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A review of the links between needs assessment and decision-making in response to food crises

Study undertaken for the World Food Programme under the SENAC project

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Overseas Development Institute

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This study was conducted under the umbrella of the Strengthening Emergency Needs Assessment Capacity (SENAC) project. SENAC is a three-year project (2005–2007) to reinforce WFP's capacity to assess humanitarian needs in the food sector during emergencies and the immediate aftermath through accurate and impartial needs assessments. The study was funded by the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Department (ECHO).

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Contents

Preface

This study was commissioned as part of the ECHO-funded SENAC project, whose aim is to strengthen emergency needs assessment capacity in WFP. It arose from a growing awareness that in trying to achieve that aim, a focus on needs assessment practice and methodology alone was not enough. At root, assessment practice had to be driven not by the question *how*, but *why*: what are assessments for, and are they serving their purpose?

Taking as its starting point that the main function of assessment is to inform decisions about response to food crisis, this study considers the function and practice of needs assessment in relation to organisational decision-making in WFP, its donors and other partners.

The study takes a generally pragmatic view of this subject. The world as it presents itself is never ideal – especially not in the context of humanitarian crisis, where circumstances are almost by definition *non*-ideal. In asking whether a particular assessment approach is appropriate in a given context, a balance often has to be struck between the need for rigour and accuracy on the one hand, and feasibility, cost and utility on the other. These things are not necessarily in tension, however, and what may be impracticable at one stage in the evolution of a crisis may become feasible later. The right approach depends largely on the nature and scale of the crisis, the purpose of the assessment and the timeframe for decision-making.

It is important to stress that the study is *not* an evaluation, though inevitably it makes observations and judgements about good and bad practice. It should not be taken as a critique of particular programmes or people, since this was beyond the remit of the study team.

The study reviewed the main factors behind decision-making and the extent to which this is informed by needs analysis. It pursued these questions in relation to four main case studies: Pakistan (the 2005 Kashmir earthquake), southern Africa (principally Malawi), Sudan (principally the Darfur crisis) and Somalia. These were taken as examples of four main crisis types, each of which raises different challenges for assessment and response: rapid-onset, slow-onset, protracted insecurity (conflict/displacement) and recovery/transitional contexts. A range of other cases was also considered, and interviews were conducted with WFP, donor and agency staff at headquarters, regional and country level.

The study was undertaken by a team led by ODI in London. James Darcy (team leader) is the Director of the Humanitarian Policy Group at ODI. Stephen Anderson is a partner in the Food Economy Group. Nisar Majid is an independent consultant. The team benefited substantially from the advisory input of Mohamed Zejjari, former senior staff member and current Honorary Representative of WFP. Useful comments were also received on earlier drafts from a number of other individuals. The final text is the responsibility of the authors alone.

The team would like to thank all those who gave their time so generously during the conduct of the study. A full list of those consulted is included in the annex to this report.

Abbreviations

AIDCO	Europe Aid Cooperation Office
CAP	Consolidated Appeals Process
CERF	Central Emergency Respond Fund
CFSAM	Crop and Food Supply Assessment Missions
CFSVA	Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis
CHS	Community Household Surveys
CILSS	Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel
DFID	Department for International Development
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
DSC	Direct Support Costs
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office
EFSA	Emergency Food Security Assessment
EFSNA	Emergency Food Security and Nutrition Assessment
EMOP	Emergency Operation
ENA	Emergency Needs Assessment
FANR	Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Sector
FEWSNET	Famine Early-Warning System Network
FFP	Food for Peace
FSAU	Food Security Analysis Unit
FSMS	Food Security Monitoring System
GFD	General Food Distribution
GIEWS	Global Information and Early Warning System
HAC	Humanitarian Assistance Committee
HEA	Household Economy Approach
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IFRC	International Federation of the Red Cross
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPC	Integrated Phase Classification
JAMs	Joint Assessment Missions
MFE	Missing Food Entitlements
MSF	Medecins Sans Frontieres
MVAC	Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OD	Operations Department (WFP)
ODAN	Emergency Needs Assessment Unit (WFP)
ODI	Overseas Development Institute

PRRO	Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SC-UK	Save the Children – UK
SENAC	Strengthening Emergency Needs Assessment Capacities
SLA	Sudan Liberation Army
TEC	Tsunami Evaluation Coalition
UNDMT	United Nations Disaster Management Teams
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VAC	Vulnerability Assessment Committee
VAM	Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping

Executive summary

1. This study, commissioned under the WFP SENAC project, explores the links and disconnects between needs assessment and decision-making (WFP and other) in response to food crises. It asks whether emergency needs assessments (ENA) are providing the analysis required for timely, appropriate, proportionate and effective responses to food crises – and considers the extent to which they actually inform organisational response decisions. The study is based on four in-depth case studies each involving different kinds of food crisis, as well as other 'reference' cases and interviews conducted with WFP, donor and partner agency staff.

A broad view is taken of 'emergency needs assessment', which is understood to include all data gathering and analysis designed to determine the existence, nature and causes of a food crisis (actual or potential); the need for intervention to protect life, health, nutrition and livelihoods; and the appropriate form of such interventions.

2. The report suggests that the **function** of needs assessment in relation to decision-making is three-fold: to *inform* internal decisions about response, throughout the life of a programme; to *influence* others' response decisions; and to *justify* response decisions and appeals for funds. Current WFP practice appears to fulfil the first of these functions increasingly effectively; the others rather less so.

Informing internal decisions

3. The study found that in most of the cases reviewed, WFP's own initial decisions about response were under-pinned by adequate information and analysis from assessments, whether conducted by WFP itself or through a collaborative process. Considerable progress has been made in this regard in the past few years, both in terms of assessment process and quality. WFP assessment practice has in some respects embraced a wider food security perspective, but it is often still geared around one set of response questions: how much food aid is required and by whom. While this is understandable given the organisation's remit, the rationale for the proposed food aid strategy is not always clear from the analysis of context in assessment reports; and is rarely articulated against a wider range of potential response options.

4. Progress in informing *initial* programming decisions is not yet matched by an ability to make informed decisions throughout the life of a programme. WFP often lacks the necessary information to predict and gauge the evolution of a food crisis; and to implement its responses in a way that is sensitive to changes in the external environment. The study recommends that WFP adopt an **information strategy** for all major responses as an integral part of its programme management, and that this be budgeted explicitly. Overall, the study team concluded that there is a relative **under-investment** in the information and evidence base to support response decisions, particularly in monitoring and re-assessment. This is particularly evident in protracted crisis response through PRROs.

5. Different information requirements were identified in relation to **four types of crisis**: rapid onset, slow onset, chronic insecurity/displacement, and transition/recovery. What is good assessment practice depends on the context, nature of the crisis and timeframe for decision-making. The rapid onset cases considered showed the need to agree simple methods for determining initial resource requirements, clearly articulated working assumptions, and the necessity of re-checking those assumptions as situations develop. The slow onset cases show the importance of agreed triggers for action, based on 'leading' risk indicators or defined thresholds, for effective prevention. The conflict and displacement cases have all these plus other requirements, including ways of assessing unmet need in currently inaccessible areas, ways of understanding the links between food insecurity and exposure to violence, and more robust methods for calculating the needs of dispersed as well as camp populations. The transitional contexts showed the need to invest more in mechanisms (including surveillance) to determine when a programme should change course or wind up.

6. Central to the various **methodological issues** arising is the need to define the right questions to drive the assessment. The method of assessment has to reflect its purpose. Some of the data and analysis currently produced is simply not relevant to the needs of decision-makers, or is not presented in way that shows its relevance. Some important types of information are often not available – such as people's *relative dependence* on food aid or other assistance, and how this may change over time and space. On the other hand, a number of good new tools (including market analysis) were found to be in use, even the results did not always appear to inform response decisions. The study found a preponderance of quantitative over qualitative methods of analysis and suggests that a better balance needs to be found between them, particularly in livelihood-related assessment. The balance between methodological *rigour* and the *utility* of assessments (for timely decision-making, etc) needs to be considered case by case; though in most of the cases reviewed, little tension was found to exist between the two.

7. The apparent disconnect between the assessments conducted by specialist teams from Rome or regional offices, and the ongoing (less formal) assessments conducted by WFP country-office teams means that **micro-level analysis** – crucial

for programme design and modification – tends to be relatively neglected compared to macro-level and 'aggregate' analysis. More emphasis and support needs to be given to this aspect of assessment.

The study team also felt that more use could be made of external (local and international) as well as in-house expertise in conducting situational analysis. This could include sociological and anthropological perspectives as well as more traditional food security approaches. Good needs assessment – particularly in conflict-related situations – is often dependent on the **quality of political and social analysis** (including security) as much as on anthropometric or economic analysis.

8. Related to the issue of information strategy, the study found that the analysis from the **existing information and analysis mechanisms** – early warning, VAM, ENA, food security monitoring, etc – is not well integrated. In particular, the relationship between VAM analysis and ENA in informing crisis response decisions is often unclear and demands further attention.

9. Internally, the role of WFP regional assessment officers is important in bridging decision-making between field and HQ. That said, the **central role of Country Directors** rather than just the specialists in assessment needed to be emphasised more strongly. It is important not to over-specialise the assessment process if it is to remain firmly linked to decisions. Relevant training in assessment needs to be provided, but there is no substitute for experience, judgement and knowledge of context.

10. More needs to be done to strengthen dialogue with potential partners as part of the assessment process, and dialogue with implementing partners throughout the course of a programme. Too little attention is given to **feedback of information** from the operational level (e.g. local distribution), and the need to build in better 'feedback loops' is essential to more responsive programming. At times, the pressure to implement an agreed programme according to plan – especially where complex logistical processes have been established – appears to militate against adaptive programming as needs change or as analysis is refined in the light of local realities.

Influencing external decisions

11. While the link between assessments and WFP's own decision-making was relatively strong, the link with **external decisions** was relatively weaker. The extent to which WFP's assessments influenced external decisions stemmed from the way assessment results were communicated, as well as their perceived credibility. Direct connections to external decisions are often hard to establish as ENA forms one of a number of sources relied upon; and other factors (including political and strategic priorities) have a major bearing on response decisions. In some cases, decisions – particularly donor funding decisions – clearly *precede* any formal needs analysis. Many are based on projections of future need, particularly in the case of protracted crises, although the basis for these projections is not always clear.

12. Donor representatives often claimed that WFP does not help them prioritise between contexts, pointing to the need for a common reference standard and more explicit WFP judgments on relative **priorities**. This should be done in recognition that applying absolute standards and a restrictive view of the role of food assistance, while it may help in prioritising scarce resources, may tend leave out of account non-life saving but nevertheless essential interventions, including those relating to livelihood support and child nutrition. The case for funding has to take some account of relative as well as absolute needs, as well as relevant contextual factors, if it is properly to address issues of basic human dignity.

13. Recent efforts to strengthen needs assessment in WFP have had a significant effect in building credibility. However, **trust** in WFP assessment reports is clearly still an issue. Donors expressed varying degrees of scepticism, and some felt that there was a tension between the credibility of WFP's assessments and the messages it put out through the media. Regarding the latter, there was a perceived tendency to talk up the scale or severity of a situation and WFP's own role, which was felt to be at odds with objective needs analysis. These credibility barriers appear to be overcome when a robust but constructive relationship exists between donor representatives and WFP country office staff, such that donors can 'interrogate' WFP's findings locally or be directly involved in the assessment process.

WFP staff need to have greater awareness both of the timeframes and the criteria for donor decision-making. The study found several cases where the failure to make a convincing case at the right time led to delays or the under-funding of proposals.

Justifying decisions

14. Moves by WFP towards greater **transparency** in the assessment process – notably in the practice of publishing assessment reports on the WFP website – have gone a considerable way to providing stronger justification for response decisions, as well as enhancing the influence of the assessments themselves. The lead set by WFP in this regard should be followed by others. The ability to judge an organisation's response decisions against its own analysis is an important plank of accountability. The quality of the original assessment and of subsequent analysis should feature more centrally in the **evaluation** of programme responses than they do at present.

15. From the assessment reports reviewed for the study, it is apparent that there is a need to distinguish **situational analysis** from **response option analysis** more clearly – but also to make the links between them more explicit. Assessments that are heavily geared towards a particular organisation's response options have limited potential for informing and

influencing others' response decisions, and provide a relatively weak platform for justifying the organisation's own response decisions. Demonstrating the links between situational analysis and response options is essential.

16. The question of the internal and external **demand** for information goes to the heart of the link between assessment and decision-making. There appears to be little **incentive** (and some disincentive) for WFP country programmes to **re-assess** situations or to monitor change and impact, particularly if this is likely to indicate a scaled-down programme. More generally, there appears to be little demand for information and analysis once an operation has commenced, except when a decision to continue or to exit has to be justified. That demand depends in part on the strength of management concern to ensure appropriate and justifiable decisions in relation to a given context. The success of the external influencing and justifying functions are highly dependent on the extent of external *receptivity* to the analysis, only partly dependent on the *quality* of analysis.

17. The diversity of donor practice in decision-making was found to be one of the single biggest variables in the study. Greater **harmonisation of donor decision-making** is a necessary condition for more timely and appropriate allocation of funds. The tendency to allocate funds at the time of greatest media coverage can lead to delayed response (in slow-onset crises), front-loaded funding (in rapid-onset) and under-funding in protracted or low-profile cases. The new pooled funding mechanisms (CERF, national-level funds) may help to iron out some of these anomalies, but this will in turn depend upon the availability of reliable needs analysis throughout the evolution of a crisis.

18. Overall, the study team concluded that WFP has a significant opportunity to take a lead in establishing good assessment practice across the sector. This involves a combination of rigour, adaptability to context, effective collaboration and good communication – providing timely information to decision-makers (internal and external) in a form they can use. It demands a rather less response-driven approach to assessment, and more attention to the external influencing and justifying functions than at present. Crucially, if WFP is concerned with the *quality* of its programmes, and with the question of appropriate and proportionate response, then it must find better ways of rewarding intelligent and responsive programming by its own country teams. WFP's donors, for their part, should find ways to encourage this.

Section 1

Study background and overview of issues

1.1 Study rationale, scope and method

Dissatisfaction with the quality of assessments in the humanitarian sector has led donors and agencies alike to review their practice. In the food security domain, this concern derives in part from collective failures to predict or respond adequately to food crises in Africa. Some of the doubts arise from scepticism about the validity of year-on-year appeals for large-scale humanitarian programming in situations of protracted crisis, like DRC and South Sudan, or about the evidence base on which such programmes are constructed. Some observers are concerned about the appropriateness of food aid programming in contexts where it appears not to be indicated (e.g. where local markets are functioning), or where it continues beyond the point where it is appropriate. Others are concerned about the failure to diagnose and respond to food insecurity in low-profile situations, or in those contexts (such as the Occupied Palestinian Territories) that fall below an absolute 'catastrophic' level, but which may nevertheless involve widespread human suffering. It is evident from the interviews conducted for this study that these are issues which concern staff in WFP and outside the organisation.

Increased attention is now being given to the quality of the information and analysis on which programmes and appeals for funding are based. This concern is reflected in the reforms of the UN humanitarian system, in the Good Humanitarian Donorship process and more generally in a renewed stress on demonstrably 'needs-based' responses. The ECHO-funded SENAC project in WFP is part of this trend, and represents the most thorough-going attempt at reform in this area by a single agency.

The present study was commissioned as part of the SENAC project. It arose from a growing awareness that, in trying to achieve its aim, a focus on needs assessment *methodology* alone was not enough. Assessment practice had to be driven, not by the question *how*, but the question *why*: what are assessments for, and are they serving their purpose? Questions about appropriate assessment methodology should follow from the answer to these questions.

Taking as its starting point that the main function of assessment is to inform decisions about responses to food crisis, this review considers the function and practice of needs assessment in relation to organisational decision-making in WFP, its donors and other partners.[1] It is structured around two questions:

(i) To what extent are organisational decisions about the response to food crises adequately informed by emergency needs assessment (ENA) and other analyses of context?

(ii) To what extent are ENA and other processes providing the analysis required for *timely, appropriate, proportionate* and effective responses to food crises? How could they do this better?

Answering these questions demands a causal analysis of the linkages and disconnects between assessment and decision-making, and this is the main subject of the study. The decision-making process is taken as the starting point. No prior assumptions have been made either about the extent to which decision-makers are influenced by assessment findings, or about the bearing that assessment quality has on that influence. Good needs and situational analysis is taken to be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for appropriate responses.

The study takes a broad view as to what constitutes 'needs assessment'. This is understood here as an umbrella term that includes all data gathering and analysis designed to determine the existence and nature of a food crisis, and to inform the design and implementation of related interventions.[2] This includes data and analysis from early warning and food security monitoring systems, as well as one-off surveys and formal needs assessment processes, commonly referred to as ENA or EFSA. The study reviews the link between assessment and decision-making throughout the project cycle, not just at inception.

The review is based largely on the results of four case studies conducted in the latter half of 2006.[3] These relate to Sudan (principally the Darfur crisis), Pakistan (the 2005 Kashmir earthquake), Somalia and southern Africa (principally Malawi). Each study involved travel to the regions in question and

1 The Terms of Reference for the study are included in the annex to this report.
2 What constitutes a 'food crisis' in a given context, and the way WFP and other definitions are interpreted in practice, is considered in s.1.3 below.
3 The studies have been separately documented and are available in electronic form.

interviews with key actors in WFP and other bodies. In addition, a number of other 'reference' cases were reviewed through documentation and interviews, and interviews were conducted with staff in Rome and with selected staff from key donors and partner agencies. A full list of interviewees is given at the end of the report. The report also draws on other relevant literature.

1.2 Decision-making and the function of assessment

The terms of reference for the study take the informing of decision-making about organisational response to food crisis to be the over-arching purpose of assessment.[4] But this leads to a further set of questions. First, what kinds of decision are we concerned with? For the purposes of the study, these are taken to include decisions about when, where and how to respond, on what scale, in partnership with whom and over what period. Different kinds of decision demand different levels of information. Decisions about scale and overall funding requirements often have to be made without detailed information about actual needs. Decisions about targeting, logistics and programme design can only be made on the basis of more detailed information and analysis.

Second, what constitutes an adequately informed and well-founded decision? In crises, timeframes for decision-making tend to be short; reliable information is hard to come by; situations evolve, sometimes rapidly; access may be difficult; and confusion pervades. Programmes designed and resources allocated against one set of circumstances may have to be implemented against another set – inevitably requiring decisions about re-deployment and re-prioritisation, especially where the resources available are less than originally requested.

Such responsiveness to uncertain and changing circumstances is essential to good programming. So the question of what constitutes *good enough* (rather than perfect) information and analysis on which to base a decision is crucial.[5] Sometimes this is about the robustness of predictions, since many decisions are based on a judgement about the most likely future scenarios, and this demands an analysis based on *risk*: in other words, an analysis of threats, vulnerabilities and the probability of future harm.

Risk analysis and needs assessment in these complex environments is far from being an exact science. The balance between (formal) methodological rigour and (non-formal) judgement and interpretation will depend in part on the purpose of the particular assessment. What is appropriate for informing internal decisions may carry less weight in influencing other actors, or in justifying a response decision to others. In particular, internally-oriented assessments tend to conflate situational analysis with response analysis in ways that limit the utility of the assessment for external actors. Part of the problem is that the judgements and assumptions involved in reaching a decision are often not recorded or clearly articulated.

Even where sufficient reliable information and analysis is available, it may not be the determining factor – may not even be taken into account – in decision-making. The problem of disconnect between analysis and response to food crisis has long been recognised. This is true both of the failure to act on early warning signals (Buchanan-Smith and Davies, 1995) and more generally (Darcy and Hofmann, 2003). This review attempts to determine the extent of linkage or disconnect in current practice, and the factors which appear to have most bearing on this.

Questions about assessment and decision-making cannot be divorced from the criteria for judging actual responses. In this context, we take a good response to be one that is timely, appropriate in kind, proportionate in scale and effectively carried out – judged against the aim of ensuring the short and medium-term food security of the affected population.[6] Here, organisational policy on issues such as targeting and inclusion/exclusion errors in the calculation of beneficiary numbers has a significant bearing on assessment policy. For the most part, practice in the humanitarian sector generally, and in WFP in particular, errs on the side of inclusion. Given the uncertainties inherent in the process, and the potential consequences of underestimating the requirement for assistance, we believe that this is appropriate in situations where food-related interventions are potentially life-saving – just as it may be appropriate to plan around a worse case but less probable scenario.[7] However, where numbers or resource requirements are found to have been over-estimated, it is incumbent on a responsible agency to say so.

Response decisions are not made in a policy vacuum. Pre-existing national, regional and global policies and strategies will all condition the form and scale of response. Other factors may play an even greater part: the need to be seen to respond, or the need to reach accommodation with the host government, donors and partner agencies. In the real world of organisational decision-making, these 'extraneous' factors may have as much if not more bearing on responses than needs analysis. The question of how needs assessment can provide an effective counter-weight (or correction) to other factors is therefore central. This is particularly the case where extraneous factors may skew the analysis itself; when, for example, it is not politically expedient to acknowledge the existence or scale of a food crisis. The ability to *influence* and hence galvanise appropriate responses is, we believe, one of

4 The draft WFP Emergency Food Security Assessment (EFSA) Handbook (June 2005) provides an admirably clear, but arguably too restrictive, account of the function of assessments and the kinds of decisions they are supposed to inform.

5 As WFP's ENA expert consultation in 2002 noted: 'a good assessment, done in a timely way, is more valuable than a perfect assessment [which] comes too late for an effective emergency response'.

6 Of course, there may be other relevant criteria to be applied in evaluating a response, including the question of efficiency.

7 This must be distinguished from the deliberate 'inflation' of numbers with a view to securing resources.

the most important functions of assessment and analysis. Establishing and demonstrating the validity of a given analysis in the face of competing claims or false assumptions may be the single most important purpose of an assessment.

There is also a *justificatory* function to assessment, related to credibility and accountability. Justifying a given response decision or appeal for funds to external actors requires an agency to demonstrate the credibility of its situational analysis, the appropriateness of the response in the light of that analysis and how the one follows from the other. The formal assessment report is not sufficient for this purpose: an evaluator would look for a documented rationale for the decisions that were subsequently made, and how it related to the available analysis.[8]

In summary, we suggest that the function of ENA is threefold:

- To *inform* organisational decisions about response, throughout the life of a programme.
- To *influence* others' response decisions.
- To *justify* response decisions (including exit) and appeals for funds.

In order to fulfil these functions, the assessment process has to provide an adequate basis for determining:

- Whether a food crisis exists or is imminent: its extent, nature and driving factors (diagnosis) and likely evolution (prognosis).
- Who is worst affected, and how (relative risk/vulnerability).
- What needs to happen to prevent the worse potential outcomes.
- The requirement for intervention (type, scale) in the light of government and others' capacity/will to respond, as a basis for calculating resource requirements.
- Programme design (targeting, logistics etc.).
- The appropriate role for WFP in partnership with others.

1.3 Defining and categorising food crises

In its policy paper approved by the Executive Board, WFP defines 'emergencies' for the purposes of EMOPs as:

> *urgent situations in which there is clear evidence that an event or series of events has occurred which causes human suffering or imminently threatens human lives or livelihoods and which the government concerned has not the means to remedy; and it is a demonstrably abnormal event or series of events which produces dislocation in the life of a community on an exceptional scale.*

The same directive goes on to say:

> *WFP's EMOPs will continue to be based on assessed needs, taking into account any other considerations that may be decided upon by the Board consistent with WFP's rules, regulations and mandate.*9

Thus, emergencies are not considered exclusively as food crises, but concern actual or imminent suffering or threats to life and livelihood on an exceptional scale. Second, they are seen as 'abnormal' and beyond the capacity of the government in question to deal with. Third, WFP's emergency operations will be based on 'assessed needs', but may also take into account other relevant factors. Each of these elements has a bearing on assessment practice. Assessments must be able to spot a prevailing crisis, and predict an imminent one. They must provide a basis for gauging others' capacity to respond. They must provide an understanding of context and the factors that are likely to determine the appropriate role for WFP, and the success of a particular intervention strategy.

Food security crises have been defined in various ways (Devereux and Howe, 2004), typically in terms of actual or impending famine. In this study, we have clustered crises into four main types, each of which raises particular issues for needs assessment and decision-making:

1. Rapid-onset.
2. Slow-onset or recurrent natural disasters.
3. Protracted conflict, insecurity and displacement.
4. Post-conflict, transition, return, recovery.

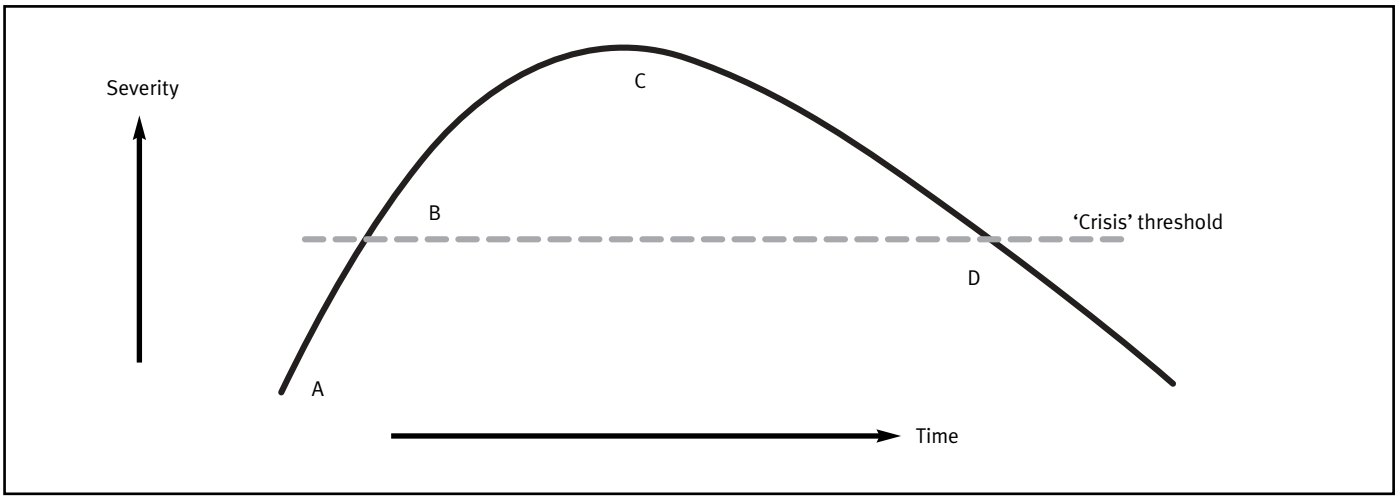
These are not mutually exclusive categories. Some situations (like Afghanistan) could be placed in either category 3 or 4, sometimes with a type 2 crisis superimposed, and subject also to type 1 disasters such as earthquakes. Sometimes different crisis types can be found in parallel in the same country. Generally, however, a given crisis can be placed within one dominant category. In each case, critical food insecurity generally exists alongside other areas of humanitarian concern, such as health and nutrition, water and sanitation, shelter and protection from violence.

In many cases, these crises happen amid pre-existing poverty and chronic food insecurity. A key question for assessment is how acute food insecurity relates to other (chronic) problems of food security and nutrition (Devereux, 2006), and at what point the need for relief intervention ceases. Various assessment parameters are relevant, including the acuteness, severity and extent of food insecurity. Devereux argues that the crucial distinction is between severe and moderate food insecurity, gauged against criteria including nutritional status and livelihood indicators.

8 It is interesting to note the observation in the TEC evaluation of the tsunami response that 'many assessments served to justify actions already underway'- de Ville de Goyet, C. and L. Morinière (2006)

9 WFP/EB.3/2004/4-F; WFP/EB.1/2005/13.

Figure 1: Slow onset crisis (time-scale in months)



No science exists for food insecurity equivalent to that of epidemiological forecasting of the progress of a disease over time in a given population. Nevertheless, it is useful to think of a 'curve' representing the evolution of a crisis over time, measured in terms of excess mortality, morbidity, acute malnutrition, livelihood impacts – or the proportion of people unable to meet their basic food requirements without external assistance or resort to damaging survival strategies. The aim of intervention can be described as being to flatten the curve, and so reduce the incidence of the outcomes of concern.[10] It may also be to shorten the length (duration) of the curve, in other words to speed recovery.

The timeliness of information or assessment has a significant bearing on the effectiveness and appropriateness of an intervention. The ability to spot a developing crisis at or before point A in the diagram is essential to prevent the evolution of a full-blown crisis. By the time points B or C have been reached, the crisis is already being gauged in terms of catastrophic outcomes. The monitoring of outcome indicators is essential for gauging severity, for effective targeting, impact assessment and deciding when to exit or scale down a programme. In some cases (Niger in 2005 is an example), programmes mounted on the basis of limited information at a point where critical thresholds have already been exceeded may result in interventions at a point closer to D in the evolution of the crisis – coinciding in the Niger case with the new harvest.

The curve is assumed to represent a deviation from a norm. In reality, the norm may itself be highly variable, and the situation may hover close to the defined 'crisis' threshold over extended periods. In practice, it is often hard to predict what form the curve is going to take, or where a particular situation sits on it at any given time. The rationale for the intervention will depend in part on the point on the 'curve' at which it is mounted. The important questions for the purposes of this study concern the information package required at different points on the curve.

In rapid-onset crises, the timeframe may be only days and weeks, and the effects of the crisis may not register as a change in anthropometric indicators. In protracted crises, the timeframe is months and years, though fluctuations may occur rapidly. Indicators may be a long way short of the 'critical' line, yet people may remain highly dependent on the continued provision of aid, and therefore constitute a high priority for ongoing assistance. The issue of *volatility* (susceptibility to sudden change) as well as measured severity is therefore important, as is relative dependence on food assistance. Understanding the effect of withdrawing assistance requires a knowledge of the options available to people. This is often a politically and socially determined question, as much as an economic one. Can people safely return to their homes? Will the local community house and feed them? In short, needs assessment – particularly in conflict-related situations – is often dependent on the quality of political and social analysis, as much as on anthropometric or economic data.

10 Of course, a crisis is not a process for which a single curve can be drawn, even at the most macro level, unless perhaps a single variable (e.g. levels of acute malnutrition) is taken as a gauge of 'severity' and plotted against time. Even then, no one curve could represent the diversity that exists within a crisis context. Nevertheless, such diagrams serve a useful schematic purpose.

Section 2

Assessment and decision-making: case study analysis

In this section, four case studies – Pakistan, Malawi, Sudan and Somalia – are analysed against the criteria set out in the previous section. We consider how the decision-making process worked in each case, and explore the linkages and disconnects between assessment practice and decision-making. The guiding question here is: how were organisational decisions about response to food crises informed by emergency needs assessment and other analyses of context?

Deciding on the appropriate role for WFP in response to a given crisis has traditionally involved answering questions about needs, capacities and resource requirements, generally framed in terms of estimated household food aid requirements. Moving from more traditional ENA to emergency food security assessment (EFSA) implies a more nuanced approach to the analysis of food crises, weighing food availability factors against questions of access, usage and nutrition, and taking account of economic and social factors at household and community level. It involves an analysis of vulnerability and capacities, and looks at the whole range of factors bearing on food security.

Box 1: Types of decision

The decision whether and how to respond involves a number of sub-decisions, each of which requires a different kind of information and analysis. The decisions we are most concerned with can be broadly grouped under the following headings:

Decisions about assessment
- When to mount a formal needs assessment
- Where and how to conduct it
- How to interpret and communicate the findings

Decisions about response
- Whether to respond – or to change or exit from an existing response
- How to respond: type (food aid +?), scale, location
- With whom and how to collaborate
- How to finance the response
- Relative priorities for resource allocation (within/between countries)
- Targeting and eligibility criteria
- Operational design
- Implementation

2.1 The Pakistan (Kashmir) earthquake

Background

The Pakistan earthquake in October 2005 was massively destructive: it killed around 73,000 people, injured another 70,000, left over 2.8 million without shelter and seriously affected access to food and water. Most of the damage was done at the outset, and subsequent interventions could only reduce people's vulnerability in the aftermath and help them to recover. Various factors affected decisions about response and needs assessment, in particular the remoteness, inaccessibility and political sensitivity of the affected areas, the timing of the earthquake (just before winter) and the government's relatively strong response capacity.

Emergency needs assessment

The first rapid needs assessment was coordinated by OCHA under the UN Disaster Management Team, and was completed within the first three days. A simple and clear methodology was adopted which, while effective under the circumstances, was not a needs assessment based on solid baseline data or field work. Rather, it was a process of needs *estimation* using existing (outdated) population data and a very rapid house–to-house damage assessment by the military. Damage to property was used as a proxy indicator of need across the board. The important role played by the Pakistani government, while advantageous in many ways, led to blanket food distributions when a more targeted approach was indicated. When food aid was subsequently halted, there was no proper re-assessment. From the outset, food was not considered a priority, and there was a discernible anti-food aid bias.[11]

Because the initial rapid methodology produced a very rough estimate of need, the actual beneficiary figures were negotiated between agencies and sectors, based largely on considerations of what funds or commodities were available and what could be moved quickly. Agency biases appeared to colour these initial decisions. For example, WFP felt that UNICEF over-emphasised the need for supplementary feeding. 'This is the reality of negotiating a multi-actor response,' one WFP official commented. In general, there was little emphasis on rigorous assessment either at the outset of the crisis or subsequently. According to one OCHA official, 'With the focus

11 For example, in the World Bank/Asian Development Bank 'Preliminary damage and needs assessment' report of 15 November 2005.

on the response surge, the lack of access, the difficulty of conditions, assessment went by the wayside'. Some rationalised this in terms of the opportunity costs involved in devoting time and resources to further assessment which could be devoted to protecting lives.

Against this backdrop, WFP's own assessment performance was relatively strong. It collaborated well in the initial rapid OCHA-led joint assessment, and subsequently with UNICEF and Oxfam.[12] Both the WFP/UNICEF and market assessments had clear ToRs, and WFP worked to broaden its analysis beyond food aid requirements, including a focus on health and nutrition through the collaboration with UNICEF, a basic analysis of livelihood patterns and of cash and food sources, and a basic market analysis. The market assessment established clear criteria for an exit strategy. That said, the follow-up to assessments was not as strong as it should have been, and the results could have been better communicated. In particular, non-food recommendations were not picked up by other actors.

The main problems with assessment generally were attributed by the study team to poor coordination of follow-up sectoral assessments, and the confusion caused by parallel UN and World Bank assessment processes.

Links between assessment and decision-making
The diagram below is a graphical representation of major decisions and the way in which they were linked (or not) to assessments. The link between the initial assessments and decision-making was strong, but grew weaker over time, and the original very broad 'guesstimates' were never properly revisited and checked through re-assessment.

WFP's own decision-making can be said to have been relatively strongly linked to assessment processes, through initial assessment (with the UN DMT) and re-assessment with UNICEF; and subsequently a market assessment and a VAM assessment, both of which helped inform the design of a PRRO. The internal 'informing' function, in other words, seemed to work well. The external 'influencing' function was much weaker: there was little link between WFP assessments and the decisions of other actors, partly because communication of the results of WFP's assessments was itself weak. Nor do the assessments in themselves provide a solid justificatory basis for the decisions taken (the extent to which the rationale for those decisions was articulated and documented in relation to the needs analysis was an issue that the study team was not able to explore further).

One theme that recurs in this and in other case studies concerns the lack of responsiveness to new information once programme implementation has begun. As some interviewees put it: 'once food began flowing, logistics took over'. When the food arrived, there was significant pressure from WFP field staff to distribute it according to plan, rather than adjusting to changing patterns of need. The information gathered by food aid monitors appears to have been under-utilised.

Some interviewees charged WFP with not listening to its implementing partners, and criticised it for over-rigid application of its targeting criteria. Some international NGO staff interviewed felt that the commodities and rations were predetermined and rigid, and did not reflect real need. More generally, many implementing partners felt there was a 'take it or leave it' relationship with WFP. Given the importance of NGOs operationally, and their role in influencing donor decisions, a closer working relationship is advised. More consultation and collaboration on assessments would be a good start.

The study team concluded that WFP did not effectively counter the prevailing anti-food aid bias, and in fact added to it at times. The case for food aid in a country with functioning markets and a cash-based economy needed to be made. Without a strong and credible joint assessment of food-related issues, WFP was unable to do this effectively. The dominant focus on logistics did not help in this respect. In the race to deliver the food, the valid concerns of implementing partners and the changing nature of the circumstances were sidelined, reinforcing the perception that WFP was serving its own interests.

2.2 Food shocks in Malawi

Background
Malawi has a history of food insecurity rooted in chronic poverty, a reliance on rain-fed agriculture and a lack of agricultural and economic diversity. The increased prevalence of HIV/AIDS and the reduced access to basic health and agricultural services add to the country's overall vulnerability to shocks. Malawi suffered two serious weather-related shocks in 2001/2 and 2004/5.

In 2001/2, a combination of factors led to critical shortages of food in markets and record maize prices, far surpassing the average family's purchasing power. At the height of the crisis, 3.2 million people were receiving food aid. The impact of the decrease in maize production was underestimated, in part because of an overly optimistic estimate of the extent to which tuber production could fill the gap. This resulted partly from a poor understanding of the relative importance of tubers at the household level.

Emergency needs assessment
The 2004/5 crisis began with poor rains early in the year. In February 2005, early warning and food security reports from MVAC (see Box 1) and FEWS NET predicted another acute food crisis, and a severe reduction in crop yields was forecast. An MVAC assessment was initiated in April 2005. The preliminary results from government crop assessment missions were

12 WFP led a joint food security assessment with UNICEF and OXFAM one month after the earthquake. This was followed by a market assessment soon afterwards. Six months later, VAM conducted a livelihood assessment to feed into the design of the new PRRO.

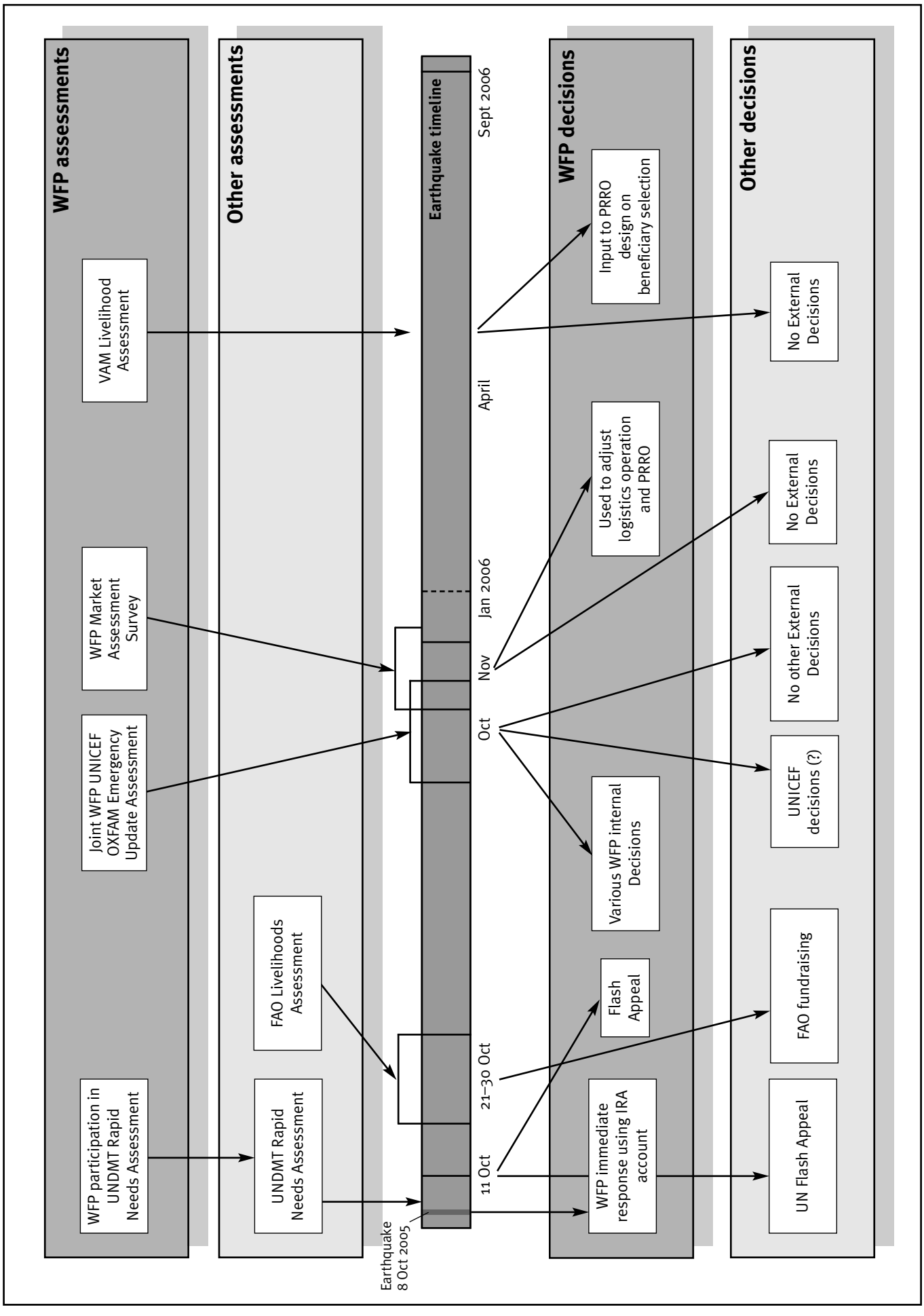


Figure 2: Assessment & decision-making in the Pakistan earthquake response

serious, with up to a 50% reduction in normal yields in some areas. However, what was not known was the impact at household level, given the other stress factors involved. In many areas, the household asset base had not fully recovered from the 2001/2 shock, and households were also under pressure from a combination of rapid population growth and the impact of HIV/AIDS. In addition, the provision of key inputs such as fertilizer was seriously delayed. The economy was also underperforming, with high inflation and interest rates.

In May/June 2005, MVAC reported two scenarios based on different projections of future market prices. The 'best case' scenario envisaged 4.2 million people 'at risk', with a 'missing food entitlement' of 269,000 MT. The worst case envisaged 4.6 million at risk, with a food gap of 414,000 MT. In November, the figures were updated to 5.07 million people affected. At this stage, the MFE was stated in food terms (335,000 MT) and in cash equivalents ($93 million).

In March 2005, the government met all the major donors, the UN, the World Bank, and the IMF, and a response package was assembled based on donor commitments and government contributions. The following August, the Malawi UN Flash Appeal was issued. However, this made no mention of the substantial donor response pledged in March. There was, recalled a representative of one major donor, 'no recognition of our pledges, just pressure. And I'm afraid it had a negative impact on the donors'. WFP was perceived as operating outside of the MVAC process, using its own tools and generating its own estimates. Donors also believed that WFP was inflating beneficiary numbers, for instance by exaggerating admittance figures into health centres. The Flash Appeal was not seen as consultative, was criticised for being short-termist rather than forward looking and did not make a convincing case. Several donors commented that it was driven more by UN resource constraints than by actual assessed need. According to one donor interviewee: 'we get this bloated shopping list with no case [made] that it is based on real needs and when we do not respond, they attack us in the press. It doesn't factor in other aid flows and is not grounded in solid needs assessment. It ends up damaging UN credibility'.

Box 2: The MVAC process

The MVAC is part of a regional structure established in 1999 by the SADC Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Sector (FANR). There is a regional VAC, and national VACs in each of the region's affected countries. Members of the regional VAC include most FANR technical units, WFP, FAO, other UN agencies, CARE, FEWS NET, SC-UK and IFRC. The national VACs are a consortium of government, NGO, UN and donor agencies. The VACs are generally perceived to be gaining strength as more agencies commit to the process and capacity is built.

The MVAC uses the Household Economy Approach (HEA) for modelling its forecasts. The assessments begin with training for staff who will take part in the field survey. Interviewers follow a basic structure, and are expected to cross-check their information on site. A range of secondary data is incorporated, and is used to triangulate field work. According to the MVAC secretariat, the aim is 'to maximize the use of existing information and survey data … while ensuring that this data reflects the situation on the ground and is internally consistent'.

WFP was also criticised for portraying the Malawian government as a victim of the crisis, rather than as an active participant in the response. In 2001/2, the humanitarian agencies were fully in control of the response. By the time of the 2005 crisis, however, the government had become an active player in, and supporter of, the VAC process, and was intent on proving that it could handle the crisis. The government was careful not to exert pressure on the MVAC, and no agency reported government manipulation of the MVAC process.

Links between assessment and decision-making

In Malawi, there is a strong connection between the ENA process – in the form of the MVAC annual needs assessment – and decision-making. The annual MVAC assessment is conducted jointly with experts from the government, the UN, donors and NGOs, under government oversight, and the initial analysis is conducted by the field teams collectively. The results of the annual assessments are immediately endorsed by all of the participants, greatly reducing the time spent in debating the interpretation of the results (a debate often complicated by political factors). While external media and political pressures have a bearing, the collaborative approach makes political influence more overt. In other countries, the technical and the political are harder to separate.

While WFP Malawi has made efforts to link the outcomes of the MVAC assessments to WFP programming, the connection is not as strong or as well-defined as it is with other stakeholders in the process. For instance, MVAC figures are used explicitly to define School Feeding geographic targeting, and in the PRRO for budget revisions. For more specific programme design purposes, however, other WFP assessment tools are used, such as the Community Household Surveys (CHS) and the JAMs. More work needs to be done to rationalise how internal WFP tools are used. Because the MVAC is viewed as overly qualitative and hence technically suspect by the regional office, opportunities for synergy and information-sharing are missed.

One particular issue with the MVAC concerns the timeliness of the information it provides. While VAC assessment information was critical in determining the scale and breadth of the crisis, it would have had more impact on decision-making had it been available earlier in 2005, when the government was meeting donors to secure initial pledges and prepare an overall budget. Subsequently, the VAC has timed its assessments so that they feed more directly into the government's budget cycle.

2.3 Displacement and protracted insecurity in Darfur, Sudan

Background

In April 2003, the SLA attacked El Fashir town, the capital of North Darfur in western Sudan. By the following September, 65,000 Darfur refugees had fled to Chad, and an estimated half a million people were in need of assistance. At the end of the year, the figures had increased to 600,000 internally displaced and one million in need. However, the Sudanese government denied international agencies access to Darfur until June 2004. When access was finally granted, over 2,000 aid workers quickly moved in. WFP led the first Emergency Food Security and Nutrition Assessment (EFSNA) in September/October, at which point the UN estimated that 1.6m people were displaced. The first WFP EMOP was prepared by the end of 2004.

Emergency needs assessment

The objectives of the 2004 EFSNA were to:

- Provide WFP and its partners with data on the food security and nutritional status of the conflict-affected population in Darfur.
- Estimate the prevalence of acute malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies among children under five and their mothers.
- Analyse changes in the profile of vulnerability of IDPs and resident populations due to the conflict.
- Determine the food security and nutritional needs of the crisis-affected population during the last quarter of 2004 and for 2005.
- Provide the basis for contingency planning and a baseline for monitoring the evolving situation.

The survey provided a range of health and nutrition data and analysis, as well as food security analysis. The report's key recommendations included:

- To provide general food rations to 1.35m IDPs.
- To provide targeted supplementary and therapeutic feeding.
- To address healthcare, water and sanitation needs in the light of high diarrhoea levels.
- To assist resident/host populations as well as IDPs through blanket and targeted food aid.
- To establish food security monitoring systems and ad hoc assessments.

Two further major studies were conducted by other actors: *Markets, Livelihoods and Food Aid in Darfur*, a joint USAID, EC and FAO assessment released in May 2005,[13] and *Livelihoods under Siege*, produced by Tufts University in June 2005.[14] Both confirmed the critical importance of food aid to the survival of much of the Darfur population. WFP has made use of these studies primarily to argue for the continuation of food aid on a large scale. The case for a response based on food aid was – and remains – very clear: food availability depends on trade, and markets were badly disrupted by the conflict. However, some questioned whether other aspects of these reports could not also usefully have been raised by WFP, particularly issues of livelihood support and protection.

A second EFSNA was conducted in late 2005. Its objectives were to:

- Provide updated information on the food security and nutritional status of the crisis-affected population in Darfur.
- Compare the current status of food security and nutrition among the crisis-affected population with 2004.
- Assess access to services and the coverage of assistance programmes in Darfur.
- Determine assistance needs for 2006.

The assessment's conclusions and recommendations included the following:

- Although there was a dramatic improvement in acute malnutrition rates among children, there was little positive change in the livelihoods of most households. Continued programmes related to food, health, water, sanitation were needed.
- Another Darfur-wide survey was needed in 2006 to measure progress and inform decision-making.
- Depending on the actual harvest, the WFP ration size should be re-adjusted from 2,300 kcal per capita per day to the 2,100 kcal standard, and the communities to be assisted should be reviewed.
- General relief food rations should be provided for approximately 1.5m IDPs (approximately one million in camps, 350,000 food-insecure and vulnerable IDPs in host communities and 200,000 non-accessible IDPs who might become reachable over the coming months).[15]

The two EFSNAs in Darfur were driven by WFP, reflecting the organisation's ability to mobilise significant human and logistical resources in a very difficult environment. Although this was partly a function of the resources it received as the biggest actor in the humanitarian response, it also reflected the agency's ability to deploy its human resources flexibly. Other agencies are not able to do this nearly as effectively. The third EFSNA, in 2006, was much more of a joint effort between WFP and UNICEF, particularly in the nutrition component.

Links between assessment and decision-making

While the 2004 EFSNA contained a range of health, nutrition and food security analysis, its greatest relevance to WFP

13 The full title is *Markets, Livelihoods and Food Aid in Darfur: Rapid Assessment and Programming Recommendations*. It was a joint USAID, EC and FAO assessment.
14 Young, H., et al. (2005)

15 One important feature of this analysis is the fact that it takes account of the needs of all those known to require assistance, even though a proportion of these were inaccessible at the time. It envisages a scenario in which the needs remain the same but greater access becomes possible. This is an important but often neglected aspect of assessment.

decision-making was in terms of the aggregate amount and composition of food aid required for different programming options. The assessment was most effective in mobilising resources. At a time of great political pressure, the preliminary findings of the 2004 EFSNA were keenly anticipated and well received when they were unveiled in Khartoum. One donor commented on the professional and succinct nature of the presentation, and the value of having the US Centers for Disease Control involved as an independent agency. The bottom line figures – population numbers, nutrition, mortality, food needs – were subsequently used by the donor.

As a programming tool, the EFSNA was generally recognised to have been much less useful. Its findings were at a very general level, and senior WFP programme staff based in Darfur did not appear to refer to or use it. Decisions about targeting and distributions made at the local/State level were based much more on field-level rapid assessments. The food security, health and nutrition data gathered had limited value when related to the causes of nutrition and food insecurity at the field level – and therefore had limited value in defining appropriate response options.

In this case, the informing of strategic-level internal decisions and the influencing of external agendas came together, at least in terms of establishing the scale and nature of the problem and in setting the parameters for response. The first EFSNA in particular had high credibility (a function of its rigour and its collaborative nature), and high visibility, through good communication. Although the process of annual assessments has had less relevance to the micro-level programming, the EFSNA can also be said to have provided a strong justificatory basis for the overall approach, and for year-on-year changes of strategy.

While the Darfur crisis has been the focus of much recent attention, there is a longer and richer history of emergency assessments and research in southern Sudan. Several interviewees from WFP, donors and other agencies pointed out that the late 1990s was a particularly rich and dynamic period for assessment-led decision-making by WFP. This period was associated with the following factors:

- A senior management, receptive to assessment information and analysis.
- Strong pressure from donors, NGOs and southern Sudanese warring factions, resulting in a recognition of the value of clearly justified decision-making.
- Large investment in internal capacity-building – management & technical staff were all required to undergo a month's assessment training and fieldwork.
- Career progression from field assessment/monitoring officers to managers.
- Strong documentation of the rationale for decision-making.
- Highly collaborative assessment processes.
- Rich livelihood-based assessment information (e.g. understanding of seasonality and the importance of wild foods).
- Livelihood-based assessment methodology.

In 2000/2001 WFP's assessment capacity collapsed. Questions about the timeliness and appropriateness of food aid are being raised in many quarters in southern Sudan. Donors and other food security agencies are concerned about WFP's assessment processes and methods, and the nature of the resultant decision-making by WFP in southern Sudan. Causes and aggravating factors of this situation include:

- High staff turnover and management changes.
- Loss of institutional memory.
- Inappropriate transfer of methodology from Darfur EFSNA to southern Sudan.
- Lack of meaningful collaboration with other food security agencies.

At a time when senior WFP managers in Khartoum are particularly exercised about dependency on food aid in southern Sudan, and the need to stimulate and rebuild local livelihoods, the agency has forgotten its own livelihood-based information base. This now lies with other actors.

2.4 Climate, conflict and state collapse in Somalia

Background
The last 15 years has been a period of severe and often turbulent civil conflict in Somalia. With no effective government, the country has very limited infrastructure and basic services, and human development indicators are extremely poor.

Somalia's landscape is largely flat and semi-arid, supporting pastoral and agro-pastoral livelihoods. The rainy seasons are the main *Gu* rains (April to June) and the secondary *Deyr* rains (October to November). Livestock – camel, cattle, sheep and goats – are the major assets for many households, and the livestock economy is closely linked to major export markets in the Middle East and Kenya. Remittances form a key part of the economy, although they are not well understood.

Besides the prevailing conflict-related insecurity, the country is prone to drought, floods, market shocks and epidemics. Recent shocks include:

- 1994 – major famine in Bay regions
- 1997/98 and 2006 – floods
- 2001/2002 and 2005/06 – drought
- 2001/2002 – the closure of El Barakat, a remittance/money transfer company
- various points since the late 1990s – the closure of Middle Eastern and Kenyan markets for livestock exports

Operating in Somalia is expensive, complex and dangerous, and most agencies have country headquarters in Nairobi. The

European Commission is the largest single donor in Somalia. USAID (Food For Peace), DfID and ECHO are also major donors. Somalia has long used the Somalia Aid Coordination Body as its main coordinating forum. However, as part of the UN reform process the humanitarian 'Cluster' approach has recently been initiated, creating a common Humanitarian Response Fund and various coordinating groups.

WFP has been active in Somalia since the collapse of the state, and has periodically had to scale up for major food-based humanitarian interventions. WFP manages a PRRO, and the recent Horn of Africa drought and emergency response was run by WFP within this programme. Programming activities/goals within the WFP PRRO include:

- Life-saving food (GFD) (targeting IDPs, destitute & extremely food insecure).
- Food for recovery (food for work).
- Selective feeding programmes.
- Emergency school feeding.
- Assistance to vulnerable groups (institutional feeding and PLWHA).

The start of the drought emergency in Somalia in 2006 coincided with the arrival of a new Country Director, which meant that management was changing just as operations were expanding and new resources were becoming available. The US quadrupled its normal funding as a result of the drought.

Emergency needs assessment

WFP's analytical and assessment capacity was limited in the period under review, and the agency has relied on the FSAU to guide its decisions on resource allocation and programming. So too, crucially, have its donors. In late 2004, a national VAM officer and a JPO with a VAM background were in post, and a full-time VAM officer was appointed in early 2006. However, limited in-house technical capacity has made it difficult for WFP to pursue programme-related analysis, and the new VAM unit is now considering how best to collect and produce information relevant to WFP's programming needs.

Links between assessment and decision-making

FSAU (with FEWSNET) began issuing warnings of impending drought in late 2005. WFP at that time engaged proactively with key donors in order to solicit funds and prepare for a response. Soon after the confirmation of the failure of the Deyr rains in October–November 2005, and the realisation that a major emergency was imminent, the FSAU brought forward and expanded its seasonal situation analysis. WFP played a full part in this FSAU-led assessment, using two Nairobi-based VAM staff (one national, one expatriate). It also used the assessment exercise to gather its own information to cross-check with the FSAU analysis.

The FSAU describes this process not as one of emergency needs assessment, but rather as a process of context and situational analysis. Nevertheless, these outputs essentially frame the resource mobilisation process for donors and agencies, and the programmatic response by implementing agencies such as WFP. However, they do not quantify the level of resources required to meet the needs implied by the analysis.

WFP was part of the field research that generated the analysis and essentially agreed with the figures produced. It then had to translate the analysis into programmatic responses. It decided that all populations in the categories of 'Humanitarian Emergency' and 'Acute Food and Livelihood Crisis' should be eligible for general emergency food distributions. This decision, made in conjunction with donors (especially US/FFP and DfID) was based on a number of factors, including:

- The lack of options in responding to a large-scale emergency in Somalia.
- The capacity of WFP to scale up relatively quickly.

Box 3: The Food Security Analysis Unit (FSAU) for Somalia

The FSAU is unusual in being an essentially independent source of food security and livelihoods information and analysis.[16] It is widely respected, and virtually all the relevant actors – donors and agencies – utilise its outputs to inform their decisions about resource allocation and programming.

The FSAU's main activities are:

- Two seasonal situation analyses, which provide a detailed food security and livelihoods analysis and a framework for possible responses. (The FSAU stresses that these are not needs assessments in the sense of prescribing response options.)
- Monthly food security and nutrition bulletins.
- Participation in ad hoc emergency needs assessments.

The FSAU's analysis has significant limitations: it is relatively broad in nature, compared to the location-specific information needs of agencies, and it depends on unreliable official population data. But for all its limitations, the FSAU has by far the greatest capacity for food security and livelihoods information collection and analysis. Its Integrated Phase Classification system is currently generating a great deal of interest. This involves categorising areas into one of five food security states, ranging from general food security or chronic food insecurity, through acute food and livelihood crisis, to humanitarian emergency and finally famine/catastrophe. A risk map of the context is then created, on the basis of current and predicted severity. For an illustration of the application of this system see Box 5 in section 4 below.

16 Some may question this independence, pointing to the potential for 'interference' by the EC, its main donor, or by the FAO. While this may have some force, the FAO and FSAU management in the recent Phase IV stressed that the FSAU's integrity depends on its independence and that it should be allowed to operate as such.

- The difficulties in distinguishing between different groups in terms of targeting and distribution.

Most actors interviewed for the case study had no major concerns about the scale of the WFP response, though one donor did suggest that food aid should be restricted to the Humanitarian Emergency category.

The FSAU's analysis works on proportions of the 'official' population falling into different categories of food insecurity. It does not estimate actual populations affected. This limitation is frequently mentioned as a problem for implementing agencies, which have to adjust FSAU-determined population estimates, used for planning purposes, with actual population estimates, determined after operational assessments or after implementation has actually begun. An operational plan is made, based on the FSAU analysis, and it is then transformed into a distribution plan on the basis of available resources, the distribution of territory between different food aid agencies and the realities of programming and targeting on the ground – including local social and political factors and problems of access. Distribution plans are inevitably changed from round to round, as resources arrive later or in different amounts than planned, as new information on needs becomes available, or as access changes.

Post-distribution monitoring by WFP and other actors in Somalia is weak, although new systems are being developed. This is partly a function of the security context, although there are examples of reasonable project monitoring by different organisations. It is therefore difficult to judge the impact of food and other interventions on the ongoing food security and nutrition context, in order to complement and refine the FSAU's seasonal analysis.

Section 3

Institutional decision-making and its drivers

3.1 Decision-making in WFP

The decision-making process

The formal decision-making process in WFP in response to new food crises is clear. WFP Country Offices are required to monitor developments affecting food security in their respective countries, with a focus on access to food by the poorest strata of the population. WFP headquarters and Regional Bureaux also monitor the situation globally and regionally. When a situation looks threatening, the WFP Country Director aims to establish, through consultations with government authorities, other agencies and donors, the nature and scale of the problem. He or she determines whether the situation warrants a WFP emergency response. A key component of this process is determining the national capacity and will to respond.[17] In order to proceed to a response, the Country Director must obtain a government request soliciting WFP emergency assistance. In cases where a territory may not be controlled by a recognised government, the government request is substituted by an appeal issued by the UN Secretary-General.

In order to establish whether the situation meets the requirements of WFP's own definition of an emergency requiring a WFP response (see 1.3 above), an assessment of needs is required. WFP's policy statement on ENA[18] (para. 10) stresses the central role of the Country Office in this process:

> *It is particularly important to recognize that emergency needs assessment is not just a matter of missions: it involves working to ensure that WFP country offices are able to keep track of needs as part of their core function, knowing who is hungry, why they are hungry and where they are, and ensuring that vulnerability analyses are integrated into needs assessment mechanisms.*

The preparation of an emergency response proposal (EMOP) requires detailed information on needs, demographics, dietary habits and coping mechanisms, in addition to an analysis of government willingness and capacity to respond to the emergency with its own resources, actions taken by donor countries and other organisations and coordination arrangements at national and local level. The EMOP also requires a logistics plan to procure and deliver the required volume of food commodities within the planned feeding period; an analysis of the capacity of WFP's cooperating partners to receive, store and distribute WFP commodities; and a budget plan justifying the costs of food, transport, handling, storage, distribution, equipment and personnel. The personnel requirement includes all those needed to manage the various elements of the programme, as well as the capacity needed to update needs assessments, monitor the end-use of WFP-supplied commodities and report on the work. Much of this information should already be available in the form of contingency plans, though these will inevitably need updating.

The preparation of an EMOP document is led by the Country Director. In many Country Offices there is insufficient capacity to prepare an emergency response document, and so Country Directors call on assistance from Regional Bureaux and Headquarters technical units (ODAN, VAM, Nutrition), which deploy teams, usually within days, to the Country Office concerned. Once compiled, a draft of the EMOP document is submitted to the Programme Review Committee (PRC), which is chaired by the Regional Bureau Director with a Secretariat provided by the Office of the Associate Director of Operations (OD/Rome). The Secretariat circulates the draft document to PRC members at Headquarters and the Regional Bureau. Members of the Committee have five working days to review the document before discussing it in a teleconference meeting between the Country Office, Regional Bureau and Rome. The Committee considers the need for and relevance of WFP assistance, the feasibility of the operation, funding options, logistics issues, budget and cost, performance indicators and protection and security issues.[19] The main issues arising are recorded in a note, and the CD is expected (but not obliged: the PRC is an advisory body) to reflect these observations in the final draft emergency document before submitting it to the Regional Director and the Director of Operations (Senior Deputy Executive Director, OD) for their clearance. Once cleared, the draft document is submitted to Office of the Executive Director for final review before signature by the Executive Director and FAO Director-General. Pending the completion of the process, the Country Director has the authority to approve an immediate response operation costing up to $500,000 to start relief assistance, using WFP reserved funds under the Immediate Response Account.

17 WFP (ODAN) is currently preparing guidelines to improve analysis of national response capacity

18 WFP/EB.1/2004/4-A

19 The PRC process is currently under review, including the way assessment links to programme design

The implementation of each WFP Emergency Operation is kept under ongoing scrutiny by the Country Office and the Regional Bureau concerned. Prior to the completion of the Emergency Operation, the Country Director, in consultation with the Regional Director, determines whether to:

(i) close (exit) the EMOP at the foreseen completion date, or
(ii) extend its duration without committing additional resources, or
(iii) extend it through a budget revision not exceeding 10% of food costs originally budgeted for, or
(iv) seek approval for a new phase of the same EMOP (expansion), or
(v) replace the EMOP by a new PRRO.

The approval process of PRROs follows the same procedure described above for the approval of emergency operations. However, the final approval is granted by the Executive Director for a PRRO committing up to $20 million for food costs or by the WFP Executive Board for a PRRO committing over $20 million. FAO is not involved in the PRRO approval process.

Evidence from studies conducted by Groupe URD for WFP of the PRROs in Afghanistan, Colombia and Laos suggests that it is not yet standard practice to undertake in-depth assessments to inform new PRROs.[20] Given the scale of this component of WFP's programming, this is of particular concern.[21]

Factors affecting WFP decisions

The above describes the formal process for deciding on major new emergency programmes or PRROs. In practice, the decision-making process may be less neat. The CD has a number of factors to weigh up, including pressure from the Regional Bureau or Rome, the need to maintain a good working relationship with the government and the positions of the major donors. Often, the WFP office will be part of a collective process of assessment and review of food security, as well as a collaborative response process, and its autonomy and independence of view may be tempered by the need to reach and maintain consensus. The CDs interviewed said that their own assessments were substantially influenced by the views of host governments and donors. In one sense, this is quite proper: assessment has to take account of others' responses. But there is some concern that objectivity is lost, and that WFP needs to maintain its ability to read and respond to the food security situation as it judges it to be, rather than what is palatable to host governments or donors. The views of partner NGOs seemed to be taken less into account, and they do not seem to be consulted to any great degree.

> *'The most common question in the Executive Board is "Why do we need food aid? Why is food the answer in this situation?". WFP must invest core funding in producing credible assessments that clearly justify the role and detail the impact of food aid.* Senior WFP regional official

An institutional judgement based on formal needs assessment is increasingly central to the formal WFP decision-making process,[22] though much still depends on the individual judgement of the Country Director. The CD is often heavily dependent on the quality of the assessment and the judgement of the individual assessors. The make-up of the assessment team is therefore crucial, as are the programme 'biases' of the individuals concerned.

As the relevant policy document stipulates,[23] factors other than people's assessed needs are taken into account in deciding how to respond – most importantly, the capacity and will of others to respond, including NGO partners. But interviewees pointed out that these other factors are not always explicit, nor are they always related to the issue of needs. Two main 'extraneous' factors seem to be at work here. The first concerns the political and strategic considerations of governments and donors (see below). The second is the question of incentives and rewards. As one staff member put it: 'no-one in WFP is rewarded for suggesting a smaller programme'. In general, most of those interviewed felt that the incentives were in favour of larger rather than smaller programmes, and continuing rather than winding down existing programmes.

The most tangible aspect of this question relates to Country Office budgets. In many countries, WFP needs to maintain an active presence to be able to respond without going through the cycle of building up and then dismantling its capacity. While capacity-building of the host government should mean that dependence on WFP is reduced, in practice local capacity is often quickly outstripped by the scale of the emergency. WFP is expected to respond and to do so quickly, yet has very limited core funds to sustain ongoing operations.

The 'core' budget of a typical Country Office covers the salary of the country director plus an allocation of US $200,000 to meet local staff salaries and operating costs. All other operational or recurrent costs are covered by fees related to the cost of mounting specific programmes – the direct support costs (DSC). Formerly, all DSC were pooled centrally in Rome and allocated strategically. This allowed WFP to keep a presence in key strategic areas even without an ongoing food aid operation. Now, a percentage of the administrative overhead on each tonne of food aid (the indirect support costs) goes to cover costs at headquarters, regional and liaison offices, and country offices; while the DSC remains within the Country Office that 'earned' it. This provides an apparent incentive for Country Offices to press for large-scale

20 *Synthesis of real time reviews of selected food aid programmes in Afghanistan, Colombia and Laos*, Groupe URD, March 2006.
21 The ratio of expenditure on PRROs compared to EMOPs is in the order of 4:1 based on current commitments.
22 An Operations Division directive (OD 2004/003) now states that assessments are required for the justification of all humanitarian projects/operations.
23 WFP/EB.1/2005/13.

food aid operations. Having scaled up, it is then hard to scale down again, particularly when this involves making staff redundant. There are no obvious rewards or positive incentives for staff to down-size their programmes, to have a clear exit strategy or to reassess situations once a programme has been initiated. Despite the existence of a policy directive requiring re-assessment,[24] there is an apparent disincentive to do so if the likely outcome points to a scaled-down programme. If WFP is concerned with the quality of its programmes – and with the question of appropriate and proportionate response – then it must find better ways of rewarding intelligent programming, rather than simply rewarding a capacity to distribute food aid on a large scale.

It should be noted that the study team found little beyond anecdotal evidence that programme size had *in fact* been inflated or programme duration unduly extended. The observations above should therefore be taken as referring to potential (structural) incentives and disincentives, rather than as a comment on actual practice.

3.2 Donor decision-making

'Need is what donors believe it to be' – UN official

Background and general issues

Donor decision-making practice is highly diverse, and space does not permit a detailed account of the various processes by which donors decide on crisis response. We limit our general analysis to some of the common features of those processes, and the ways in which they are influenced by needs assessment, as this has a critical bearing on the allocation of resources within and between crisis contexts. More detailed attention is given to the practice of the two biggest donors, the US and EC.

This discussion should be located in a broader understanding of shifting donor policy in relation to food aid. Overall US food aid deliveries have been steadily declining from an annual average of approximately 7 million tonnes per year by the end of the 1980s to approximately 4.2 million MT in FY 2005.[25] EU food aid contributions, meanwhile, declined from 2.6 MT in 1996 to 1.4 MT in 2005. Meanwhile, the percentage of food aid allocated to emergencies has increased,[26] and has remained broadly consistent over the past few years. Food comprises by far the largest share of commitments to humanitarian appeals (55% of donor commitments to CAP appeals between 2000 and 2005). The US remains the largest provider of food aid: in 2005, it accounted for around 45% of all emergency food aid. A further 20% came from the EC and EU member states, and around 10% from China. Around 75% of food aid is managed by WFP.[27]

These figures should be read against an upward trend in overall emergency funding and an apparent upward curve in the incidence and severity of crises. Climate change projections indicate that this trend is likely to continue. Given relatively static budgets for food, donors place particular emphasis on the ability of WFP and others to prioritise on the basis of relative severity, within and between contexts. This emphasis can be read in two ways. Seen from one perspective, it is a call for greater consistency and precision in needs analysis, to allow rational judgements about comparative needs and targeting. Seen from another perspective, it is a function of under-funding and an attempt to rationalise under-resourcing of emergency appeals. In any case, resources are in fact limited, making difficult choices inevitable. WFP has to be able to provide a disaggregated and prioritised picture of needs, while making the case for resourcing of a broad spectrum of interventions that go beyond a life-saving rationale. In particular, the case for livelihood support and social protection needs to be more clearly articulated, especially where impoverishment threatens to result in high levels of vulnerability. There is a danger of 'inflation' of needs analysis resulting from the perceived requirement to justify interventions in life-saving terms.

Various features of donor decision-making have a bearing on the question of linkage with needs assessment. One is the fact that the decision-making cycles of donors are not synchronised with each other, making it difficult for agencies to provide information when it is needed. Donor cycles are often out of step with seasonal calendars, causing problems in responding to production-related crises. So, for example, USAID requires information on projected needs in August/September in order to make its geographic allocations. This works for Southern Africa, but falls mid-season in East and West African agricultural cycles. Even with flexible reallocation of resources, the demand for information comes at a time when scenarios (and projected needs) may be highly uncertain.

Another important feature of donor decision-making concerns the continued financing of *existing* programmes, year on year. Such allocations appear to account for the majority of funds allocated each year.[28] Here more than in any other area, the review team found scepticism among donors concerning WFP's analysis, but also an acknowledgement of their own relative neglect of this issue. The need to justify continued programming, or to design appropriate phase-out of programmes, highlights the importance of adequate re-assessment. The reluctance to reassess noted above in relation to WFP may also apply to donors, though perhaps more for reasons of institutional inertia and a desire to maintain a programming presence in a particular country than thanks to any particular incentives or disincentives. However, the review team did not find the evidence to determine this one way or the other.

24 'Assessment should be regarded as an ongoing country office responsibility; systematic re-assessment of needs is therefore essential to inform and adjust programming.' WFP/EB.1/2004/4-A

25 Hanrahan, Charles and Carol Canada, *International Food Aid: U.S. and Other Donor Contributions: CRS Report for Congress*, updated 2 May 2005.

26 Approximately 76% of food aid was for emergencies in 2005 – FFP official, 24 July 2006. For the past 4–5 years, almost all development food aid has been channelled through NGOs rather than WFP.

27 Figures taken from Global Humanitarian Assistance 2006 – Development Initiatives (drawing on data from INTERFAIS).

28 While it has been difficult to obtain figures on this, one major donor representative estimated the proportion of funds allocated to continuing programmes at around 70% of total funding.

The current appeals process – revolving around the annual CAP (with mid-term revisions) and Flash Appeals – has a number of well-documented problems. Most donors seem to depend more on the information and analysis provided in appeals documents than on the more detailed assessment reports on which they are based. However, the larger donors make their own investigations. One major donor representative at headquarters level said that he disregarded what was presented in WFP appeals, looking to other sources of information (including analysis from WFP) in making decisions.

The trust issue cuts both ways. As one senior regional UN official commented: 'If you know that you will only get 30–40% of what you request, you will guess high. We are also at the mercy of donor politics which is the main driver of what they are going to give'. Such second-guessing, while it may be understandable, is in some cases clearly having a distorting effect on needs analysis, further undermining the confidence of donors in funding proposals. Resolving these issues of trust and credibility will require closer dialogue between donors and operational agencies, both at headquarters and field levels. At an international level, the Good Humanitarian Donorship process, with its emphasis on needs-based allocations, has an important role to play. At the field and regional levels, the specialist staff deployed by major donors have a vital role in increasing trust through closer collaboration in the process of analysis and prioritisation.

USAID

USAID's Office of Food for Peace (FFP) changed its process for allocations in 2007 to better reflect the way the US government funds food aid, and to take advantage of advances in early warning, with the goal of ensuring that food aid arrives before the time of peak need.

The allocation process begins at the start of the financial year in October, with a bid for funds by USAID[29] to Congress and to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). FFP usually receives around $1.2 billion per year in appropriations. A certain amount is set aside for non-emergency grants. For emergency allocations, FFP first projects the timing and level of funding availability throughout the year. In addition to the initial appropriations, an extra $600 million is usually available at different points during the year, mostly through supplemental appropriations or draw-downs on reserves (usually $350–450 million). As a result, the timing and level of up to half of all funding is not definitively known at the beginning of the year, but must be estimated based on financial calculations and political judgements.

Against projected funding, FFP outlines needs by country for current emergencies by identifying (i) the total level of projected needs for the coming year based on appeals and discussions in the field with key stakeholders, including WFP, and (ii) the timing of peak needs based on hunger seasons and pre-positioning requirements before rainy seasons. FFP then makes initial country allocations, leaving some funds unallocated. Each month, FFP staff meet to review allocations in the light of adjustments in available funding, changes in needs based on pipeline updates and field reporting and six-month forward projections derived from Famine Early Warning System Network assessments and other reporting. There is an evident trade-off between flexibility and predictability of funding. Rather than publicly 'pledging' funds for a given crisis, as other donors do, USAID's commitments are based on evolving needs and funding availability as a crisis progresses. Unlike the EU, USAID pledges are not firm until the contract is signed.

Given the large proportion of WFP food aid resources that comes from the US and the general downward trend in food aid allocation, it is critical that WFP staff are fully aware of the mechanics and timing of the US decision-making process – and consider how they can best help to shape it.

The evidence suggests that this awareness is sometimes lacking. USAID officials bemoaned the lack of prioritisation by WFP in presenting its funding appeals, and the lack of awareness of the forward planning required by budgetary and logistics processes. They were often 'screaming at WFP to get assessment information in early so we can bid against it'. The 2006 drought in the Greater Horn of Africa was given as a particular example of what was perceived to be a failure to deliver timely information. These problems are now reported to be easing. The new procedures introduced in 2007 have meant that the process is now more regular, forward-looking and transparent, with regular monthly FFP–WFP conference calls and new FFP planning spreadsheets shared with WFP after each monthly allocation meeting. Following bilateral meetings in April 2007, FFP provided notes on funding priorities and asked that they be distributed to WFP offices around the world. WFP's Washington office plays a key coordinating role in implementing the new process.

The first imperative for Food for Peace is to have three to six months' advance notice in order to allow for the procurement and transportation of food aid.[30] Secondly, while FFP begins its country by country allocation in October, the results of many of the annual harvest assessments are not available until December, January or February. While it may not be possible to change the need for post-harvest assessments, there are many ways of providing information on the overall situation much earlier, for example through a strong contingency planning system (as in the case of Ethiopia in 2002/3), a livelihoods-based early warning system that is predictive (e.g. FSAU), or a rapid pre-harvest assessment or mid-harvest system. In short, the information system must be tailored to the needs of decision-makers.

29 The Food for Peace office is responsible for programming emergency (Title II) food aid.

30 Food aid shipments from the US take an average of five months to reach their destination (Barrett and Maxwell, 2005), though this has improved with the establishment of new regional warehouses.

The problem of the lead time for food shipments – which may be five months or more – means that what is required is less a process of needs *assessment*, and more one of needs *prediction*. One senior FFP official used a baseball metaphor: 'We have to make the decision to swing while the pitcher is still walking to the mound', a decision based on vulnerability analysis and early warning information, largely from FEWS. To respond to subsequent changes in need and priority requires budgetary and logistical flexibility. As the same official said: 'sixty percent of our shipments bound for pre-positioning facilities are diverted en route to areas of greater priority'. Again, ensuring that such decisions are made appropriately requires robust and timely information and analysis.

Consistent and timely pipeline information is also critical. USAID works in a constrained operating environment, faced with dwindling resources, increasing demands and political/ bureaucratic barriers. The most useful pipeline information for USAID includes information on what other donors have contributed and are planning to contribute. Such information would be much more influential with decision-makers than, for example, WFP's current media strategy, which seems to so aggravate USAID officials. A positive example is the WFP Sudan country programme, which provides pipeline information with overall updates to USAID every two weeks. The FFP desk officer has also set up a monthly telephone conference which has greatly facilitated information flows and mutual understanding.

EC/ECHO

The basic budgeting process for food assistance within the EC is similar to that of the US. An annual budget for global food aid is approved the Humanitarian Assistance Committee (HAC). ECHO holds both a general humanitarian and a food aid budget line, but food aid is seen as 'integral' to humanitarian assistance generally. This marks a departure from the previous system, where the emergency food aid budget line sat with the EuropeAid Cooperation Office (EC AIDCO), and so was managed separately from the humanitarian programme. The budget line and responsibility for all emergency food aid programming by the Commission has recently been transferred to ECHO and the new Food Aid and Disaster Preparedness Unit. Current practice is therefore in a state of transition.

The annual ECHO aid strategy sets the basic framework for decisions, along with the 1996 Food Aid and Humanitarian Aid Regulations. Recommendations for funding are made by ECHO's geographical units (the country/regional missions and the regional desks in Brussels), based on appeals and proposals received, and the Food Aid and Disaster Preparedness Unit decides on allocations accordingly. Initial allocations are made on the basis of projected needs, and this projection is substantially shaped by information from WFP (its 'Blue Book').

The EC funds food aid programmes in around 25 countries annually, and aims to be responsive to needs as they develop rather than pre-allocating large blocks of funding. It has a Global Needs Assessment tool, which uses a system of weighted indicators to rank countries according to relative severity/priority year on year. Related to this is a system for assessing 'forgotten emergencies'. In the budget allocation process, ECHO now asks its regional offices for quarterly projections of needs.

At headquarters level, ECHO relies heavily on the advice of its field representatives. It also seems to rely more on the UN CAP/CHAP documents than USAID, and there is less direct scrutiny of WFP's assessment reports (although one official commented that the absence of an assessment was given as a reason not to fund – 'let's wait and see'). This reflects a relative lack of specialist capacity in ECHO Brussels. In addition, ECHO does not have the equivalent of FEWS to advise it. Set against this, ECHO is building its own assessment capacity by recruiting food security specialists to regional support offices and building up a network of external experts. In addition, more than other donors, ECHO tends to look to its NGO partners for their assessment of a situation.

Asked for examples of assessment practice, one official cited the VAM process in Georgia. On the other hand, the same official commented that 'we really had to push for a Caucasus assessment. WFP had been doing the same thing since 2001, were struggling to raise funds and realised they had to do a new assessment'. ECHO had delayed its funding decision pending this assessment, but it was postponed several times ('partly for security, partly bureaucratic reasons'). When it was finally undertaken, in August 2006, the results were not available until November. This was too late for the funding decision, which had to be taken without it. Even then, there was a lack of confidence in the results: the assessment was done in summer so that school feeding could not be checked, resulting in some 'very odd' results. The assessment had to be repeated. Overall, both the process and results in this case were unconvincing, though ECHO agreed with the general thrust of the eventual assessment, which indicated a scaling down of food aid. In the case of Afghanistan, ECHO used the WFP appeal as a starting point, but given the lack of data it asked NGO partners to do surveys to flesh out the detail. Officials noted what they called a 'lack of coordination' of food security information systems (WFP, FEWS, FAO, national surveillance systems). They also asked why Rome was not insisting on re-assessment in cases like those cited here.

ECHO looks to its NGO partners for information, and those interviewed felt that WFP should be much more responsive to situational feedback from its NGO implementing partners than it was. In the case of rapid onset disasters, officials said they did not wait for WFP's analysis, but instead would use their own field experts. By way of general comment, staff in Brussels said 'we want to be able to rely on WFP assessments' – hence the funding of the SENAC initiative. While appreciation was expressed for the progress made to date, some areas still needed work. WFP was stronger on

quantitative analysis than qualitative, and this needed to be rebalanced. There was also said to be a need for stronger contextual and political analysis.

Other donors

Interviews with donors other than the US and EC revealed a variety of approaches and driving factors, though with a number of common elements. In the UK, DfID aims to provide complementary resources to 'lubricate' the humanitarian system, and adopts a comparatively flexible approach to funding – including through pooled funding mechanisms (the CERF and country-level funds). Factors influencing DfID's funding decisions include policy positions and public service agreements, country office strategies, questions of good governance and historical ties with former colonies. To a large extent, the type of crisis determines the funding source. Slow-onset crises in chronically food-insecure countries – where country offices tend to have relatively strong institutional memory – will draw on existing country budgets. The budgets for these offices are constructed according to annual budgeting processes, themselves a function of political concerns, forecasts of needs and other factors. Sudden-onset or unanticipated crises fall under a different, centralised humanitarian budget line through the Conflict, Humanitarian and Security Department. The extent of pre-allocation of funds in DfID is limited, there is no set contribution target (though a guide figure of 10% was mentioned) and DfID tends to stress the 'comparative advantage' of its assistance. It aims to release initial tranches quickly, and then adjust as more information becomes available.

The DfID staff interviewed saw ENAs and CFSAMs as part of a process that was too 'front-loaded'. DfID is pushing for more systematic tracking of needs and response impact over time. The sophistication of food security information systems and analysis needs to be balanced against the reality of best estimates and approximations. In general, those interviewed felt that agencies needed to get 'smarter' in their dealings with key donors, based on a better understanding of the decision-making process.

Various factors drive the food aid allocations made by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). One is the requirement to meet its obligations under the Food Aid Convention. Another is its commitment to the principles articulated in the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative; particularly Principle 6, which calls upon donors to "allocate humanitarian funding in proportion to needs and on the basis of needs assessments". In attempting to do this, CIDA relies heavily on assessments done by WFP and on other sources including FEWSNET and GIEWS. Essentially, allocations are determined on the basis of WFP's needs assessments and pipeline shortages, within the limits of total funding allowable to any one operation.

CIDA's food aid funding is primarily provided to two partners: the World Food Programme and the Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGB). At the start of the fiscal year, CIDA is allocated a limited food aid budget (covering both emergency and development programming) but it is often supplemented with further funds throughout the year. The fact that the food aid budget is not fully determined at the start of the year presents a challenge for predictability of funding.

Because of the central importance that WFP's assessments play in CIDA's allocation process, CIDA has provided support to the SENAC project and has also increasingly provided un-earmarked allocations (for refugee and emergency operations) to allow WFP to allocate resources where they are most needed.

CIDA is also looking at ways to improve its internal allocation process. It is in the process of developing and refining a tool to provide a common analytical framework for use by CIDA staff to help gauge the severity of a crisis and give some guidance vis-à-vis an appropriate level of response. This tool has been developed both to allow CIDA to be more consistent with its GHD commitments to respond according to need, while also creating a transparent mechanism which should make clear the factors underlying recommendations made by Agency.

Factors influencing donor decision-making

The cases examined for this study show that donor decision-making is influenced by credible assessments, where the response analysis clearly follows from the analysis of context and where potential institutional bias is countered by a combination of robust methodology and collaborative assessment processes. The EFSNAs undertaken in Darfur are a strikingly successful example of this, even if the political and other factors more or less guarantee funding, and the case for large-scale food aid is self-evident. But donors are not only interested in the annual EFSNA; they are monitoring and reporting on the impact of their resources throughout the year in order to justify the continuation of funding. They do this both through their partners (FEWSNET, NGOs, etc.) and through staff employed specifically to gather information and follow the evolution of a crisis.

Donors have to make a range of decisions: how much to allocate to which crises, what forms of intervention to fund, which partners to fund, for how long. The extent to which these decisions are based on strategic as opposed to contingent or opportunistic factors depends on issues like the timeframe of the crisis and the nature of the donor's previous involvement in the country in question.

From the evidence of the case studies and interviews conducted for this study, the main factors influencing donor decision-making can be categorised as follows:

- Credible, collaborative needs and capacities analysis.
- Existing policy frameworks and strategic plans, and a history of previous engagement.
- Resource availability and budgetary constraints.
- Political and media factors (profile, strategic interest, etc.).

- The quality of proposals received and of potential partners.
- The response of other donors, pipeline projections etc.
- Judgments about efficiency, security and potential impact.

Some of these factors are clearly linked. The availability of extra-budgetary resources is often a function of media coverage and political attention, for example. The case studies suggest that needs analysis is sometimes coloured by resource availability or by political factors (e.g. in the analysis of scenarios). At different times, these various factors appear to carry different weight in the decision-making process.[31] More attention is paid to the analysis of needs and capacities in situations where other factors weigh less heavily; in other words, a more compelling case has to be made for funding the more difficult or lower-profile crises. Recent examples are Niger and the Sahel in 2006, and Chad and the Central African Republic at the time of writing. New pooled funding mechanisms may help to offset this, and funding for 'forgotten emergencies' is an explicit part of the rationale for the revamped CERF. Discussions are taking place amongst the major humanitarian donors under the Good Humanitarian Donorship banner about ways to ensure more needs-based allocations.

Decisions about the appropriate form of response may be made on the basis partly of formal policy positions. ECHO, for instance, has for many years had an explicit policy of not providing food aid in kind, and USAID's preferred modes of operating are to some extent legislatively determined. A pro- or anti-food aid bias on the part of donors was noticeable in a number of the cases considered, and quite dogmatic assumptions about food aid were apparent in cases like the Pakistan earthquake. These positions, as much as consideration of food access and market factors, appeared to determine the choice of intervention.

3.3 Other decision-making processes

While not the focus of this study, there are a number of decision-making processes other than those of WFP and its donors that need to be considered in this context. Except in the most dysfunctional states, the most important concern the host government, whose capacity and willingness to act largely determines the scale of unmet need, and which sets the framework within which international interventions are undertaken. Access may be restricted, particularly in conflict situations; political factors may determine the extent to which a food crisis is acknowledged, who and how many are said to be in need, and the requirement for external assistance. Many examples can be given, from Sri Lanka to North Korea to Zimbabwe, where 'need' has been a political construct or a matter for negotiation with the host government, rather than a subject of objective assessment. It has long been recognised that food aid in these cases may be used as a political instrument (by host and/or donor governments) in ways that are at odds with the principle of impartial assistance given according to need. Even in those cases where the government is openly seeking cooperation with the international community, the extent and nature of stated need may be heavily influenced by local and national political factors.[32] Part of the function of assessment in such contexts is to counter political or ideological bias on the part of host or donor governments, just as it may help counter institutional biases on the part of the agencies involved. The particular issue here for WFP is how best to work with the government in the analysis of needs, while maintaining objectivity and independence, particularly in contexts like Ethiopia where government ownership of the assessment process is strong. We return to this question in the next section, and also to the wider question of collaborative assessment processes.

The assessments conducted by NGOs often perform a significant external influencing function as well as an internal informing function. The relationship between decision-making in WFP and donors, on the one hand, and their implementing partners, on the other, is complex and diverse. NGOs are particularly reliant on external resources for food aid programming – both in financial and logistical terms – and many have a symbiotic relationship with WFP in this regard. WFP in turn depends heavily on the local delivery capacity of INGOs, and will often share responsibility for geographic coverage with one or more of the major non-governmental agencies. To that extent at least, institutional decision-making processes are inter-related, albeit often less well coordinated than they should be. In Somalia in 2006, for example, three main agencies involved – WFP, CARE and ICRC – found it difficult to agree on the timing and targeting of food aid. Relations between the three agencies were often tense and difficult. In subsequent food aid operations, differences arose over the merits of air drops, with WFP in the end accepting the arguments against this approach. While differences of view will inevitably arise, better mechanisms are needed for quickly resolving them or reaching workable compromises.

> *'Our first encounter with WFP was when they asked us to distribute food by saying "we have 14 vehicles of food – go and distribute". When we wanted to assess they said, "all our Rubb Halls are full of food so just go". We decided we must assess but WFP was not interested in joining us. We worked out a plan based on our house-to-house assessment which WFP initially accepted, but then they said they had to go with the military's figures and made changes without using our information. WFP did not assess themselves nor were they interested in doing so. It was clear to us that assessments were not driving the decisions.'*
> *NGO implementing partner*

31 For an analysis of donor behaviour and the factors that appear to determine it, see Smillie and Minear, *The Quality of Money: Donor Behaviour in Humanitarian Financing* (2003).

32 See for example Haan, Majid and Darcy, *A review of emergency food security practice in Ethiopia* (ODI/WFP 2005), p. 13.

Section 4

Current assessment practice and the link to decision-making

This section reviews current assessment practice against the criteria for good crisis response. The guiding question here is whether ENA and other processes provide the analysis required for responses that are timely, appropriate, proportionate and effective. The section considers what the case studies tell us about what constitutes an appropriate assessment process in relation to the four crisis types identified above. It considers the ways in which assessment practice could be improved so as to strengthen the link with decision-making – including questions of process, methodology and communications.

4.1 Assessment approach and process

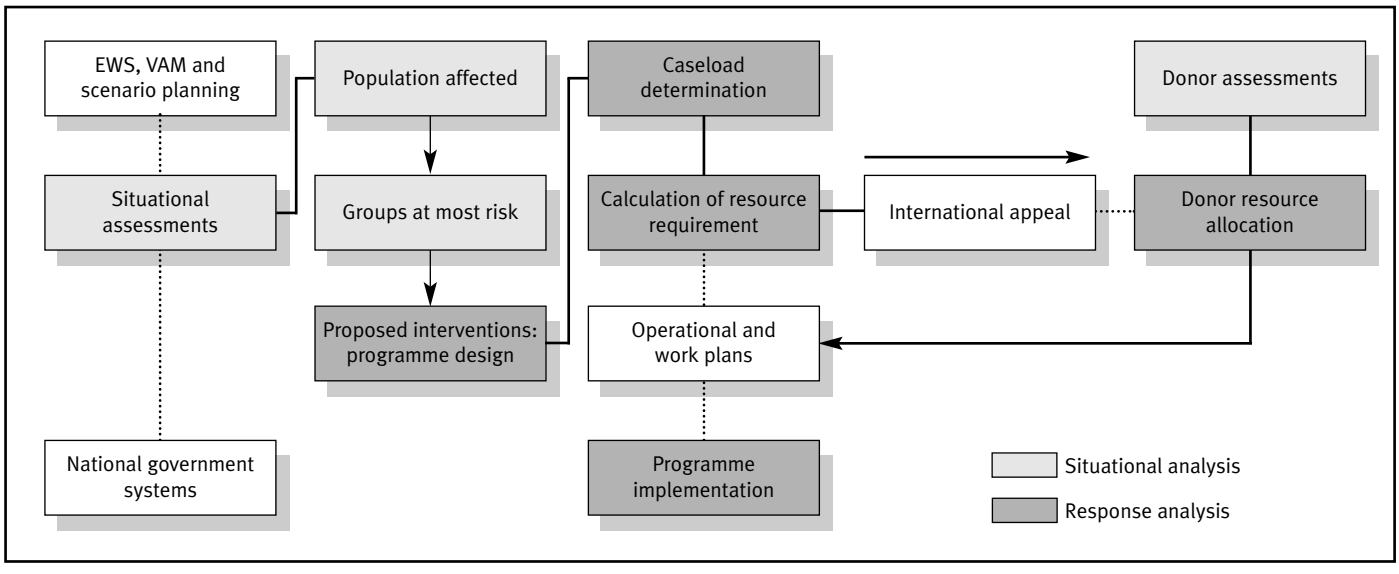
General issues

Different crisis types require different approaches to assessment, and involve different decision-making timeframes and parameters. This applies also to pre-crisis information mechanisms. Early warning is more relevant to certain types of crisis (slow-onset, hurricanes, floods) than to others (earthquakes, sudden displacement). The utility of pre-crisis baseline information varies, depending in part on whether the catastrophic event has radically changed the context and demographics, for instance through the mass displacement of people. In all cases, however, an understanding of social, economic and political dynamics – both pre-existing and crisis-affected – is likely to be crucial to appropriate and effective response. Context and situational analysis has to be sufficiently fine-tuned that it can pick up significant variations in crisis impact by social and livelihood group, geographical area and so on. This analysis then needs to be appropriately reflected in programme design.[33]

The particular issues for assessment in the four crisis types identified in this study are summarised below, but some generic issues can be discerned. One is the ability to satisfy information requirements throughout the project cycle. At each stage of a crisis response, different kinds of decision need to be made. Sometimes, it will not be apparent that a decision needs to be made at all (e.g. to continue a programme strategy or change course) *unless* there is a flow of new information. What constitutes the minimum necessary information on which to base a particular decision is a matter for organisational policy-makers and managers, and it is important that a shared view on this is developed, to distinguish the valid exercise of individual judgement from arbitrary decision-making. From the available evidence, it appears that analysis is often dependent on individual personalities and their preferences. The *justificatory* function of assessment is important here, as is the documenting of response decisions against a framework of evidence.

33 There is evidence that, even where the analysis is fine-tuned, this is not always reflected in programme design. For example, Groupe URD reported: 'Although data is successfully disaggregated during the needs assessment to reflect the diversity of social and economic factors, the same degree of detail is rarely preserved in the design of the PRRO programme'. Op. cit., 2006.

Figure 3: Linking assessment and response



Getting to the proposed interventions demands an analysis of the causes of risk, the interventions most likely to eliminate or mitigate those risks, the vulnerabilities and capacities of those affected, and the capacity of government and other actors to respond.

In practice, there is rarely a linear progression from the left-hand side of the diagram to the right-hand side. Donor resource allocations may happen independently of (and sometimes in advance of) WFP and other assessment processes. There is then a process of matching available resources with assessed needs, often requiring a re-evaluation of approach and priorities.

Key to this is defining the right questions. Many of the assessments reviewed in the study appeared to begin without adequate consideration of the questions that the assessment was trying to answer. As a result, there is a tendency to overload assessments with too many superfluous information requests, perhaps in an attempt to lend credibility through sheer volume of information. This only serves to complicate the important business of identifying unmet needs. Focused inquires with clear questions and objectives are essential to good assessment.

The 2005 EFSA Handbook (p. 26) usefully distinguishes questions relating to the symptomatic *analysis of situations* in food security terms (revolving around impact, reaction, unmet needs and risk) from *response option analysis* (causes, opportunities, constraints and response options). In practice, this distinction is often not clearly drawn in WFP assessment reports, making the rationale for intervention hard to evaluate and lessening the potential for influencing other organisations.

The basic assessment process

The EFSA Handbook distinguishes between three types or phases of assessment:

- Initial investigations
- 'Rapid' assessments
- In-depth assessments

It also mentions in passing the question of monitoring and re-assessment, but does not treat these as central to the EFSA process. In that sense, though the handbook contains much that is valuable and sensible, it tends to perpetuate the idea that EFSA is essentially a front-loaded process of information gathering and analysis, perhaps to be repeated annually in the case of protracted crises. The key decisions that EFSA is supposed to inform are assumed to be largely about the requirement for intervention and the nature, scale and resource requirements of various response options.[34]

This account of the purpose of needs assessment is incomplete and potentially misleading. In Darfur, the study team concluded that the emphasis on annual assessments, while in itself appropriate, was disproportionate compared to the investment in information mechanisms (monitoring, surveillance) to allow real-time analysis, against which WFP and its donors could monitor food aid requirements and impact, and adjust their interventions accordingly. More generally, the team observed a disconnect between situational analysis and programme design on the one hand, and what might be called 'operational' assessment on the other. Defining the information requirements of a programme at the outset, and devising a strategy for satisfying those requirements, requires a more 'joined-up' way of thinking about functions that are currently split and tend to be treated separately (early warning, VAM, ENA, monitoring, evaluation).

This has a bearing on the question of where to position ENA and other information processes in the organisational structure. In order to bridge the gap with programming, ENAs need to be linked as closely as possible to the programming function – and the process of ENA needs to be 'owned' by the relevant decision-makers, particularly at the field level. Assessments must be seen as part of the project cycle, with clear linkages to programme design, monitoring and evaluation. There are reasons to think that the current analytical mechanisms in WFP are not structured in the best way as to achieve this (see below).

Collaborative assessments and coordination

The case studies threw up a number of issues relating to collaborative assessment processes and the question of linkage to organisational decision-making. For WFP, maintaining its independence of analysis and obtaining the information it requires for organisational decision-making, while at the same time engaging effectively in collaborative assessment processes, is a challenge. The team concluded that the merits of engaging in such processes significantly outweighed the drawbacks. One significant advantage for WFP is that its motives are less likely to be questioned. The results of joint assessments are not subject to the same degree of scepticism that an independent WFP assessment might attract. However, there are costs and potential risks involved in such collaboration, which must be judged case by case. These relate primarily to time delays and bureaucratic process; the pressure to maintain consensus; the adoption of 'compromise' methodologies that may lack rigour; and the potential for political interference by governments.

All four of the cases examined for this study involved a significant degree of collaboration in assessment. The most radical is Somalia, where responsibility for situational analysis is largely delegated to the FSAU by all the relevant actors. Southern Africa, through the VAC process, represents a 'heavy' coordination model, in this case characterised by the strong involvement of the host governments. The Pakistan case involved parallel international and government assessment efforts, with the international assessments coordinated in a relatively loose way. In the case of Darfur,

34 For a diagrammatic account of the key questions involved, see EFSA Handbook, p. 19.

WFP deliberately chose its partners – the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, UNICEF and FAO – in order to ensure that its food security analysis was complemented by health and nutritional analysis.

The southern Africa case shows both the strengths and weaknesses of highly collaborative approaches. The strengths include buy-in from multiple actors and the potential for generating consensus around both analysis and response priorities. The weaknesses include compromise methodology that some feel does not provide a sound basis for analysis.[35] Government involvement carries the risk of loss of independence in assessments. This case also showed the extent to which individual personalities can drive the process. But in general, a collaborative approach is less likely to be biased towards the perspective any one person or institution. In southern Africa, as in Somalia, progress has been made in both joint assessment and joint decision-making mechanisms. In the case of Malawi in 2006, donors themselves accelerated the response by collaborating through the Joint Task Force structure, working closely with the government. This government-chaired body proved a crucial forum for information-sharing and problem-solving.

In the Malawi case, the team concluded that it was important for WFP to strike a balance – to remain fully engaged in MVAC, while ensuring that any technical or process-related issues are clearly articulated. Keeping assessments relatively short and focused on specific questions that matter to decision-makers allows a high level of participation by senior agency and donor staff, which in turn greatly increases the uptake of the information by managers. There is an argument for involving managers in a further (post-assessment) step, to locate the assessment results within an understanding of the existing capacity to implement. In Malawi, donors had unrealistic expectations of the ability to implement cash-based emergency programmes. Realistic analysis of existing capacity must be stressed as an integral part of the collective assessment process.

Related to this, the team found in the Pakistan case that it was not always clear who was responsible for following up on the recommendations from joint assessments. This was especially true for the non-food recommendations. The WFP-specific recommendations of the joint UNICEF/WFP assessment were largely acted upon by the Country Office, but the UNICEF and non-food recommendations were not followed up in the same manner. The Country Office was not sure what happened to the bulk of the UNICEF-inspired recommendations beyond supplementary and therapeutic feeding, or the recommendations for seeds, fodder, animal shelter and de-stocking. FAO was not aware of the assessment at all.

With regard to collaborative assessments with government agencies, few would argue with the need to work with the host state to the greatest extent possible in fulfilment of its sovereign responsibility. But given the potential for political bias, and the uncertainty surrounding much government data, most would also recognise the importance of independent cross-checking. In some contexts (India is an example) the media play an important part in this. So do NGOs, as Save the Children did in Malawi in 2002, and MSF in Niger in 2006. FEWSNET, GIEWS and other early warning and monitoring mechanisms also play an important role in this respect – although predictive and macro-level supply-based analysis is inevitably a less precise indicator of food security than field-level observation, and there is no substitute for 'ground-truthing' through surveys and surveillance to get at the question of local access to food.

The Darfur example points to an important issue about cross-sectoral coordination. Of the cases studied, Pakistan was the only one where the new Cluster model of inter-agency coordination had been tried, and even there it was in embryonic form. While this approach reduced duplication and increased collaboration, it fell short in terms of developing joint work plans, pushing for common assessments and coordinating agency appeals for resources. Despite issuing a joint flash appeal, individual UN agencies still submitted ad hoc unsolicited proposals to donors – an issue that was a source of irritation for donors who wanted coordination extended to this level. WFP staff felt that food aid was not adequately prioritised in the clusters, and that they were often left to fight this corner alone. There is a need for more fully coordinated assessments that adequately address food needs within an overall cross-sectoral analysis under the leadership of the Humanitarian Coordinator.[36] WFP has a considerable opportunity to exercise leadership in this respect, and should take it.

Assessment team composition and skill sets

One of the most important variables in assessment is the composition and skill set of the assessment team. This is not surprising: an agronomist will naturally focus on different issues than a micro-credit specialist or a health expert. The outcome of an assessment can be manipulated in various ways: for example, by skewing the ToRs towards particular outcomes or by using consultants who are 'on side' and hoping for future work. It is suggested that an audit of assessment ToRs be conducted periodically to ensure reasonable consistency and objectivity in the commissioning process.

In the case of Darfur, the team found that the EFSNA approach gave limited scope for using complementary information and

35 By way of contrast, the Integrated Phase Classification system adopted by the FSAU in Somalia does not depend on agreeing a common methodology, but provides a tool for reaching consensus on situational analysis that is said to be independent of the methods used to generate data. The revised guidance from Save the Children on the Household Economy Approach used in southern Africa emphasizes its status as an *approach* rather than a *method* – opening the way for different data collection methods to be used.

36 One OCHA official in Pakistan commented that real needs-based decision-making happened not at the Islamabad level but at the level of operational hubs – i.e. the closer to operations you are, the more needs-based the decision-making.

analysis. Such an approach tends to stress survey data collection and enumerator skills over local knowledge. Although the assessment was strong in its own terms, there was relatively little substantive input from WFP's own experienced field staff into the overall analysis.[37] This appears to reflect a more general pattern, related to the emphasis on quantitative analytical techniques, which almost certainly results in weaker analysis than would otherwise be the case. Many of those interviewed felt that ways should be found to make more use of the knowledge of WFP's local staff and partners.

As WFP engages more in integrated multi-sectoral and multi-partner assessments, the required skill level of assessment personnel increases. A specialist assessor requires technical expertise in assessment tools, (basic statistical analysis, sampling, PRA methods, techniques to limit bias, livelihood analysis, etc) but also an understanding of how WFP works, what is practical and realistic, what is required in programme formulation and an understanding of the role of food in the wider economic and social context. This includes skills in analysing markets, household economies and livelihoods.

Feedback from operations and the use of food aid monitors
As noted in the previous section, many of those interviewed in the course of the study commented on the lack of provision for feedback into decision-making from those who actually implement the programmes. This was particularly true of WFP's implementing partners, who often felt that the feedback they provided was ignored.

This points to a gap in the assessment process. Food aid monitors have an important role to play, but one that is not yet being fully exploited. In Pakistan, food aid monitors were the front-line interface for WFP and travelled regularly to all operational sites. Their information was primarily used to ensure that food aid operations were progressing as planned, and to report bottlenecks and implementation problems. The monitors also collected non-logistical information about the context – but it was unclear how much this information fed into decision-making or future assessments. The feeling in the site visited was that this information was not acted upon, perhaps due to lack of demand, lack of summaries and the sheer volume of the reports.

4.2 Assessment approaches in different crisis types

The three-step assessment process in the EFSA Handbook reflects the dominant mode of thinking about crises. The paradigm is a crisis that is triggered by a sudden shock, which demands an immediate 'first phase' response (initial investigation to inform response in first 1–4 weeks); which then enters a second phase response (2–6 months), informed by a rapid assessment; and which may be followed by a third phase response (1–2 years), informed by an in-depth assessment; and, finally, transition to a development or PRRO programme. In reality, few crises conform to this linear pattern.[38] That said, given the related frameworks for decision-making, it is important to have assessment mechanisms that are adequate to the task of informing decisions at the point they are actually taken. We review here some of the case study lessons for assessment in the four different crisis types identified.

Rapid-onset
More than in any other kind of crisis, the process of initial assessment in rapid-onset crises depends on estimation, often using simple proxy indicators as a basis for estimating food needs. In the Pakistan case, the indicator used was the extent of damage to property, and this set the pattern for most subsequent aid.

The initial assessment in the Pakistan case provided a clear basis for decision-making, but left considerable uncertainty as to whether this was the *right* basis. In its study of food aid programming and assessment in Afghanistan, Laos and Colombia, Groupe URD noted a tendency to conduct emergency *damage* assessments as opposed to *food security* assessments, and concluded that this resulted in supply-driven rather than needs-based responses. 'In Afghanistan, rapid assessment reports drafted following the floods were often limited to a description of the damage with estimated numbers of affected families. If food aid was recommended, there was little explanation for the rationale behind this decision.' (Groupe URD, March 2006). The ODI team concluded that, while damage assessments alone were not sufficient, they did in the Pakistan case serve a useful purpose; more generally, where time or access is severely constrained, the use of proxies of this kind may be appropriate in informing response decisions – even though they provide an inadequate basis for attempting to influence others or to justify interventions. However, it must be recognised that they provide only a hypothetical rather than an actual picture of needs.

For WFP, the core question is always likely to be whether a situation requires food aid intervention. But the case for food aid can be undermined if assessors are essentially tasked with asking who needs food aid and how much; in other words, if the requirement for food aid is assumed. Making a robust case for food aid – alone and in conjunction with other inputs – requires answering a set of questions to determine the nature and extent of people's access to food.[39] To take the case of the Pakistan earthquake: the actual (as opposed to estimated) requirement for food aid could only be assessed by considering the availability of food and people's access to it, including markets, along with the extent of local contributions, government support and international remittances. These factors were never fully assessed.

37 Many of the VAM officers in Darfur used to operate a food security information system and were experienced food security analysts. Their local knowledge appears to have been little drawn upon.

38 Harmer and Macrae (2004)

39 This essentially marks the difference between traditional ENA and newer EFSA approaches. The first edition of the EFSA Handbook is explicit on this point – see p. 23.

Despite the missing elements in the assessment process, the answer is not simply to add more to the assessments. In fact, the earthquake pointed to the need for a *simplified* assessment methodology in the early stages, with data collection and reporting formats that address the critical junctures of a fast-onset emergency. The current procedures in the EFSA Handbook do not address this, and in fact may add unnecessary additional burdens to the assessment process. A radically simplified 'short-cut' version is required for initial assessments in rapid-onset disasters.40

There are valid concerns about the opportunity and financial costs of assessment in rapid-onset crises. The answer probably lies in better feedback loops from operations, allowing micro-level programme adjustment, rather than wholesale re-assessment. Such feedback was lacking in all of the cases reviewed for this study. The study found that the Pakistan programme, in particular, was notably inflexible and unresponsive to such feedback when it was given.

The response to the Lebanon crisis of 2006 makes for an interesting comparison. This was a rapid-onset crisis deriving from the effects of conflict. The issue was less one of destruction than of insecurity, displacement and interruption of livelihoods. These last two factors served as proxy indicators of food insecurity. Reviewing the related WFP assessment report, the study team found that it was a decision-oriented document that correctly identified the prevailing trend (in this case, a process of rapid return) and recommended a response limited in scope and duration. It was also explicit about what WFP should *not* attempt to do in this context, i.e. attempt to use food aid to address underlying problems of poverty and inequality.

Slow-onset crises

The cases of Malawi, Somalia and Niger allow consideration of some generic issues for the assessment of slow-onset crises. Some of these concern the effective linkage of early warning and baseline information systems with ENA and response decision-making. Some concern the use of thresholds and indicators for response, raising the question whether sufficient consensus exists between national and international actors on the appropriate response triggers. Cases like the Niger crisis of 2005 suggest that it often does not (see Box 4).

The Niger case, and the subsequent drought in the Horn of Africa region, underline the critical importance of linking market and livelihood factors at macro and micro level. In both cases, there was a failure of effective preventive action that might have allowed fragile agro-pastoralist livelihoods to be effectively bolstered against the shock of market price increases and loss of livestock.[41] It is not suggested that this failure can be traced back to a failure of analysis. In the Horn of Africa in particular, both symptoms and causes of the drought were well documented and flagged in advance.[42] But there

Box 4: A preventable crisis? Niger, 2005

The response to the Niger food crisis in 2005 was slow and inadequate despite international presence in the form of GIEWS, FEWSNET, EU AGRHYMET, CILSS, the Sahel Food Crisis Prevention network (Canada, Germany, Netherlands, France) and WFP. Why?

It is hard to find agreement on this, but two issues seem to stand out:

1. A diagnostic failure – weak analysis, in particular the failure to understand changing regional market and food security dynamics, lack of effective surveillance, together with a lack of a 'critical mass' of actors to push the warning signals harder.
2. A response failure – the response was late and (many felt) inappropriate. Arguably, urgent livelihood support (fodder for livestock, etc.) plus cash was what was needed, more than food aid.

Diagnostic failure

Given the highly integrated nature of markets in the region, Nigeria's change in food import policy, coupled with lower than average production, had the effect of raising prices across the region. There was a failure to understand or interpret the implications of this and other factors, like high levels of indebtedness, for different socio-economic groups. In effect, poor people were priced out of the market. The symptoms of this in terms of acute child malnutrition were not adequately monitored, and the available data was disputed.

Decision-making failure

A number of factors combined to delay decisions. These included the elections in Niger and the UN's reluctance to push early warning messages without the government's approval. The IMF and some donors were also focused elsewhere, concerned with the selling of the strategic grain reserves and corruption.

It is suggested that food security analysis and advocacy is still overly focused on harvests and production periods rather than ongoing and seasonally-based monitoring and analysis of markets, prices and household access to food.

40 More generally, we concur with the recommendation of Groupe URD for a simplified version of the EFSA Handbook to increase its utility to field staff, who currently seem to make little use of it.

41 For analysis of both contexts, see HPG Briefing Notes '*Humanitarian issues in Niger*' (July 2005) and *Saving lives through livelihoods: critical gaps in the response to the drought in the Greater Horn of Africa* (May 2006), at http:// www.odi.org.uk/hpg/publications_rapid.html. See also Clay, E., *The Niger Food Crisis* http://www.odi.org.uk/publications/opinions/48_niger_web.pdf.

42 There is also a wealth of literature on the nature and causes of food crises in this context, and documented lessons from previous interventions. This raises the question of how such lessons do or do not inform organisational thinking, and how this evidence is brought to bear in the assessment process.

was a collective failure to act in a timely and appropriate way, and in neither instance was a compelling case made for urgent, large-scale *preventive* action, as distinct from relief. In some that a paradigm shift is required before appropriate and effective responses are achievable. This requires better models for intervention, agreed criteria for intervention and modes of funding that are not constrained by the artificial distinction between 'normal' ('development') and 'crisis' ('relief') contexts.

Protracted crises

The Darfur case was chosen as representative of a certain kind of crisis, involving protracted insecurity, political instability and displacement, combined with multiple other factors (political, economic, ecological, etc.). Ironically, to the extent that the target population is camp-based, it is also one of the easier contexts to assess – at least in those areas where access is secure. Defined populations, almost entirely reliant on food aid to meet their food requirements, present a relatively more straightforward task for assessment than dispersed populations of uncertain size and indeterminate access to food and income.[43]

A number of general lessons can be drawn from the Darfur case. First, there is value in a process of annual assessment in establishing baselines and measuring year-on-year changes. While not a substitute for micro-level and real-time assessment, this serves a crucial purpose in informing and updating overall strategy and establishing progress against objectives. It is a significant investment – the first EFSNA cost around $500,000 – but still only a small percentage of the total operational budget. A programme of this size and scope requires a proportionately large investment in assessment, information and analysis.

Second, processes like the EFSNA are good for informing and influencing strategic decisions, but less useful for operational decision-making. More attention and investment needs to be given to the micro-level assessment processes on which many of the most important operational decisions are based. Surveillance – of nutritional status, market prices, etc. – remains a comparatively neglected and under-resourced aspect of ENA generally, and protracted crises in particular. Without it, programmes cannot be properly responsive to changes in the environment. This includes post-distribution food security monitoring, which was found to be weak in the cases studied.

Third, more attention needs to be paid to assessing needs in currently inaccessible (insecure) areas. The third EFSNA attempted to do this, on the grounds that provision should be made for a scenario where attempts to gain access to these areas were successful. The study team felt that this was appropriate and necessary, and should be encouraged in other similar contexts.

43 In fact, the 2005 and 2006 EFSNAs included dispersed and resident populations, making the calculation of food aid requirements significantly more complex.

Fourth, contextual analysis has to include an analysis of the political context, and the factors that impact on people's security. This is vital, not just because it is essential to the prognosis, but also because assistance strategies in such contexts have to take account of the potential impact (positive or negative) of interventions on the security of civilians. A protection dimension, in other words, has to feature in the assessment of need, and the choices and trade-offs people may be forced to make between subsistence and physical security have to be understood. At present, however, there are limited tools with which to make this analysis.

Finally, the assessment of the needs of dispersed (non camp-based) populations presents an urgent challenge. Non-displaced populations may themselves be in dire need of assistance, but are less likely to be included in current assessment processes. More robust ways of assessing and meeting the needs of such people are required. This is related to the point about inaccessible and insecure areas.

It appears that re-assessment in advance of new programmes is not routinely conducted. In a paper prepared for the EFSA Community of Practice meeting in Rome, it is noted that 'in principle, it should be possible to plan and undertake an assessment in good time for the preparation of a next phase of the project/operation. In practice, the new operation (EMOP or PPRRO) is often prepared only shortly before the termination date of the current operation and even then without a proper assessment. Sometimes the problem is that the CFSAM, which is scheduled in relation to the harvest cycle, has not yet been undertaken'.[44]

Transitional and recovery contexts

While Somalia, at the time of writing, can hardly be described as a transitional context – let alone one in recovery – it shares with a number of other contexts some of the features of 'post-conflict' political economies. One of the key characteristics of such contexts is weak or almost non-existent central and local governance. This has an obvious bearing on the prospects for development, on the availability of state services and on effective social protection mechanisms, and it affects decisions about the appropriate mode of intervention. Given the emphasis of this study on food crisis assessment, relatively less attention has been given to these situations, although the scale of WFP's PRRO programming far exceeds EMOPs.

One of the critical questions here concerns the distinction between acute and chronic food insecurity. The distinction is problematic; but the need to define appropriate strategies to address 'new' and 'ongoing' caseloads of affected people remains. This in turn depends in part on whether effective social safety net provision exists for those who are unable to meet their food needs year on year. In the absence of multi-

44 As part of WFP Programme Quality Meeting, May 2006.

year provision for the 'chronic' caseload, the danger is that the poorest may find themselves excluded from effective assistance.[45]

To some extent, the PRROs reflect the 'linear progression' model of crisis outlined above, and assume a transition from relief to recovery that in practice has not materialised in many of the contexts concerned. For the purposes of this study, the important question is whether current assessment practice in such contexts provides the analysis necessary to inform related programming decisions, and how it might be strengthened. The evidence available to the study team suggests that current practice is inadequate. The Groupe URD study cited earlier concluded that in-depth assessment is not yet rooted in organisational practice, and anecdotal evidence from donors and others tends to back this up. It is in the decision to continue, revise or cease year-on-year programmes that the issue of re-assessment becomes so vital, and yet where practice is in some ways weakest. The study team suggests that this is a matter of priority for WFP to address.

4.3 Existing assessment methodologies and mechanisms

While not a primary focus of the study, the team considered the relationship between the choice of assessment methodology, the various mechanisms for assessment and the process of decision-making. Given the broad interpretation of 'needs assessment' adopted, this included some consideration of forecasting and baseline information mechanisms; 'point in time' ENA mechanisms, mostly survey-based; and 'real time' mechanisms (surveillance etc.) for monitoring food security. The observations made here are essentially based on evidence from the four country case studies, rather than on any wider review of methods and systems.

Forecasting and baseline information

Under this heading, two main issues were identified: the limited *predictive* capacity of existing mechanisms; and the limited utility of baseline information for the process of emergency needs assessment, to which it is often only weakly linked. This last point is also related to the way that functions are currently divided in WFP ODA (ENA, VAM, EWS), which some respondents argued tended to perpetuate this disconnect.

Predictive capacity of current methods

As noted above, in section 3, much of the decision-making around response – especially by donors – involves in effect needs *prediction* more than needs *assessment*. Current mechanisms provide only a limited basis for this. The best-established of these are the non-WFP early warning systems and the CFSAM process, which aims to forecast food production and availability. These suffer from inevitable problems of accuracy, particularly at the micro level. They are heavily dependent on government data, and have limited independent 'ground-truthing' capacity.

Of the mechanisms considered, only the FSAU/IPC model and the VAC method provided a sound basis for predictive judgments. The FSAU/IPC model is a risk/probability-based system that depends heavily for its accuracy on the quality and coverage of its field data-collection element. It is designed to provide a dynamic rather than a static picture of a situation, allowing for effective *prognosis* as well as diagnosis – which current 'snap-shot' assessment methods tend not to do. This, of course, depends on the reliability of the data available and the credibility of the subsequent analysis. With the current proposals to replicate this in other contexts, the intensity of this data collection and the analytical 'processing power' of the FSAU should be recognized as being key to the success of this mechanism.

For the most part, even the stronger of the ENA methods considered in this study, such as the EFSNA in Darfur, provided what was essentially a 'point in time' picture of nutrition and food security, with little retrospective or predictive qualities. This is not a criticism of the method, but a recognition of the limitations of survey-based mechanisms, which have to combined with surveillance or other monitoring mechanisms if they are to inform decisions through the life of a programme.

Linking pre-crisis information with ENA

The issue of pre-crisis information – early warning, baselines, vulnerability mapping – and ENA was raised by a number of those interviewed. Some felt that there was a disconnect between the two, and that the CFSVA mechanism was not linking them effectively. This relates to the wider question of the relationship between VAM and ENA. Where it works well, VAM has an influence on food crisis responses that extends well beyond WFP. Southern Africa is one example. In the Pakistan case, a major constraint was found to be the lack of pre-crisis baseline information in earthquake-affected areas. The initial calculation of need for the UN Flash Appeal was derived using census data from 1998, and was crude in nature. The VAM unit subsequently played an important role in compiling different data sets and making them available to the wider aid community.

In many cases, the process of ongoing needs assessment also relies heavily on the involvement of country VAM staff, without whom this function would certainly be weaker than it is currently.[46] That said, the role of VAM was at times unclear to interviewees in the case studies. Some of this uncertainty appears to relate to the role of country-level VAM officers vis-à-

45 This is because the 'acute' category is defined as those who only need help after a major shock. However, the chronically food-insecure are also in greater need after a shock, and are often not adequately protected by safety nets.

46 In many cases, the VAM officers in the field cover the functions of early warning and preparedness, food security vulnerability analysis and monitoring, and emergency needs assessment. The ODA Headquarters structure is not replicated as such at the field level.

Box 5: Getting to a number

In order to arrive at a 'target population' figure for assistance, WFP and others tend to work through a similar calculation in each case: total population (usually from census or survey) – affected population as % of total – vulnerable groups as % of affected population – target population. Typically, this will be broken down by geographic region or by camp. This allows the calculation of resource requirements, generally based on a proposed food ration for each beneficiary category. In order to translate this into an operational plan, the households who will actually receive assistance have to be identified, based on agreed targeting criteria.

There are a number of variables, and the process usually involves a significant degree of estimation and extrapolation. It is rarely an exact process, the main exception being in camp situations where numbers can usually be fairly accurately determined. Even then, there may be a considerable degree of redistribution among the recipients.

To take the example of Somalia: the final output by FSAU is a classification of the affected population (by district and livelihood type) according to the IPC framework. A national-level table is complied summarising the number of people thought to fall into each category of food insecurity. This is broken down into two further tables, disaggregating the same information according to (i) the lowest administrative unit and (ii) by local livelihood groups.

The process for WFP then becomes one of turning the FSAU analysis into an operation and distribution plan. While WFP uses FSAU data to provide its overall parameters for response, this also allows it to plan on a district by district basis. Data for the 2006 emergency were translated into an operation plan by WFP, as illustrated in the table opposite.

vis the Regional Bureaux and Rome HQ. Some of it relates to the issue of how baseline information relates to ENA processes, and specifically how the CFSVA process fits with ENA.

Emergency needs assessment methods and mechanisms

Unlike the fields of nutrition and epidemiology where there are agreed, standard methodologies for producing statistically representative results, methodological questions in the food security field are complicated and contested. Personal and institutional disagreements over methodology characterised at least one of the case study contexts (Malawi and the VAC), and are commonly a stumbling block to effective collaboration in food security assessment and analysis. While not central to the present study, a couple of the issues arising are considered here.

Inter-comparability. One of WFP's major challenges from donors is to prioritise within and between countries, which is difficult if each country is assessed using different methods or response thresholds. One of the strengths of the Malawi VAC process is that the same basic methodology (HEA) is used in several countries, allowing for some comparability. However, there is still not enough commonality in approach to allow full comparisons across the region. A possible answer to this problem lies in the use of a classification system like the IPC in Somalia, which does not depend on unified methodologies but allows for 'consensus' classification of contexts according to a basket of outcome and process indicators.

Disconnect between ENA and monitoring mechanisms. There is a disconnect between 'macro' ENAs of the kind undertaken in Darfur, and the mechanisms used to gauge local realities and track changes over time. Discussions with WFP staff and other actors in Darfur suggested that food security monitoring and analysis systems were not well developed or systematic, and were dependent on individual initiative and experience. For example, some interviewees mentioned that food aid distributions sometimes appeared to be unconnected to analysis of nutritional status. UNICEF was developing a nutrition surveillance system and FAO was working on the design of a national food security information system. WFP, meanwhile, appeared to be missing an opportunity to develop Darfur-specific food security monitoring and analysis systems to complement the EFSNA.

4.4 Communication, appeals and the media

WFP, assessments and credibility

There are significant issues of trust between WFP, its donors and its major partners. One donor representative interviewed

Box 6: Best practice? The WFP market survey in Pakistan

The WFP Market Survey conducted in November 2005 was innovative in a number of ways:

- It examined a range of market issues, including a survey of traders, and an analysis of the whole market chain.
- It tied normal CFSAM production issues directly to market factors.
- It examined the linkages and differences between rural and urban areas.
- It assessed the impact of food aid on market prices and as a potential price disincentive.
- It used a livelihoods perspective to understand household purchasing power.
- It analysed the issue of food access from a market perspective.
- It made exit strategy recommendations tied to measurable market indicators.

An opportunity was missed to build on this innovative approach. WFP Pakistan did not adequately implement the recommendations from the market survey, suggesting a disconnect between assessment and practice in this case.

Box 5 table: Food Aid Working Group – WFP and CARE International. Contingency Plan for Southern Somalia – Relief

Region	Population	Affected	% affected	HH affect	Monthly full	Monthly 50%	6 months	Cereal	Vegetable oil	Pulses
Bay WFP	409906	311705	76%	51951	5902	2951	23606	20780	748	2078
Bay – CARE	245780	173843	71%	28974	3291	1646	13166	11590	417	1159
Bay total	655686	485549	74%	80925	9193	4224	36772	32370	1165	3237
Bakool WFP	167925	120769	72%	20128	2287	1143	9146	8051	290	805
Bakool CARE	57525	50622	88%	8437	958	479	3834	3375	121	337
Bakool total	225450	171391	76%	28565	3245	1491	12980	11426	411	1143
Gedo WFP	152925	98383	64%	16397	1863	931	7451	6559	236	656
Gedo CARE	230418	230418	100%	38403	4363	2181	17450	15361	553	1536
Gedo total	383343	328801	86%	54800	6225	2861	24901	21920	789	2192
L. Juba WFP	329240	182228	55%	30371	3450	1725	13801	12149	437	1215
M. Juba WFP	244275	172672	71%	28779	3269	1635	13077	11511	414	1151
Hiraan WFP	280880	77092	27%	12849	1460	730	5838	5139	185	514
Grand total	**2118874**	**1417732**	**67%**	**236289**	**26842**	**12665**	**107370**	**94515**	**3403**	**9452**
Total WFP	**1585151**	**962849**	**61%**	**160475**	**18230**	**9115**	**72920**	**64190**	**2311**	**6419**
Total CARE	**533723**	**454883**	**85%**	**75814**	**8612**	**4306**	**34450**	**30326**	**1092**	**3033**
Grand total	**2118874**	**1417732**	**67%**	**236289**	**26842**	**13421**	**107370**	**94515**	**3403**	**9452**

for this study set out three essential questions relating to trust and credibility in assessing proposals:

1. Do we trust their analysis of a situation?
2. Do we think their prescription is the right one?
3. Do we think they are capable of implementing it?

Passing these tests puts a considerable weight on the quality of assessment, a fact of which WFP senior managers have become increasingly conscious.[47]

WFP's credibility is tied up with how it is perceived as well as what it does – and its actions may either reinforce or counter those perceptions. Some are deeply sceptical: WFP acts in its self-interest, constantly looking for ways to increase its profile and programming; it exaggerates needs and uses the media to play on donor and public emotions; it is a supply-driven organisation that does not know when to turn off the tap; it is driven by the 'logistics machine' which, once engaged, is hard to stop. Partly because of its size and because of prevailing scepticism in some quarters about food aid, WFP receives a heightened level of scrutiny – and some look for evidence to confirm the above perceptions.

Within this environment of heightened scrutiny, WFP more than most agencies needs to be able consistently to demonstrate its credibility, starting with the needs assessment process. Donors generally are concerned that WFP has a vested interest in the outcome of assessments. As one major donor noted: 'in our organisation, if you design a project, you cannot implement it. If you implement, you cannot evaluate. This aims to reduce bias and increase objectivity. Can WFP truly be objective in assessments if it stands to directly gain from its outcome?'. This is a valid point, and underscores the importance of distinguishing situational analysis from response analysis in assessment reports. A more radical response could be to call upon more independent assessment capacity to cross-check WFP's own analysis. The study team concludes that, in order to maintain credibility, this will be increasingly necessary.

Various factors were identified as contributing to credibility in assessment. These included collaboration and where possible joint ownership of the process with the host government; openness, transparency and flexibility; wider political and economic context analysis, such as cross-border trade reports; and a relatively open methodology. Some factors tended to reduce credibility and trust, including certain types of media strategy, and regional appeals that cut across national cycles and processes. In general, a commitment to true partnerships (rather than just contractual arrangements) and capacity-building would significantly help to build trust in WFP.

From the donor perspective, a question often raised is why, when WFP gets only (say) 50% of what it asks from donors in a situation described as life-threatening, do we not see catastrophic outcomes? This is a question commonly addressed to other agencies as well, and should be easy enough to answer if the terms in which the problem is stated were more nuanced. Most people are not solely dependent on food aid for survival, but the provision of support to the household may be essential in preventing suffering, impoverishment and loss of access to services. As noted above, the tendency to over-simplify is a structural one, a factor of donor expectation as much as agency 'spin'. The answer surely lies in closer dialogue between WFP and its donors. The megaphone diplomacy of press releases is the least helpful way to proceed in this regard.

It is apparent that WFP does not always provide donors with the information they feel they need in order to make decisions, and that the way in which messages are communicated is sometimes counter-productive. It is essential that this relationship is understood in terms that go beyond marketing, appeals and resource allocation if mutual trust is to be more firmly established. This requires transparency in judgments about prioritisation on WFP's part, as well as openness about the quality and robustness of assessments. Sometimes, both parties will need to act in the absence of adequate or reliable information. Rather than a stand-off, the result should be a joint commitment to more firmly establishing the facts over time. This will require donors to recognise the resource requirements of setting up adequate systems for re-assessment, monitoring and surveillance.

Dissemination and communication of assessment findings

The study found variable practice across the case studies with respect to dissemination and communication. All of those interviewed recognised the great strides made in transparency and communication at the global level, particularly through the publication of assessment reports on the WFP website. With regard to the timely communication of assessment findings to relevant parties in the field, practice was not always so good. In the Pakistan case, the results of assessments conducted by WFP were not effectively communicated. Although the reports were widely distributed by WFP to the cluster partners, few remembered receiving the assessments. None of the NGO implementing partners or WFP field staff had seen the assessment reports – with the exception of one NGO that received the market study through a colleague who had attended a conference in Indonesia. A three-page executive summary of the WFP/UNICEF assessment was supposed to be posted on Relief Web, but this did not happen. In general, the assessments tend to be seen as tools for either generating food aid beneficiary numbers or for justifying a programme proposal. In this case, the assessments conducted illustrate WFP's strengths in its integration with partners, its serious consideration of the non-food sector, its examination of markets, and its consideration of an exit strategy. It is in WFP's best interest to disseminate its findings more widely, both within the agency and to the aid community.

47 The refusal by donors to fund the Great Lakes PRRO in 2006, on the grounds that it did not accept WFP's analysis or the proposed response, is particularly notable in this respect.

Several donors in the Pakistan case commented that the information provided by WFP and others did not meet their need for quick decision-making. The clusters helped to bring information together, but it was suggested that there should be regular consultation with donors to ask how donors want information, when and in what format. One donor requested more help in prioritising and making sense of the mass of information donors are bombarded with. This suggests that it would be useful to summarise and collate various assessment results into an overview document that directly meets donor needs, rather than perceived needs.

The Darfur case is more positive in terms of the dissemination and communication of assessment results. Analysis has been done in timely manner and results have been immediately presented in a professional way. This, and the use of other studies, have served to justify resource mobilisation. The EFSNA findings were extremely well communicated to donors, the media and other interested parties, particularly through presentations in Khartoum, which took place as soon as the analysis and preliminary findings were completed. Presentations have also been made in Europe. Internal communication of the different assessment and report findings, particularly to WFP staff in the field and to implementing partners, appears to be more erratic. There was no sense that the assessments and report findings are considered as part of internal learning processes.

The media and communications

Sometimes it appears that WFP's marketing efforts undermine the credibility of its analysis. In Pakistan, the media was focused on the more glamorous side of operations, especially the helicopter operations. WFP highlighted those operations prominently with stories about 'quake jumpers' and 'the world's largest helicopter'. The helicopter operations were important, especially early on when road access was so limited, but did not represent a significant part of the operation as a whole. But there was a perception among some donors that this sort of branding and showcasing of flashy parts of the emergency undermined the overall credibility of WFP.

The local media in the Pakistan case was very critical of the overall operation. It was not, however, always reliable in its information sources. OCHA in particular worked closely with the local media to provide updated information, which was used to exert pressure on the government. This in turn fed into the international media. As one major donor commented: 'the media create great expectations which turn into direct pressure on the donors'. In the Malawi case, the local media was prone to exaggeration and sensationalism, which again (via the international media) created more pressure on donors to act. WFP's own media strategy produced mixed results.

The potential disconnect between media and programming functions was apparent from the Malawi case. The UN Flash Appeal of August 2005 presented different figures from those that the donors were working with, and those numbers did not tally with the figures in WFP press releases. In another example, in October, the UK newspaper *The Guardian* carried a major article describing the poor response by donors, despite the major support already pledged to the government. Local donor representatives felt that WFP had orchestrated this article. The net effect was to increase short-term pressure on donors, while damaging WFP's relations with the local donor representatives, arguably its most important advocates in arguing for funding for a country. The study team concluded that the Country Office should sign off all press releases that concern their country.

WFP faces a dilemma. Donors respond most strongly to a dramatic trigger event that has high media profile and which resonates with constituents (for example, DfID was under pressure from MPs and constituents to respond to the tsunami). However, as donor attention is redirected to the next high-profile event, so too is the follow-on funding necessary for sustaining the emergency operation, let alone recovery activities. This creates a perverse incentive to maximise the trigger event and to secure as much funding as possible for the duration of the emergency at this opportune moment. For WFP, sustaining emergency operations or moving into recovery requires enough tonnage to generate the DSC to maintain operations. Although there was no evidence that WFP exaggerated assessment figures to secure more resources, several donors were suspicious of WFP's motives, especially since food was not identified as a priority area of need in initial assessments.

Section 5

Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 General issues: the criteria for good needs assessment

'Need' is not a precisely definable or measurable quantity, and needs assessment is not an exact science: it involves estimation, interpretation and judgement, as well as measurement, observation and analysis. Decision-making, similarly, involves judgement and the weighing of multiple factors. The question for this study is what constitutes a sufficiently well-informed decision, and how to ensure that decisions are adequately informed by good needs analysis. Given the real-world constraints to both assessment and decision-making, the question of what constitutes *good enough* information and analysis in a given context – sufficient and accurate enough to inform timely, appropriate, proportionate and effective responses – sets the basic parameters for good needs assessment practice. This raises further questions about assessment methods and the quality of analysis, which in turn relates to questions of skill and judgement.

The study has considered these questions in relation to responses to four main types of context: rapid- and slow-onset crises, situations of protracted insecurity and displacement and post-conflict transitional contexts. Sometimes the desire for precision and accuracy may have to give way to the requirement for swift action in rapid-onset crises, or to the limits of secure access in dangerous environments. But in most cases of the kind considered for this study, it is feasible to determine with a fair degree of precision who is worst affected and how, to design an appropriate package of interventions and an accurate beneficiary number, to allocate resources and target assistance accordingly, and to monitor subsequent changes.

The consequences of getting the assessment wrong can range from wasting or tying up scarce resources to a potentially disastrous failure to respond. Fear of this last outcome is one reason why there is a tendency to err on the side of inclusion rather than exclusion in calculating beneficiary numbers, to plan for worst case rather than best case scenarios, and to continue programmes beyond what might be considered their natural lifespan. While this is understandable, it can be used as a cover for weak analysis, institutional inertia, or even an active disinclination to reassess. Besides the diversion of scarce resources, over-programming is known to have potentially damaging effects on local or national economies. Good emergency assessment practice is about ensuring that critical needs are identified, and knowing when the identified need has changed or declined.

The cost of assessment is usually small in relation to the overall cost of a given programme. Yet the study team concluded that too little is currently invested in the 'diagnostic' component of response, particularly in monitoring and surveillance, and in the process of re-assessment following the initial response. The case for increased investment is compelling – but only if a demand for information and analysis is created that is genuinely linked to programme decision-making. 'Box-ticking' procedures serve nobody's interest. More generally, if WFP is concerned with the *quality* of its programmes, and with the question of appropriate and proportionate response, then it must find better ways of rewarding intelligent programming, not just the ability to distribute food aid on a large scale.

5.2 Thematic conclusions and recommendations

The function of assessment and its link to decision-making
The study suggests that the function of needs assessment in relation to decision-making is three-fold: to *inform* internal decisions about response, throughout the life of a programme (including decisions about programme adjustment and exit); to *influence* others' response decisions; and to *justify* response decisions and appeals for funds. From the evidence of the cases considered for the study, current WFP practice appears to fulfil the first of these functions increasingly effectively, but is relatively weaker in its ability to influence others' decisions or to justify its own.

The situational analysis available to decision-makers in WFP was generally agreed by informants to have strengthened over the past three years, though it was felt that social and political factors in particular needed better analysis. While WFP assessment practice has in some respects embraced a wider food security perspective, it is still largely geared around one set of response questions: how much food aid is required and by whom? This is understandable given the organisation's remit, but the rationale for the proposed food aid strategy is not always clear from the analysis of context in the assessment documents, and is rarely articulated against a wider range of potential response options related to food security. It is essential for both internal and external purposes

that the response analysis follows clearly from the situational analysis.

The study team found that the *direct* connections between assessment and decision-making were hard to establish with any certainty. Decisions are influenced by multiple factors, of which the output from formal needs assessment is just one. WFP's own response decisions appear to be increasingly informed by formal needs assessment, either conducted by its own staff or jointly with others. The link between such assessments and external decision-making was found to be considerably weaker. The study team concluded that the extent to which WFP's assessment influenced external decisions was in part a function of the way assessment results were communicated, as well as their perceived credibility.

Recommendations

- In designing an assessment, WFP should consider what functions it is meant to perform, and should give due attention to the influencing and justifying functions. Subsequent programme decisions and their rationale should be documented in such a way as to relate them to the results of assessment.
- A clearer separation should be made in assessments between situational analysis and response option analysis, while explaining the link between them.
- Programme evaluations should consider the quality of initial and continuing assessment and the extent to which the programme design and implementation was responsive to both.

Assessment, information needs and response decisions
Decision-makers interviewed for the study, inside and outside WFP, were concerned to obtain the necessary information to allow them effectively to predict and gauge the evolution of a food crisis; determine its nature and causes; formulate appropriate responses; and implement those responses in a way that is sensitive to changes in the external environment. The 'middle' part of this spectrum is better served by existing information mechanisms than the front and back ends – an issue that needs to be considered in designing an information strategy for a given crisis or for a country or regional office.

WFP needs to have an overall information strategy related to the requirements for decision-making through the life of a programme. The current approach to assessments is driven less by an overall strategy than by funding cycles, technical agendas and individual judgements. Increasingly, with the advent of the cluster approach and the ascendancy of collaborative mechanisms, WFP will have to make decisions about assessments (methodology, participation, coverage, timing, objectives) within a complex institutional environment. This requires clearer definition of an overall WFP decision-making and response option framework for which the information requirements can be defined.

Although a clearer decision-making framework is needed, particular decisions must always remain context-driven. The *prima facie* case for a given response option may not be tenable in a given context – but having such a framework would serve to ensure greater consistency of thinking across the organisation, and strengthen the ability of country offices to make the case for politically unpopular or 'hard to sell' options.

The study team found that the information requirements in relation to PRROs in particular were poorly defined. Since these now constitute the bulk of WFP's work, this demands particular attention.

Recommendations

- An *information strategy* should be a key part of programme design for all major responses. This should encompass internal and external information needs relating to a crisis response, including monitoring, re-assessment and evaluation. It should be costed and budgeted as part of the programme proposal, and framed in relation to country and regional strategies. It should be linked to (but not driven by) a clear communication strategy, and written in to the work-plan for the programme.
- WFP should develop a standard decision-making framework with 'rule of thumb' response options related to prevailing conditions, including market access factors for the affected population. Decisions to respond in ways not indicated within this framework should be justified accordingly, case by case.
- Approval for year-on-year programme continuation should be made conditional on appropriate re-assessment. An in-depth assessment should be a prerequisite for all new PRROs. This should provide a baseline against which situational change is assessed, at least annually. EMOPs continuing beyond one year should also be subject to in-depth re-assessment.

Decision-making processes and their influences
Needs assessments form only one of a number of information sources (formal and informal) that are relied upon. Other factors, including political and strategic priorities, are acknowledged to have a major bearing on response decisions. In some cases, decisions – notably donor funding decisions – clearly *precede* any formal needs analysis. Many are based on projections of future need, particularly in the case of protracted crises, although the basis for these projections is not always clear. The annual budgeting processes within which such decisions are made have varying degrees of flexibility built into them, but most require pre-allocation of resources. While additional extra-budgetary funding may be available for crisis response, it is limited and often politically contingent.

The link between WFP's assessments and its internal decisions about response was found to be relatively strong at the onset of a new crisis. In that sense, the informing function is working

well. However, there appears to be little incentive (and some disincentive) for WFP country programmes to re-assess situations or to monitor change and impact, particularly if this is likely to indicate a scaled-down programme. More generally, there appears to be little demand for information and analysis once an operation has commenced, except when a decision to continue or exit has to be justified. WFP is also notably unreceptive to information and analysis from its implementing partners.

WFP decision-making.
The study team found that WFP programmes tended to be insufficiently responsive to reported changes in the external environment, or in the face of newly available information. They related this to two main factors: a lack of consistent feedback from programme implementers to decision-makers, and inflexibility in the design and operation of the programme once it has commenced. While this problem is by no means unique to WFP, the scale and complexity of its operations – including multiple partners, forward commitments and extended delivery chains – make adaptation inherently more difficult. This requires a deliberate effort and suitable incentives to overcome institutional inertia. Staff should be encouraged to ask at every stage what is *really* happening in the crisis-affected areas, and to search for formal and informal ways of finding out. Managers, for their part, need to be routinely requesting an answer to this question.

Recommendations

- As part of the information strategy, WFP's senior managers should identify with programme staff a few key indicators against which they will track the evolution of a given crisis and the response to it. These might cover food access, nutritional status, demographics and relief dependence. Such indicators should be reviewed with programme teams on a regular basis (e.g. quarterly) as part of a programme review process. Mechanisms should be put in place to generate the necessary information, e.g. through monitoring or repeat surveys.
- Indicators should be developed for situational *volatility* (susceptibility to sudden change) and for households' *relative dependence* on assistance.
- A regular process of 'fine-tuning' programmes in the light of ongoing analysis (e.g. by adapting the ratio of food to non-food inputs) should be encouraged as standard practice, with the option of more radical programme re-orientation.
- The central role and responsibility of Country Directors for assessment should be more explicitly reflected in their job descriptions, and should be the subject of appropriate 'refresher' training courses. More generally, Country Office staff should be provided with the support and training needed to undertake ongoing situational and needs analysis of an appropriate kind.
- WFP should reconsider the question of incentives, including those relating to support costs and programme scale. In general, it should find ways of rewarding the behaviour it wishes to encourage.
- The role of the SENAC-funded Regional Assessment Officers was found to be important in bridging decision-making between field and HQ, although their sphere of responsibility needs to be more clearly defined. It is recommended that these posts be institutionalised and brought within the regular WFP budget.

Donor decision-making.
The diversity of donor practice in decision-making was found to be one of the single biggest variables in the study. Greater harmonisation of donor decision-making is a necessary condition of more timely and appropriate allocation of funds. This has parallels in current humanitarian reform processes aimed at achieving more coordinated inter-agency responses. The tendency to allocate funds at the time of greatest media coverage can lead to front-loaded funding (in rapid-onset crises), delayed response (in slow-onset) and under-funding (in protracted or low-profile cases). The new pooled funding mechanisms should help to ensure a more even funding pattern, but this will in turn depend upon the availability of reliable needs analysis throughout the evolution of a crisis.

Although efforts to strengthen needs assessment in WFP are having a significant effect in building credibility, trust in WFP's assessment reports is still an issue. While they continue to fund WFP, donors express varying degrees of scepticism about the analysis emerging from the organisation – although their own assessment methods can appear arbitrary by comparison. In order to maintain credibility, WFP may increasingly have to provide independent cross-checks on its own analysis, or else engage more in collaborative assessment processes. A more radical solution would be for donors to fund more independent analysis units like the FSAU for Somalia.

A persistent comment from donor representatives interviewed was that 'WFP does not help us prioritise between contexts'. This points to the need for a common reference standard and more explicit WFP judgements on *relative priorities*. Absolute standards and a restrictive view of the role of food assistance, while they may help in prioritising scarce resources, may also tend to exclude non-life saving but nevertheless still essential interventions, including those relating to livelihood support and child nutrition. The case for funding has to take some account of relative as well as absolute needs, and relevant contextual factors, if it is properly to address issues of human dignity. However, meeting absolute minimum standards should constitute a universal priority.

Recommendations

- Donors must work to harmonise their decision-making at field and headquarters levels, based on shared analysis

and adoption of mutually complementary strategies. Developing a shared frame of reference for analysis and priority-setting would assist in this.
- Donors should continue to invest in their own capacity at regional and headquarters levels, and where appropriate should be prepared to be involved directly in assessments. They should also help WFP to continue to develop its own assessment capacity.
- Proposals for investment in monitoring, surveillance and re-assessment should be considered favourably where these are methodologically sound and are justified in relation to the scale of the programme. Proposals for collaborative mechanisms should be given priority.
- Senior WFP staff should be more aware of the budget cycles and decision-making parameters of the donors, and ensure that information is targeted accordingly.
- WFP should more clearly articulate its judgement of relative priorities across different contexts and proposals, based on its assessment of need.
- Greater use should be made by WFP of independent assessment and analysis of particular contexts through commissioned studies and surveys.

Assessment approaches and process

Apart from the 'front-loaded' nature of current approaches, the study found that micro-level analysis – crucial for programme design and modification – was relatively weak compared to macro-level and 'aggregate' analysis. One dimension of this was the apparent disconnect between the assessments conducted by specialist teams from Rome or regional offices, and the ongoing, less formal, assessments conducted by WFP Country Offices. The latter needs more attention, as do the on-the-ground assessments of implementing partners. In particular, current methods for determining beneficiary numbers and resource requirements are poorly connected to the actual process of targeting and distribution.

What constitutes good assessment practice depends on the context, the nature of the crisis and the timeframe for decision-making. The rapid-onset cases considered (Pakistan, Lebanon) show the need to agree simple methods for determining initial resource requirements, clearly articulated working assumptions and the necessity of rechecking those assumptions as situations develop. A number of the slow-onset cases considered (including the Horn of Africa and Niger) showed the importance of agreed triggers for action, based on 'leading' risk indicators, for effective prevention. The conflict and displacement cases (Darfur and others) have all these plus other requirements, including ways of assessing unmet need in currently inaccessible areas, ways of understanding the links between food insecurity and exposure to violence and more robust methods for calculating the needs of dispersed as well as camp populations. The transitional contexts show the need to invest more in methods (including surveillance) to determine when a programme should change course or wind up.

New ways of understanding contexts are required that go beyond the traditional process of needs assessment. Here, the Malawi and Somalia (FSAU) cases both provided examples of best practice. The study identified other examples of good practice in this regard, e.g. the markets study in Pakistan and the livelihoods studies in Darfur. However, in neither case was the influence on decision-making as great as it should have been.

All four of the cases examined for this study involved a significant degree of collaboration in assessment. On the whole, the team concluded that the merits of engaging in such processes – not least that WFP's motives are less likely to be questioned – significantly outweighed the drawbacks. Perhaps the most significant concern is that relating to political manipulation. Even in those cases where the government is openly seeking cooperation with the international community, the extent and nature of stated need may be heavily influenced by local and national political factors, and needs may become *negotiated* rather than assessed. WFP should seek to limit the room for the negotiation of need and promote more objectively needs-based responses, by encouraging and taking part in transparent, collaborative assessment processes.

Recommendations

- WFP should continue to engage in collaborative assessment processes, while seeking to offset the potential disadvantages of doing so by maintaining sufficient independence of analysis.
- In the interests of harmonisation and capacity building, information should be collected through existing national mechanisms wherever possible. As far as possible, WFP should seek to foster a common situational analysis between the host government and the international community.
- WFP should ensure that its operations include consistent feedback loops from the distribution end of the operations chain, including feedback from its local staff, food aid monitors and implementing partners on the nature and extent of actual needs. Programme design and budgets must be flexible enough to be adapted accordingly.
- Particularly in protracted crises, WFP should encourage new ways of understanding the context in which it is intervening, for example by commissioning external livelihood specialists, market economists and anthropologists to assist in the analysis.
- Political and social analysis should be considered central to the process of needs analysis, and reflected in assessment reports. This should include analysis of civilian security (protection) in situations of violent conflict, and the way in which proposed interventions will impact upon it.
- A much shorter version of the EFSA Handbook should be produced for use by managers and non-specialists. The handbook itself should be revised to provide simpler guidance for rapid assessment in fast-onset crises.

Information and assessment mechanisms

In general terms, the study found that the analysis from the various existing information and analysis mechanisms – early warning, VAM, ENA, FSMS, etc. – was not well integrated. In particular, the relationship between VAM analysis and ENA was often unclear, and demands further attention. Considerable progress has been made in matching ENA to decision-making needs. But current information supply does not appear to match the requirements of management information through the whole project cycle, particularly as regards situational and programme monitoring.

Much of the decision-making around response – especially by donors – involves in effect needs prediction more than needs assessment. Current mechanisms provide only a limited basis for this. Of the mechanisms considered, only the FSAU/IPC model and the Malawi VAC method provided a sound basis for predictive judgments.

Recommendations

- The relationship between VAM, ENA, food security monitoring and other mechanisms should be revisited. They should be conceived in the framework of an overall organisational information strategy.
- WFP should aim to increase the predictive ability of current mechanisms. Greater use of risk analysis is essential to this.
- Donors should discuss with FAO and WFP options for replicating the FSAU model at a regional level in the Horn of Africa and possibly elsewhere, linked to the roll-out of the IPC.

Assessment methodology

The study considered some of the methodological issues relating to the question of linkages between assessment and decision-making. Central to this is the need to define the right questions to drive the assessment. But the study found that defining questions were rarely made explicit in assessments, and the relevant questions were not always addressed in the assessment. For example, there is little analysis in current assessments of people's *relative dependence* on food aid or other assistance, and how this may change over time, such as might inform programme design, modification and exit strategies. On the other hand, a number of good new tools were found to be in use (such as market analysis), even though the results were not always used to inform response decisions.

Overall, the study found a preponderance of quantitative over qualitative methods of analysis, and concluded that a better balance needs to be found between them, particularly in livelihood-related assessment.

Communications and the media

Communicating the results of assessments is essential to the influencing and justifying functions. The study found variable practice across the case studies with respect to dissemination and communication. WFP needs to be able consistently to demonstrate its credibility, starting with the needs assessment process. It is important that its communications strategy reflects this.

Donors expressed a particular aversion to what was sometimes perceived as 'spin' in WFP's media communications, a perceived tendency to talk up the scale or severity of a situation and WFP's own role, and to blame donors for failing to respond accordingly. This they felt was at odds with credible and objective needs analysis, and tended to be counter-productive. It is essential that this relationship is understood in terms that go beyond marketing, appeals and resource allocation.

Recommendation

- WFP should take care not to convey messages through the media in such a way that the credibility of needs analysis is compromised.

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Annex 2
List of interviewees

Malawi

Maria Bernardez Ercilla	*Action Against Hunger*
Andres Narros Lluch	*Action Against Hunger*
C.J. Matabwa	*Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation*
Peter Killick	*CIDA/High Commission of Canada*
Valerie Young	*CIDA/High Commission of Canada*
Victor Mitoni	*CISANET*
James M.K. Chiusiwa	*Department of Poverty and Disaster Management Affairs*
M. Nowa Phiri	*Department of Poverty and Disaster Management Affairs*
Jimmy Kawaye	*DFID*
Susan Kumwembe	*DFID*
Paul Jones	*Emmanuel International*
Dominique Blariaux	*EU*
Raniero Leto	*EU*
M. Mazlan Jusoh	*FAO*
Sam Chimwaza	*FEWS NET*
Andy Nicholson	*Goal*
Thomas Baunsgaard	*IMF*
Hon. V.G. Dzoole Mwale MP	*Malawi National Assembly*
Hannock Kumwenda	*Ministry of Economic Planning and Development – Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee*
Charles Rethman	*Ministry of Economic Planning and Development – Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee / Save US*
Radson Mwadiwa	*Ministry of Finance*
Augustine Chikuni	*Royal Norwegian Embassy*
Leif Sauvik	*Royal Norwegian Embassy*
Susanne Thorsboll	*UNDP*
Lars Tushuizen	UNDP
Karen Allen	UNICEF
Kasper Engborg	UNICEF
Birgithe Lund Hendriksen	UNICEF
Roger Mathisen	*UNICEF*
Mark Visocky	*USAID*
Karla Hershey	*WFP*
Penelope Howarth	*WFP*
Masozi Kachale	*WFP*
Blessings Mwale	*WFP*
Domenico Scalpelli	*WFP*
Gladys Zimba	*WFP*

Pakistan

Safia Agha	*All Pakistan Woman's Association*
Graham Zebedee	*British Embassy*
Raja Abbas	*CMO – Government of Pakistan*
Sadia Ahmed	*CIDA /Canadian High Commission*
John Moore	*CIDA /Canadian High Commission*
Tim Hatton	*DFID*
Johann Klomfass	*Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany*
Saeed Ahmad Khan	*ERRA – Prime Minister's Inspection Commission*
Elizabeth Loacker	*European Commission*
Memed Gunawan	*FAO*
Sayed Mohammad Ali	*FAO*
Tim Vaessen	*FAO*
Vincent Gainey	*Help Age International*
Adil Al Mahi	*Islamic Relief*
Jamil Amed Awan	*Islamic Relief*
Aziz Ahmed	*National Rural Support Programme*
Muhammad Tahir Waqar	*National Rural Support Programme*
A. Abu Diek	*OCHA*
Sue McIntyre	OFDA
Iftikhar Khalid	OXFAM
Khalid Kibriya	Pakistan Red Crescent Society
Iqbal Meeah	SC US

Stephen Swenson	*Swedish Rescue Service Agency*
Iqbal Fafar	*Trust for Voluntary Organizations*
Ahmad Nawaz	*Trust for Voluntary Organizations*
Earl James Goodyear	*UNDP*
Cheema Shafgatullah	*UNDP*
Mohammad Zafar Iqbal	*UNDP*
John Andrew	*UNHCR*
Kilian Kleinschmidt	*UNHCR*
Giovanni Zanelu	*UNHCR*
John Egbuta	*UNICEF*
Terje Thodesen	*UNICEF*
Debbie Gibbons	*UN JLC*
Maha Ahmed	*WFP*
Zulfiqar Ali	*WFP*
Abdul Gadir Nouvain	*WFP*
Sahib Haq	*WFP*
Aslam Khan	*WFP*
Tanvir Khan	*WFP*
Magdalena Moshi	*WFP*
Jennifer Nyberg	*WFP*
Mamoona Raja	*WFP*
Ahmad Shadoul	*WHO*
Shahnaz Arshad	*World Bank*
Ayaz Parvez	*World Bank*
Raya Rehan Arshad	*World Bank*
Pashima Naz Ali	*World Vision*

Rome

Neil Briscoe	*DFID*
Thierry Negre	*EC*
Nanna Skau	*EC*
Vitor Serano	*ECHO*
Luca Alinovi	*FAO*
Henri Josserand	*FAO*
Alain Mourey	*ICRC*
Stephen Devereux	*IDS*
John Hoddinott	*IFPRI*
Michael O'Donnell	*SC UK*
Richard Newberg	*USAID*
Stephen Anderson	*WFP*
John Aylieff	*WFP*
Michelle Barrett	*WFP*
Paul Buffard	*WFP*
David Bulman	*WFP*
John Crisci	*WFP*
Mohamed Diab	*WFP*
Lisa Doughten	*WFP*
Torben Due	*WFP*
Joan Fleuren	*WFP*
Neil Gallagher	*WFP*
Jean-Jacques Graisse	*WFP*
Anette Haller	*WFP*
Wolfgang Herbinger	*WFP*
David Kaartrud	*WFP*
Joyce Luma	*WFP*
Jeff Marzilli	*WFP*
Burkard Oberle	*WFP*
John Powell	*WFP*
Stanlake Samkange	*WFP*
Giorgio Sartori	*WFP*
Georgia Shaver	*WFP*
Terry Toyota	*WFP*
Darlene Tymo	*WFP*
Charles Vincent	*WFP*
Jamie Wickens	*WFP*
Philip Wood	*WFP*

Somalia

Stephanie Rousseau	*EC*	Food Security & Rural Development
Graham Farmer	*FAO*	Office in Charge
Cyrill Ferrand	*FAO*	Programme Manager

Mohamed Y. Aw Dahir	*FEWSNET Somalia*	Country Representative
Cindy Holleman	*FSAU*	Food Security Analyst
Ahono Busili	*FSAU*	Nutritionist
Degan Ali	*Horn Relief*	Executive Director
Mathias Frese	*ICRC*	Coordinator for Economic Security and Relief Programmes
Nick Haan	*Intana*	Executive Director
Wafaa Elfadil Saeed	*OCHA*	Humanitarian Affairs Officer
Phillipe Lazarine	*OCHA*	Head
Parmjit Takhar	*Oxfam GB*	Programme Manager
Eric Laroche	*UNDP*	Resident Representative
Leo Van Der Velden	*WFP Somalia*	Country Representative
Genevieve Chicoine	*WFP Somalia*	Programme Officer – VAM
Fabrizio Andreuzzi	*WFP Somalia*	JPO
Mohamed Hersi	*WFP Somalia*	VAM
Mowlid Warfa	*WFP Somalia*	Programme Officer
Blessing Ezeibe-Nweke	*WFP Somalia*	Programme Officer / Reporting and RBM
El Rashid Ahmed	*WFP Somalia*	Head of Programmes
Tareq Keshavjee	*WFP Somalia*	Head of Logistics
Wahid Murad	*WFP Somalia*	M & E
Louise Sowe	*WFP Somalia*	Puntland Focal Point

Sudan

Liz McHaughlin	*CARE*	Country Director (ACD) – Program
Dirk Salomons	*DfID*	Consultant
Paul Symonds	*European Union*	Food Security Coordinator
Marc Abdala	*FAO*	Deputy Emergency Coordinator
Everlyn Muchomba	*FEWSNET southern Sudan*	
Bucay Deng	*German Agro Action*	Project Co-ordinator, Unity State
Barbara Hunziker	*ICRC*	Ecosec Coordinator
Yasmine Praz Dessimoz	*ICRC*	Head of Operations – Darfur
Mike McDonagh	*OCHA*	Manager North Sudan
Musa A. G. Afraan	*Save the Children USA*	Programme Advisor
Hussein Halane	*Save the Children USA*	Country Office Director
Yousif Abaker	*SC UK*	Food Security Adviser
Buzz Sharp	*SC UK southern Sudan*	
Josephine Ippe	*UNICEF*	Project Officer – Nutrition / Acting Head of Section
Grainne Moloney	*UNICEF*	Nutritionist
AbdulRahman Hamid	*USAID*	Agriculture Specialist
Salma Rashid	*USAID*	Food Aid Monitor

Pam Fessenden	*USAID/FFP*	
Martin Betteley	*WFP Sudan*	Fleet Manager
Daniel Clarke	*WFP Sudan*	Programme Office, Darfur
Domingos Cunha	*WFP Sudan*	Programme Officer – North Darfur
Zein Elabdin Hassan	*WFP Sudan*	VAM National Officer
Bradley Guerrent	*WFP Sudan*	Deputy Country Director
Pascal Joannes	*WFP Sudan*	Head of Procurement Service
Sarah Longford	*WFP Sudan*	Centre, East, and Three Areas Coordinator
Lynne Miller	*WFP Sudan*	Head of Area Office – N Darfur
Daniel Molla	*WFP Sudan*	Head of VAM
Billy Mwingi	*WFP Sudan*	Head, VAM, South Sudan
Bill Nall	*WFP Sudan*	Programme officer, VAM
Kenro Oshidari	*WFP Sudan*	Resident Country Representative
David Schaad	*WFP Sudan*	Head of Logistics Unit
Peter Schaller	*WFP Sudan*	Logistics Officer
Tom Shortley	*WFP Sudan*	Senior Emergency Programme Officer
Carlos Veloso	*WFP Sudan*	Emergency Coordinator Darfur
Abdul Wahab Ahmed	*WFP Sudan*	National Advisor
Maria Yun	*WFP Sudan*	Donor Relations Officer, Special Assistant to the Representative
Thomas Couteaudier	*World Bank Sudan*	
Renato Gordon	*World Vision*	Country Director

South Africa and Botswana

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David Ndegwa	*AusAid*
Tom Kelly	*DFID*
Margaret MacEwan	*FAO*
Jean-Luc Tonglet	*OCHA*
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Karen Allen	*UNICEF*
Geoff Griffin	*UNICEF*
Birgithe Lund Hendriksen	*UNICEF*
Amy Sink	*USAID*
Jane Wessel	*USAID*
George Aelion	*WFP*
Sylvie Montembault	*WFP*
Thomas Yanga	*WFP*

Washington

Chuck Chopak	*Chemonics*
John Anderson	*FFP – USAID*
Tyler Beckelman	*FFP – USAID*
Susan Bradley	*FFP – USAID*
John Brannaman	*FFP – USAID*
John Brouse	*FFP – USAID*
Barry Burnett	*FFP – USAID*
Jonathan Dworken	*FFP – USAID*
Bill Gaverlink	*FFP – USAID*
Tim Lavelle	*FFP – USAID*
Caroline Mutamba	*FFP – USAID*
Karen Nelson	*FFP – USAID*
Len Rogers	*FFP – USAID*
Dale Skoric	*FFP – USAID*
Will Whelan	*FFP – USAID*

John Brouse	*National Security Council*
Tim Shortley	*National Security Council*
Peter Morris	*OFDA*
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Margaret McKelvey	*Population, Refugees, and Migration – USAID*
Anita Menghetti	*USAID*
Joyce Friedenberg	*USDA*
Babette Gainor	*USDA*

Regional/Other

Simon Mansfield	*DFID Humanitarian Advisor*
Suleiman S. Mohamed	*FEWSNET Regional Representative*
Nick Cox	*USAID/FFP Regional*
Phil Evans	*DFID, London*
Shaun Hughes	*DFID, London*
Joanna McCrae	*DFID, London*
Erminio Sacco	*FAO*
Luca Alinovi	*FAO*
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Annex 3
Terms of Reference

Draft

Review of the linkages between emergency needs assessments and decision-making

1. Context and justification

Strengthening Needs Assessment Capacity (SENAC) in WFP

Improving the accuracy and transparency of emergency needs assessments (ENAs) is an essential component of the SENAC effort in WFP. While the technical validity of ENAs is a necessary condition for informed decision-making on assistance, targeting and programmes, it is not sufficient to guarantee that its results will be used by decision-makers. The way ENAs are planned and conducted, and the way results are reported and communicated are also essential with regard to decision-making. Furthermore, external factors including politics, the availability of resources, implementing capacities etc. play a key role on the extent to which ENA recommendations are endorsed and applied.

During Phase I of the SENAC project, case studies were conducted in Afghanistan, Colombia and Laos to review the approach followed by WFP for the assessment of needs and their linkages with the subsequent formulation and targeting of food aid operations (EMOPs and PRROs). While the depth of these reviews may not be sufficient to draw firm conclusions, a synthesis of these studies[48] will provide preliminary insights on the main weaknesses of the assessment process, and suggestions on how to enhance the use of assessment results for WFP targeting, programming, monitoring and evaluation.

The proposed review should deepen the understanding of the linkages and disconnects between ENAs and decision-making within WFP and by WFP donors and partner agencies, and identify key actions to improve the ENA process and linkages with decision-making[49],[50].

Main issues on the linkages between the EFSA process and decision-making

The ODI Report[51] 'According to need?' identified criteria for good assessments including timeliness, relevance, coverage, continuity, validity and transparency, as well as coordination with others, sharing of data and analysis, and communication of significant results. The recent Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP) joint evaluation of the tsunami response[52] also identified a series of essential points to improve the usefulness of assessments for decision-making, particularly in terms of coordination among stakeholders, what should be the focus of the immediate and follow-up assessments, involvement of the media, and communication of the results to donors.

Some of the main reasons contributing to the disconnect between ENA recommendations and WFP programming decisions are indicated below:

Policy and programming issues, including:

- A "food aid drive": the link between Country Offices' operational budget and the tonnage of food aid distributed can encourage requests for more food aid than recommended by the ENA;
- Pre-conceived ideas about WFP capacity to carry out rigorous and accurate food and non-food needs assessments;
- Programming constraints, such as the incompatibility between the lead time needed for food aid pre-positioning and the time lag before assessment results are available (e.g. the need to purchase food aid with cash before prices go up, especially in drought situations) and lack of implementation capacity that may not have been identified by the assessment;
- Pressure from the media for a quick announcement of a response;
- Pressure from the UN consolidated appeal mechanisms for a quick appeal;
- Wrong timing of the ENA (including communication of its results) as compared to the timing of fund-raising events and programming decisions;
- The 'politics' of donor funding and the clear differences in the negotiating positions of the main donors, making it necessary to look separately at the US and the cash donors in particular;
- Incentives to "pump up" the needs due to the information asymmetry between appealing agencies and donors;
- Influence of the expected level of donors' funding and earmarking and/or recipient countries' policies on the level and type of assistance being requested, even if it differs from the ENA results;

48 The three case studies were conducted by the Consultancy group URD '*Urgence, Réhabilitation, Développement*' from August 2005 to February 2006, and a synthesis will be produced in March 2006.

49 The EFSA Handbook makes recommendations on the planning for an EFSA, data collection and analysis, and report writing but does not address overarching policy and programming issues.

50 The Vulnerability, Assessment and Mapping (VAM) Unit of WFP has also engaged into an effort to strengthen the linkages between VAM or other assessments and the formulation and implementation of programmes, including targeting of areas and beneficiaries, and monitoring of results. This activity is being carried out in Angola, Cambodia and Colombia and includes training of staff and programme support.

51 ODI Humanitarian Policy Group Report No.15 '*According to need? Needs assessment and decision-making in the humanitarian sector*' – J. Darcy, C-A. Hofmann, September 2003

52 '*Evaluation of the adequacy, appropriateness and effectiveness of needs assessments in the international decision-making process to assist people affected by the tsunami*' – C. de Ville de Goyet, L. Morinière, ALNAP, Draft 15 December 2005

- WFP budgetary procedures which may create adverse incentives by not allowing for economies of scale or contingencies/risk management, or real-time correction;
- Inappropriate degree of involvement of partners (government, donors, NGOs, etc.);

More technical issues including:
- Assessment methodology to assess recovery food aid needs not fully developed;
- Assessment methodology to asses long term relief food aid needs may not be reliable for multi-year operations and recommendations may not be appropriate for protracted crisis situations ("chronic emergencies");
- Absence of, or insufficient prioritization of the recommendations;
- Insufficient clarity of the terms of reference and expected results from emergency needs assessments (so that the outputs respond to the requests from those who have commissioned the assessment);
- Inadequate format and modalities of communication of the results.

2. Objectives of the consultation

The review will:
- explore the linkages between ENAs carried out by WFP and decision-making in WFP, by donors and partners, focusing on process and policy issues rather than on purely methodological (technical) issues;
- identify the main problems; and
- suggest ways to address the internal WFP and external constraints in order to improve the relevance and the use of ENA recommendations for funding, targeting and programming decisions.

Following the completion of the consultation, guidance on policy and/or procedures will be prepared for ENA teams and WFP management. Other communication material[53] may also be prepared for donors and other decision-makers, if appropriate.

3. Expected outputs

- Diagnosis of the main disconnects between ENAs and decision-making on resources allocation, targeting and programmes, and their internal and external causes;
- Practical recommendations to address these problems and improve the linkages between ENAs and the use of their results by decision-makers within and outside WFP.

4. Intended users

Intended users of the Desk review are primarily staff from WFP, including Country and Regional Directors, Operations Department managers and Senior Programme Officers. The results will also be of interest to WFP partners (NGOs and government services) who are involved in ENAs, and to donors who are allocating resources to WFP.

5. Scope

The consultation will not be limited to in-depth ENAs but will encompass the various kinds of assessments undertaken in emergency situations, ranging from initial, rapid and in-depth ENAs, joint UNHCR/WFP Assessment Missions (JAMs), joint FAO/WFP Crop and Food Supply Assessment Missions (CFSAMs) and other inter-agency assessments (including those that provide inputs to the UN Country Appeal Process). The priority will be given to assessments conducted in the framework of large-scale crises and operations but smaller events may also be considered. It may be necessary to distinguish between types of emergencies to better understand the pattern of responses to ENA recommendations.

6. Methods

The review will combine case studies with additional stakeholders' interviews and come up with a final synthesis and recommendations. It is proposed that a team of at least 2 consultants conduct the review, with the support of a (former) Senior WFP staff.

6.1 Case studies
The linkages between ENAs and decision-making will be reviewed in 4 to 6 countries representing a range of recent emergencies and types of assessments. Some candidate countries may include Ethiopia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Kenya, Niger, Sudan... These field studies will involve discussions with staff from WFP, other agencies (UN and NGOs), local authorities and donors who were involved in the assessments and decision-making at country and headquarters levels. In order to facilitate the tracking of these stakeholders, preference will be given to recent emergencies and assessments.

The data will be collected through semi-structured interviews by phone, e-mail and short field trips, as well as review of EFSA reports, project documents, evaluation reports and other relevant documents. The results from the 3 "light" case studies conduc-ted in 2005 by Group URD and the feedback provided by WFP assessment officers through the "Communities of practice" launched by ODAN in February 2006 on the same topic, will also be used to identify important issues that need to be further analysed.

Some key points to review include:

- Who decided to launch the assessment, and on which basis?
- Did the terms of reference of the assessment reflect the expectations of those who commissioned the assessment?
- Did the design of the EFSA enable to respond to these

53 ODAN is currently developing a template for an "Executive Brief" of EFSAs to communicate key results to the decision-makers.

expectations (e.g. sampling and data collection approach followed, partnership)?
- Were the results reported on time for targeting, programming and funding decisions?
- Were the results communicated in the appropriate format to decision-makers within and outside WFP?
- Were the results used by donors? Which factors influenced their decisions?
- Were the results used by local partners? Which factors influenced their decisions?
- Were the results used for subsequent monitoring and evaluation of programmes?
- Were the results used to decide on re-assessments and were these carried out as planned?

6.2 Additional consultations with stakeholders

Besides the case studies, consultations will take place with a sample of WFP decision-makers in the field (Country and Regional Directors) and headquarters (ODAN, OD Senior managers, FD Officers), major donors (e.g. EC, US, Nordic countries, Japan, etc.) and partner agencies (e.g. OCHA, UNHCR, UNICEF, FAO, WHO, ICRC, IFRC, CARE, SCF, OXFAM etc.), through face-to-face, telephone and e-mail semi-structured interviews using a list of standard questions for each category of stakeholders. In addition, evaluation reports of programmes will be reviewed to gather information on related assessments.

6.3 Synthesis and recommendations

The results of the case studies and stakeholders' consultations should contribute to determine:

- how decisions are taken to launch EFSAs (by whom, on which basis) and the extent to which these decisions relate to fund-raising events and/or timing of programming decisions;
- whether the type and design of EFSAs enable to respond to the expected outputs for decision-making;
- what are the key internal and external factors that affect on the one hand the consideration of EFSAs (i.e. whether they are taken into account at all) by programmers and decision-makers, and on the other hand the use of EFSAs use of their results for targeting, programming and funding (i.e. when EFSAs are taken into account);
- what can be done within WFP and with partners (including other humanitarian agencies, national governments and donors) to improve the linkages between EFSA results and decision-making.

Based on this analysis, specific recommendations should be made for WFP to overcome the main hindrances to the use of EFSA results by decision-makers and donors.

7. Report framework

The Synthesis report should include an Executive Summary, Main text and Annexes, as follows (suggested length in parenthesis):

- Executive Summary (maximum 2 pages), clearly outlining conclusions and recommendations, and reflecting the format of the main text;
- Main text (not longer than 30 pages), including a separate section for the recommendations;
- Annexes, including (but not limited to): case study reports, sources/bibliography, list of persons met or who provided direct information, list of reports/documents reviewed.

8. Tentative time-frame and location

- Each case study should not last for more than 2 weeks, including a maximum of 5 days in the field. All should tentatively be carried out between March and May 2006.
- The stakeholders' consultation should be conducted over a 3-week period during that time.
- A draft of the overall synthesis should be completed during 2 weeks after the completion of the case studies and stakeholders' consultation (June 2006).

9. Key deliverables by the consultants/institute and deadlines

- Draft case study and stakeholders' consultation reports: tentatively by 31 May 2006.
- Draft synthesis report: tentatively by 30 June 2006.
- Final synthesis report: tentatively by 31 July 2006.

10. Reporting, dissemination of results and follow-up

Stakeholders in WFP (at headquarters and in the field), the Advisory Group of Experts[54] and the SENAC Steering Committee established under the SENAC project will be given an opportunity to comment on the draft report prior to it being finalized.

Within WFP, ODAN will be responsible for the follow-up of the consultation.

54 The Advisory Group of Experts is composed of individuals from a range of academic institutes, non-governmental and governmental organizations, who are highly knowledgeable of the various Themes covered by the SENAC project (see list of members in Annex).

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