

"For too long, we simply equated a food security problem with a food gap, and a food gap with a food aid response." 1

When emergency situations continue for years or decades, achieving food security becomes an overwhelming challenge. Interventions are hampered by real danger, including open conflict, and the collapse of institutions, while deeper analysis is hindered by a lack of information and suitable frameworks.² Furthermore, structural causes are often not accounted for and yet they are the reason these crises persist over time.

The main characteristic of most protracted crises, in addition to the loss of human lives due to conflict, are high and steadily growing levels of food insecurity and hunger. This policy brief thus focuses on protracted crises from a food security perspective and aims at sharing insights, based on evidence from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and the Sudan, on what might be done.

BACKGROUND

One feature which distinguishes protracted crises from short-term shocks (such as floods or droughts) is their impact on people's livelihoods. While the impact of short-term shocks can be temporary, the causes and effects of protracted crises are often structural and long-lasting. Unlike natural catastrophes, protracted crises are often characterized by conflict, a lack of public services such as security, health and education, and the absence of

regulation in the productive and trade sectors. This may lead to the sustained erosion of livelihoods and result in structural vulnerability.

In terms of international response, protracted crises continue to draw the vast majority of humanitarian aid. Since 1997, of the US\$39.7 billion requested through the consolidated appeal process (CAP), US\$36.5 billion (91% of the total) went to appeals for complex emergencies.⁵

Characteristics of Protracted Crisis

In recent years, the term 'protracted crises' has been used to emphasize the persistent nature of certain emergencies (Schafer, 2002). Elements that characterize protracted crises include:³

- non-existent or weak public institutions;
- weak informal institutions;
- state control is challenged by the lack of resources and institutional failure;
- external legitimacy of the state is contested;
- a strong parallel or extra-legal economy;
- existence of or a high susceptibility to violence;
- forced displacement;
- the deliberate exclusion of sectors of the population from enjoying basic rights;
- livelihoods are highly vulnerable to external shocks; and
- widespread poverty and food insecurity.

Figure 1: Countries facing food emergencies 1995-2005



Source: FAO. 2006. Global Information and Early Warning System.

Note: The deteriorating situations of countries under protracted crises, in particular the DRC, are one main reason why there has been a lack of progress towards meeting MDG1⁴ in Africa.

1 **Dan Maxwell.** *Improving Food Security Analysis and Response: Some Brief Reflections.* Keynote speech at the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification Workshop. 21 March 2007. Rome

2 **Pingali, P.** 2008. Preface. In Alinovi, L., Hemrich, G., & Russo, L. (eds). *Beyond Relief: Food Security in Protracted Crisis.* FAO and Practical Action Publishing. Rugby, U.K.

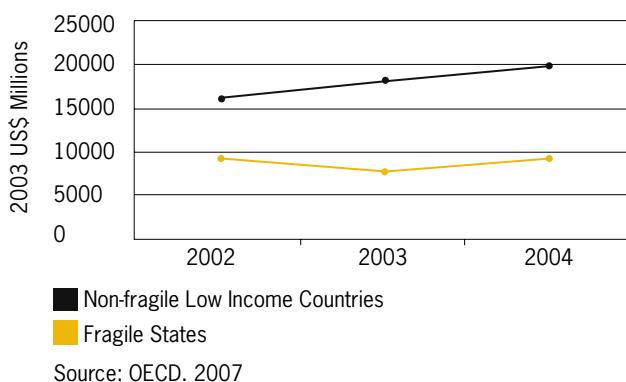
3 **Schafer** (2002) in Alinovi, L., Hemrich, G., & Russo, L. (eds). *Beyond Relief: Food Security in Protracted Crisis.* pp. 3-4

4 Millennium Development Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty & hunger (see: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/poverty.shtml>)

5 **Development Initiatives.** 2008. *Global Humanitarian Assistance 2007/2008.* Somerset, UK. p.23 (available at: <http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/pdffdownloads/GHA%202007.pdf>)

The difficulties inherent in engaging with fragile states, may partially explain the limited overall impact of aid and international response. Nonetheless, it is important to note that overall, fragile states consistently receive less aid than other low income countries (see Figure 2).⁶

Figure 2: Aid to low income countries and fragile states



KEY FINDINGS

Structural factors - such as failed institutions and conflicts over land and resources - are at the root of most protracted crises. They also play an important role in further fuelling crises.

It is worth noting that institutions were already deteriorating long before open conflict erupted. For example, in the DRC, decades of economic mismanagement and patrimonial rule, the conversion of economic resources into political assets and profit-seeking activities by the ruling class caused a total collapse of the Congolese economy and prevented a process of formal institution building.⁷

The case studies show that protracted crises can transform unequal land access from a structural source of poverty and conflict into a "resource of conflict." In the DRC, for example, political and military elites consolidated their power base and rewarded their supporters by extending their control over land.⁸

Protracted crises also take a heavy toll on informal institutions and can severely weaken social networks that otherwise would buffer the adverse effects of crisis. For example, the Bahr El Ghazal (Sudan) 1998 crisis was known as the "famine of breaking relationships" because it led to the failure of social entitlements and traditional elder authorities were supplanted by military authorities (Deng, 1999).⁹ Conflicts also often have a detrimental

impact on traditional institutions that regulate the use of natural resources.

Informal policies may be more relevant than formal policies – yet they are rarely taken into account by the international community.

In contexts characterized by poor governance, informal policies may be more relevant than formal policies.¹⁰ Yet, the case studies show that very little institutional analysis is conducted when planning response and that the international community tends to downplay both formal and informal policy processes. In the worst

Policy is defined as "a purposive course of action followed by an actor or a set of actors." (Anderson, 1994).

cases, not understanding underlying policies can lead to negative outcomes such as humanitarian aid being used as a weapon of war.¹¹

Indeed, as food insecurity spreads, there is the risk that food will be used as an instrument to achieve other ends. For example, food aid has sometimes been used to reach consensus and feed militias in several countries. On the other hand, in South Sudan, it has been used by beneficiaries to strengthen local social networks (a policy priority for the Dinka) in contrast to the external agency's targeting objectives.

Informal policies and institutions can also play a very positive role in conflict mitigation. In the DRC, *chambres de paix* (peace councils) helped local farmers claim their land rights and resolve disputes over land.¹² Nonetheless, the *chambres de paix* were not recognized or supported by the international community.

Chambres de paix in the DRC

Local councils (*chambres de paix*) composed of elders investigated the nature of land disputes and tried to reach a solution based on a compromise between the farmers involved. While these peace councils made the justice system even less formal, they were the best mechanisms available for offering some protection to local farmers. Indeed, farmers no longer trusted customary justice systems and local courts because of corruption (in the courts, the one who paid most usually won the case) and lack of legal protection.¹³

⁶ OECD. 2006. *Ensuring Fragile States are Not Left Behind*. p. 2 (available at: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/36/56/38572891.pdf>)

⁷ Alinovi, L., Hemrich, G., & Russo, L. (eds). 2008. *Beyond Relief: Food Security in Protracted Crisis*. FAO and Practical Action Publishing. Rugby, U.K. p.157

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ *ibid*, p.20

¹⁰ Alinovi, L., Hemrich, G., and Russo, L. 2007. Addressing Food Insecurity in Fragile States: Case Studies from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and Sudan. FAO/ESA Working Paper 07-21. p.16 (available at: <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/010/ai028e/ai028e00.pdf>)

¹¹ Pantuliano, S. 2005. A 'Principled' Approach to Complex Emergencies: Testing a New Aid Delivery Model in the Nuba Mountains. In *Disasters*. Volume 29. ODI. London. p. S56

¹² Vlassenroot, K. 2008. Land tenure, conflict and household strategies in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. In Alinovi, L., Hemrich, G., & Russo, L. (eds). *Beyond Relief: Food Security in Protracted Crisis*. FAO and Practical Action Publishing. Rugby, U.K. p. 214

¹³ *ibid*

Short term and humanitarian responses predominate, yet development paradigms are not always appropriate.

Response in protracted crises often consists of a series of short-term emergency interventions. Little attention is given to the long term effects of these (largely supply-side) interventions and if there may be more appropriate strategies.

For example, agencies provided free seeds in Juba, Somalia although local seed markets were functioning well. In the DRC, fisherfolk near Lake Edward were provided with fishing equipment as part of a sustainable livelihoods programme, which only exacerbated the underlying problem of already severely depleted fish stocks.

On the other hand, development paradigms (such as participation and sustainability) should not be blindly applied. In Somalia, inadequate knowledge of clan politics led some humanitarian and development agencies eager to promote participation, to work with local groups that represented militia factions rather than households and communities.¹⁴

Nevertheless, the case studies show several examples where participatory interventions with longer term perspectives have been successful (See below: Nuba Mountains Community Empowerment Project). However an in-depth understanding of the local context and of underlying policy processes was necessary.

Nuba Mountains Community Empowerment Project (NMPACT)

The NMPACT project in Southern Sudan innovatively addressed a growing food security crisis by supporting livelihoods and building peace. In all stages, from design to implementation and monitoring, it used participatory approaches and included opportunities for local people to meet with policy makers. Furthermore, it was the only programme which brought together opposing factors in the conflict (the government of Sudan and the SPLM) while the conflict was still going on.

For more information see:

Changes and Potential Resilience of Food Systems in the Nuba Mountains Conflict by Sara Pantuliano (<http://www.fao.org/docrep/008/af141e/af141e00.htm>)

Affected communities are already acting for the long term and not merely waiting for the emergency to be over, a process ignored by the international community.

The case studies show that farmers and vulnerable groups often do have a long-term vision and are able to exploit the 'opportunities' offered by some crises.¹⁵ For example, in Somalia's Jubba region, pastoralists and agro-pastoralists have gradually moved towards agriculture as a normal response to population demands and volatile grain prices.¹⁶

People affected by crises, in almost all cases, continue to invest in assets such as land and livestock. In some countries like Somalia, which had a buoyant informal banking system within two years of the state's collapse, markets and trade with neighbouring countries flourished. Somali entrepreneurs also seized business opportunities offered by new technologies such as mobile phones.

People adapt their livelihoods to the crisis but the overall resilience of food systems remains a challenge.

Because people have a long term view of the crisis, they often make major changes in order to better adapt to the situation. Adaptation strategies include shifting livelihoods (for example, from fishing to farming in the DRC and from raising livestock to agriculture in Jubba) and radically changing farming systems.

However, these adaptation strategies often lack both traditional and formal regulatory mechanisms and may make communities less resilient in the longer term. For example, in the Nuba Mountains, farmers began to cultivate hillsides, perceived as more secure areas, as the conflict spread. However, this had negative repercussions on the agro-ecology of the area.¹⁷

The case studies give insights on specific factors that strengthen or diminish resilience. For example, the Somalia case studies show that factors which contribute to pastoralists' resilience include mobility, cross-border trade, robust markets and remittances.

Lack of analytical and response frameworks

When "emergency" situations continue for years or even decades, traditional humanitarian and development paradigms are often not suitable for guiding analysis

14 Alinovi, L., Hemrich, G., & Russo, L. (eds). 2008. *Beyond Relief: Food Security in Protracted Crisis*. FAO and Practical Action Publishing. Rugby, U.K. p.224

15 *ibid.* p.230

16 *ibid.*

17 *ibid.* p.231

and response. Moreover, organizations that intervene in these situations often fall firmly into one side of the humanitarian/development divide and plan their response accordingly. The case studies show that assistance is often externally driven and very few donors commit to longer term development once the acute phase of a crisis passes, thus leaving the root causes of the crisis unresolved.¹⁸

Most mainstream analytical tools used, particularly in the DRC and Sudan, have treated food insecurity as if it were triggered by natural hazards such as crop failure, or at best as a livelihoods crises at the household level caused by external factors.¹⁹ What little analysis is done often is geared towards identifying needs that correspond to the capacities of intervening agencies to deliver specific goods rather than to a contextual analysis.²⁰

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Rethink response. Address both the short and long term dimensions of crises. Make sure it is based

on an adequate analysis of specific contexts.

Not surprisingly, the case studies show food insecurity to be on the whole a manifestation of social and political configuration.²¹ Yet, politico-economic analysis was, in most cases, limited and had little impact on policy process.²²

A new conceptual and operational framework for food security in protracted crisis should:

- have an overarching **livelihoods-based framework** to represent various processes at the global level and the effects of those processes at the household level;
- highlight appropriate food security responses policies and programmes;
- identify institutions that play a positive (or negative) role in strengthening the resilience of food systems; and
- identify institutions that are necessary for implementing food security response.

Figure 3: The Twin Track Approach

Twin Track Approach	Availability	Access and Utilization	Stability
Rural development/ productivity enhancement	<p>Enhancing food supply to the most vulnerable</p> <p>Improving rural food production especially by small-scale farmers</p> <p>Investing in rural infrastructure</p> <p>Investing in rural markets</p> <p>Revitalization of livestock sector</p> <p>Resource rehabilitation and conservation</p> <p>Enhancing income and other entitlements to food</p>	<p>Re-establishing rural institutions</p> <p>Enhancing access to assets</p> <p>Ensuring access to land</p> <p>Reviving rural financial systems</p> <p>Strengthening the labour market</p> <p>Mechanisms to ensure safe food</p> <p>Social rehabilitation programmes</p>	<p>Diversifying agriculture and employment</p> <p>Monitoring food security and vulnerability</p> <p>Dealing with the structural causes of food insecurity</p> <p>Reintegrating refugees and displaced people</p> <p>Developing risk analysis and management</p> <p>Reviving access to credit system and savings mechanisms</p>
Direct and Immediate Access to Food	<p>Food Aid</p> <p>Seed/input relief</p> <p>Restocking livestock capital</p> <p>Enabling Market Revival</p>	<p>Transfers: Food/Cash based</p> <p>Asset redistribution</p> <p>Social rehabilitation programmes</p> <p>Nutrition intervention programmes</p>	<p>Re-establishing social safety nets</p> <p>Monitoring immediate vulnerability and intervention impact</p> <p>Peace-building efforts</p>

Source: P. Pingali, L. Alinovi and Jacky Sutton (2005): Food Security in Complex Emergencies: Building Food Systems Resilience

¹⁸ Pingali, P. 2008. Preface. In Alinovi, L., Hemrich, G., & Russo, L. (eds). *Beyond Relief: Food Security in Protracted Crisis*. FAO and Practical Action Publishing. Rugby, U.K.

¹⁹ Alinovi, L., Hemrich, G., and Russo, L. (eds). 2008. *Beyond Relief: Food Security in Protracted Crisis*. FAO and Practical Action Publishing. Rugby, U.K. p.223

²⁰ ibid

²¹ ibid, p.232

²² ibid

The FAO twin-track approach (Figure 3, previous page) is a useful framework for linking short and long-term response. In particular, it can ensure adequate support to livelihoods through initiatives that provide immediate access to food while addressing the root causes of longer-term food insecurity.

On an operational level, among the most important lessons learned is that small injections of cash to poor households can make an enormous difference.²³

Last but not least, coordination needs to be strengthened by agreeing on shared enforcement mechanisms. Response should be based on shared basic operational principles, clearly spelt-out partnership arrangements and common frameworks for humanitarian and long-term interventions.²⁴

Involve local partners and institutions when defining and implementing response. Account for all groups affected by the crises, with special attention to women, children and minority groups.

When institutions have broken down, as is often the case in protracted crises, it may be difficult to identify suitable partners and entry points for interventions. Furthermore, local partners and governments are often excluded because they may be perceived as parties in the conflict. Yet, working with local partners when planning, delivering and evaluating response has proven to be a key factor in successful response. The Southern Sudan NMPACT case study is a good example of how working with local NGO's was crucial for the programme's success.

Account for shifts in livelihoods and support patterns of resilience

The protracted nature of these crises often leads to a sustained erosion of assets and livelihoods. When successful adaptation strategies and patterns of resilience exist, they should be acknowledged and supported by intervening agencies.

At the very least, it is important not to hinder patterns of resilience. For example, distributing free agricultural inputs and indiscriminate food aid could be counter-productive when local markets are functioning adequately.²⁵

Conflict resolution and prevention are crucial

Because protracted food security crises are often accompanied by recurring violent conflicts, it is vital to intervene before unstable situations further deteriorate. It is also crucial to develop institutional arrangements before, rather than after, the outbreak of violent conflict or crisis.²⁶

FURTHER READING:

Alinovi, L., Hemrich, G., & Russo, L. (eds). 2008. *Beyond Relief: Food Security in Protracted Crisis*. FAO and Practical Action Publishing. Rugby, U.K.

Alinovi, L., Hemrich, G., and Russo, L. 2007. *Addressing Food Insecurity in Fragile States: Case Studies from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and Sudan*. FAO/ ESA Working Paper 07-21 (available at: <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/010/ai028e/ai028e00.pdf>)

More detailed versions of all the case studies are available at:

http://www.foodsec.org/pubs_case.htm

© FAO 2008

Published by the EC - FAO Food Security Information for Action Programme

website: www.foodsec.org

e-mail: information-for-action@fao.org

The EC-FAO Food Security Information for Action Programme is funded by the European Union and implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

²³ *ibid*, p.119

²⁴ *ibid*, p.227

²⁵ **HPN Online Exchange**. *What can be done to achieve food security in protracted crises?* (available at: <http://www.odihpn.org/report.asp?id=2943>)

²⁶ **OECD**. 2008. *Concepts and dilemmas of state building in fragile situations*. p.8 (available at: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/59/51/41100930.pdf>)