the preparedness audit as a useful tool. PACAPS

Box 8

It's good to talk

During an agency 'preparedness clinic', one NGO realised that it could cut its start-up times considerably if it improved communication between teams. Specifically, it set itself the following tasks:

1. The HR and the programme teams to talk about:
- contingency recruitment strategies;
- employment terms for recruiting back former staff on emergency programmes;
- the approval process for job descriptions;
- developing a checklist for programme managers for recruitment, making clear the roles and responsibilities of each party;
- developing a 'service agreement' between HR and Programmes; and
- reviewing the concept notes for assessing contingency recruitment needs.

2. The finance and logistics teams to talk about:
- devising a system for speedier payments to suppliers.

3. The finance and programme teams to talk about:
- reviewing prepared concept notes and preparing draft budgets.

4. Logistics and programme teams to talk about:
- how to speed up turnaround times; and
- what communication each side feels would help them speed up programme delivery.

had offered a free preparedness clinic to help any agency in Ethiopia or Kenya to improve its systems, and many agency staff were interested. And yet in only one case were the interested staff able to persuade their NGO as a whole to give it a try. Why did no other agency take advantage of the opportunity? We do not believe that lack of appreciation of the product was the reason. Trying to organise the agency to tackle its 'system problems' fell victim to the very same system problems that were preventing early response. Everyone was busy, staff were over-stretched, if programme staff felt it was a priority they had no forums for presenting the opportunities to their colleagues in other departments, and senior managers were too busy managing projects and contracts to have time to worry about something that they were not being held accountable for.

Changing the response system in one District

The idea was again quite simple. If all the actors in the system could rethink how they interacted with each other in one, quite small, administrative area, a pilot could be created of a system in which agencies negotiated together what their responsibilities were, and what they needed from each other. Donors could clearly not promise specific funds for one area, but there was hope that everyone would work in good faith and respond as positively as possible to a pilot, subject to the overall constraints they faced and within their policies. We chose to pilot in Kenya because of the level of interest shown, and because there was an existing structure, the District Steering Group (DSG), that brought together all actors concerned with food security and humanitarian issues. Wajir District was chosen because it had reasonable security, with a reasonably well functioning DSG and at least one NGO very supportive of the process.

A series of meetings were held with a small group of actors (government, UN, donors and NGOs) involved in humanitarian work. A common vision of the problem and where solutions must come from was not hard to reach (see Figure 4), but it took time. It took a whole year to bring on board the number of actors necessary to start a pilot in one District. (People are busy, meeting timetables keep having to change. This is an important finding: initiatives for coordination or system-level working need to think in long time frames.) A slow approach bore fruit. The government Arid Lands Resource Management Project (ALRMP) felt the initiative had promise as a potential national approach and wanted to take ownership through its capacity-building project, the Drought Management Initiative (DMI), with technical support from PACAPS. An initial joint visit by DMI and PACAPS assessed the opinions and perceptions of the various actors in the District. The views expressed were remarkably uniform. Typical comments were:

- 'There is a lack of coordination' – though all who said this agreed that the DSG met every month and sub-committees met even more frequently.
- 'We had a meeting to talk about contingency planning but the DSG never did anything about it' – though all who said this agreed that they were members of the DSG.
- 'One of the main problems is the food aid, it is killing pastoralism' – though the recommendations from the DSG always included the continuation of food aid.
- 'The DSG never discusses broader strategic issues about food security' – though they admitted that the DSG meetings have an open agenda, and all participate (or are invited) and could have raised strategic issues.

Kenya has a structure for bringing together *everyone* working in the field of food security where they can discuss issues, coordinate with each other, analyse early warning information and prepare contingency plans for the District as whole. This structure has a direct and official line of communication to the central government and other key decision-making forums. And yet members were not using the structure. The degree of 'collegiality' among DSG members was good – the problem was not in-fighting, rivalries or politics. The Drought Management Officer (DMO) was respected and was doing his job.

The problem was at the same time simple and yet hard to understand. The DSG was created by ALRMP, and so was seen as belonging to ALRMP. The ALRMP also created the

DMOs, and so they were seen as responsible for the DSG. When people said 'the DSG hadn't …' they meant 'the DMO hadn't …'; everything was seen as 'his job' not theirs, even when what was to be done was in their own interests. When we suggested a meeting to look at a District-wide response strategy for a threatened drought, everyone was eager.

Senior personnel in Wajir in government, international and national/local NGOs had a very sophisticated analysis of their situation, but had not tried to use the DSG as a vehicle for advancing their own agenda. The problem is in no way unique to Wajir, though the general lesson is rarely addressed. Many projects establish structures, but systems do not work on their own. Training which focuses on the activities that people have to complete (e.g. what EW information to collect, what plans to prepare) tends to reinforce the sense of *non-ownership* of the system as a whole – you are given your role as a cog in a bigger machine, and what you are taught is the limit of your responsibility. Systems rarely fail because of the lack of technical capacity. They fail to work properly because people do not use them to achieve the things that they themselves want to get done.

At this point, interest in the initiative grew to the extent that it derailed it. MPs are a significant fund-holder for development and humanitarian response in Kenya, and it was natural that the local MP became interested. However, because he was also a minister, the political ramifications of his interest became wider and PACAPS had to withdraw its support from the initiative. The promised workshop for DSG members in Wajir went ahead at the end of April 2009, where they analysed the crisis calendar of the looming drought and identified appropriate strategic responses and immediate steps for preparedness. However, this was a stand-alone District workshop and it did not lead to system change. The reason is significant. A pilot *system solution* was essentially turned into yet another District-level capacity-building programme – and yet the very diagnosis of the problem had said that such 'training' was not the way to get systems working properly. Piloting a complete system solution at District level means involving all the actors engaged in response in the District – including those at national and international level. Even if District-level training is replicated across the country, though potentially useful this is not the same as reforming a national response system. Following the end of PACAPS, two other INGOs were interested in continuing the initiative and workshops were held with local government and NGO staff from the two sides of the border. But, again, they were the self-contained projects of an individual NGO, with no real long-term impact.

What lessons can be learnt from these failures? First, the relative lack of impact of the initiative once it became a set of training workshops proved yet again that a system solution is needed and not a solution that addresses individuals' capacity. Second, failure was not due to lack of interest in or hostility to the initiative. The tools and approaches offered were broadly welcomed, easy to understand and gave individual participants a new perspective that they appreciated. However, they gave 'solutions' that were patched onto people's work (and ways of working), but which were not made an integral part of their work. No one was accountable for following up on any agreed lessons from workshops – which was the very problem the pilot was trying to tackle. Any initiative designed to change the system status quo has to consider system inertia and the kinds of thresholds and critical masses that are needed to create paradigm changes. In particular, long time frames need to be built in.

PACAPS' own withdrawal from the initiative is also illustrative of an increasing risk-aversion in the sector. 'Changing the response system' was not a project deliverable or a contractual obligation, but was considered to bring a degree of (political) risk. It made more sense, from this perspective, to focus on easily controllable outputs, such as workshops and reports. In attempting the pilot, PACAPS staff were fighting internally against the very system forces (e.g. what are agencies and individuals rewarded for?) that they were trying to change. The irony of the failure was that it was good evidence that the diagnosis of the problem was correct.

Chapter 5
Conclusions

Most attempts to improve early response have focused on improving the performance of one or two actors, or introducing new tools to achieve a better and faster response. Such interventions are needed, but only if they are part of a much more holistic approach to putting things right. Simply put, the actual performance of the system is far below what can be justified with the current capacity of individuals and organisations and with current know-how. Improving capacity is important, but on its own does not address how the actors in the system relate to one another, and the linkages between them. The whole system needs an overhaul. This is neither difficult nor expensive. It requires the actors involved to think differently about how they communicate with each other and establish rules and principles that maximise the likelihood of positive outcomes, defined by common objectives. This is an obvious prerequisite for any 'teamwork', and yet it is not happening in the area of livelihood protection.

A better way forward?

Although the activities carried out under PACAPS have not themselves created any new realities, it is too early to say that the initiative has been a failure. Although interest appeared to be much higher in Kenya than in Ethiopia, it is in Ethiopia that the ideas may be taken forward in new forms. The discussions and ideas have mainly been taken up by donors.

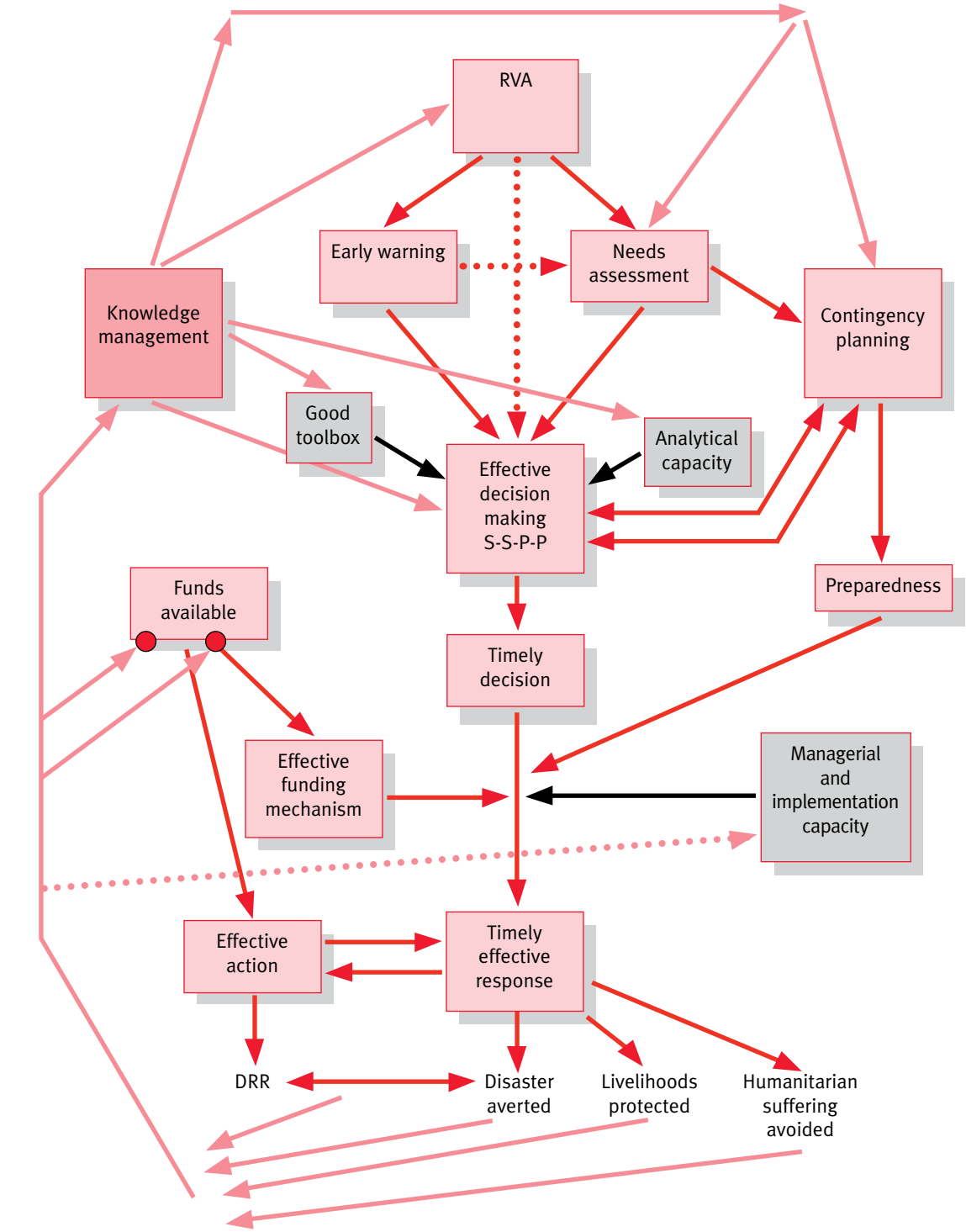
The Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) in Ethiopia is a donor-supported state social protection programme, but with roots in chronic (annual) emergency response. With World Bank support a 'Risk Financing Mechanism' (RF) has recently been 'added' to the PSNP, whereby contingency plans are developed at District level, and mechanisms are established for EW indicators to automatically trigger a scaling up of PSNP support. Support under RF is currently limited to labour-based cash or food grants. The risk finance approach was first discussed in 2006, but as it developed common threads with the ideas in this paper emerged: systems that are designed to link early warning, vulnerability analysis and predictive needs assessment and contingency planning; assistance that does not wait for a humanitarian crisis but which is given in order to prevent one; long-term mechanisms that can be scaled up and down as needs change, instead of creating new structures and programmes each time.

Mechanisms for donor coordination and for shared analysis are perhaps stronger in Ethiopia. This may be because a food crisis is an annual event in Ethiopia with a 'case load' for food aid of millions even in years of good harvests, and because the government manages the aid sector much more actively, which brings donors together to form a partner in dialogue with the government. Whatever the reasons, donors are actively trying to find a common way forward to support the government in developing a new disaster risk management policy (not yet officially approved, but probably in its final form). They are trying to move away from a situation where each donor runs its own projects in disaster response, and to come to an agreement around a strategy and then work out how development partners, possibly acting on their own, can work towards common goals within a common system. Some of the ideas behind this have been discussed here: ensuring that early warning, vulnerability analysis and needs assessment are not supported in isolation but as a system, so that for example EW is designed to serve response, not to produce good reports; and avoiding the creation of a myriad of local EWS or competing methodologies for needs assessment, but using the contribution to system improvement as the measure of which changes are most useful. The design of the donor support strategy was based around the Disaster Risk Management (DRM) system map (Figure 5).

It is too early to say what the results of the process will be, but the message is already clear. If we want to change systems, we have to set out to do so and not try to run 'projects' to improve response. In order to do this, the current system needs to be analysed, a desired system map needs to be drawn, a process for moving from one to the other needs to be designed and the management both of the process and for maintaining the new system needs to be considered. The relationship between the government and its development partners is the starting point, and everything must revolve around this. Small-scale initiatives by single donors, by government departments or by NGOs will never be adequate to the task.

Figure 5

The DRM system map for Ethiopia



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Notes

1 For example S. Pantuliano and M. Wekesa, *Improving Drought Response in Pastoral Areas of Ethiopia Somali and Afar Regions and Borena Zone of Oromiya Region* (London: ODI, (2008); C. Longley and M. Wekesa, *Improving Drought Response in Pastoral Areas of Kenya: Lessons and Recommendations* (London: ALNAP, (2008); and F. Grünewald et al., *Real Time Evaluation of the Drought Response in the Horn of Africa*, http://ochanet.unocha.org, 2006.

2 For further discussion, see S. Pavanello and S. Levine, *Rules of the Range: Natural Resources Management in Kenya–Ethiopia Border Areas*, HPG Working Paper (London: ODI, 2011).

3 For more details on the programme, see Regional Enhanced Livelihoods in Pastoral Areas (RELPA): RFA Support Documents, USAID East Africa, http://eastafrica.usaid.gov and www.elmt-relpa.org.

4 HEA's main weakness is that it underplays social factors and power relations in its analysis of vulnerability. However, more complex frameworks for understanding livelihoods (e.g. by Sarah Collinson and Sue Lautze and Angela Raven-Roberts) are less accessible as a practical tool for response analysis. See S. Collinson, *Power, Livelihoods and Conflict: Case Studies in Political Economy Analysis for Humanitarian Action*, HPG Report 13 (London: ODI, 2003); S. Lautze and A. Raven-Roberts, 'Violence and Complex Humanitarian Emergencies: Implications for Livelihoods Models', *Disasters*, 30(4), 2006.

5 See S. Levine and M. Abdinoor, *The RELPA Guide to Early Response to Slow-Onset Crises: How To Make Contingency Planning Useful, In Just Fifteen Easy Steps*, http://www.disasterriskreduction.net, 2008.

6 Alexandra Crosskey developed an adaptation to analyse the calendar of malnutrition in work with UNICEF.

7 G. Bekele, M. Abdinoor and W. Asfaw, *Analysis of Traditional Drought Indicators and Triggers in the Southern Pastoral Areas of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, 2008).

8 U. Hess, W. Wiseman and T. Robertson, *Ethiopia: Integrated Risk Financing To Protect Livelihoods and Foster Development*, Discussion Paper, WFP/WB/DFID, http://www.agriskmanagementforum.org, 2006.

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7 *The Evaluation of Humanitarian Assistance Programmes in Complex Emergencies* by A. Hallam (1998)
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