

Working Paper 188

**Food Economy in Situations of
Chronic Political Instability**

Tanya Boudreau

Philippa Coutts

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Overseas Development Institute
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London
SE1 7JD
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The Livelihoods and Chronic Conflict Working Paper Series

This Working Paper forms part of a series that reviews the range of ways in which livelihoods approaches are currently used by operational agencies and researchers working in situations of chronic conflict and political instability (SCCPI). The aim of the series is to document current practice so that useful lessons can be learned and applied to ensure for more effective policies, needs assessment, and aid programming to support livelihoods during protracted conflict. Many of these lessons from each of the individual papers are summarised in a synthesis paper. The series also includes an annotated bibliography and a paper outlining the conceptual issues relating to the applications of livelihoods approaches to SCCPI.

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Tanya Boudreau is a founding member of the Food Economy Group. She has worked in Africa since 1992, and has managed food security-related projects and led food economy studies in a wide range of countries and settings including Ethiopia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Mozambique, Kenya, Uganda, and Pakistan.
Email: tboudreau@blazenet.net

Philippa Coutts is a founding member of the Food Economy Group. She has utilised her extensive background in food economy in refugee settings, conflict environments, and to build institutional capacity within governments in Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Somalia.
Email: pippac@clara.co.uk

Acronyms

AFD	Action for Development (Ethiopia)
ALRMP	Arid Lands Resource Management Project (Kenya)
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EMOP	Emergency operation (Kenya)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FANR	Food and Natural Resources Department (SADC)
FEAU	Food Economy Analysis Unit (WFP/SC–UK, southern Sudan)
FSAU	Food Security Assessment Unit (for Somalia)
FEG	Food Economy Group
FEWS NET	Famine Early Warning Systems Network (USAID)
GDP	Gross domestic product
GoK	Government of Kenya
GoZ	Government of Zimbabwe
IDP	Internally displaced person
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KFSM	Kenya Food Security Meeting
KFSSG	Kenya Food Security Steering Group
NCA	National Constitutional Assembly (Zimbabwe)
NDVI	Normalized Difference Vegetation Index
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OLS	Operation Lifeline Sudan
OFDA	Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance
REDSO	Regional Economic Development Support Office
SADC	Southern African Development Community (Botswana)
SC–UK	Save the Children–United Kingdom
SC–USA	Save the Children–United States of America
SCCPI	Situations of chronic conflict and political instability
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAM	Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (WFP)
WFP	World Food Programme
ZANU–PF	Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front

Vernacular terms

<i>Bulla</i>	Small compounds of huts set up by a family, or group of families
<i>Ermansi</i>	A form of wealth-sharing common among pastoral groups in Somalia and northern Kenya, where wealthier households loan poorer kin livestock during hard times

Summary

This paper describes the food economy approach and, based on case studies from Zimbabwe and Kenya, illustrates how this approach links livelihood information to an analysis of the effects of political, economic and social change. Food economy analysis is an analytical framework designed to help decision-makers understand the effects of different shocks on household livelihood options. While the original food economy work of the early 1990's aimed simply to understand how people made ends meet, more recent work in situations of chronic conflict and political instability has developed more sophisticated analyses of the household effects of macro-political and economic changes. The paper shows how food economy analysis is particularly helpful in determining appropriate responses and targeting of both relief and development interventions. In Zimbabwe, food economy analysis has been used to establish an urban baseline to monitor the effects of macro-economic shocks on households' access to food, cash income and basic services in relation to the current political crisis. Food economy assessments carried out in the northern pastoral areas of Kenya have built up livelihood pictures to understand the inter-related causes of particular drought outcomes. The case studies show that not only is it possible to conduct livelihoods assessments in situations of chronic conflict and political instability but it is also essential in designing appropriate interventions and in determining who most needs external assistance. Because the food economy framework logically organises and structures different types and levels of information, it provides a powerful impetus for coordinated information gathering and analysis, helping to build consensus around findings and conclusions, leading to faster and more accurate decision-making.

1 Introduction

This paper illustrates how the food economy approach has been used in situations of chronic conflict and political instability (SCCPI). The food economy analytical framework is a useful tool for integrating outcomes arising from different political contexts into a livelihood-based analysis because it is designed to connect changes in the macro-level context to micro-level consequences. Recent experiences have emphasised the need to incorporate an analysis of the wider political, social, and economic context into livelihood assessments, and to increase the synergy and communication between political economists and food security analysts (Jaspars and Shoham, 2002).

In unstable political situations, aid agencies typically need to take decisions quickly – either due to the extreme and changeable nature of events that tends to arise under these circumstances, or because of the limitations placed by a funding agency. At the same time, decisions on the allocation of resources are greatly facilitated by quantified information. Yet the best kind of information does more than cater to decision-makers; it marries their needs with the words, views and realities of poor rural and urban households.

In SCCPI, perhaps more than in other situations, change is an important factor for decision-makers. They take decisions because something has changed, or because they want to make something change. It follows that effective assessment approaches must allow one to analyse and predict the effects of macro-level changes on real people. Such changes are today often propagated by political power plays or changing market conditions, and it is no longer enough to think in terms of handling natural hazards on the one hand and man-made hazards on the other – livelihood analysis must be able to incorporate both.

Food economy analysis, built from field experience over the past 10–20 years, has developed into a model that is designed to link livelihood information to an analysis of the effects of change. The method has been employed in SCCPI (Angola, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan); situations of sub-national conflict (Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), pastoral Kenya); and situations in recovery from conflict (The Balkans, Eritrea, Mozambique, Rwanda). While the original food economy work in Ethiopia and southern Sudan aimed to simply get a handle on how people made ends meet, current work in such settings as rural Mozambique and urban Zimbabwe have developed this basic model into more sophisticated analyses of the household effects of macro-political and economic changes.

2 Background

This paper has been developed under the umbrella of a research agenda which argues that the model of a relief-development continuum has limited use (see Schafer, 2002). It points out that many situations exist where emergency relief is the only type of assistance available because the state in question fails to meet the political standards required for development. Yet those are the very countries in which poverty levels are highest, and where livelihoods are constantly under threat.

The disconnection between the ways aid is planned and programmed, and the reality of life in areas subject to persistent instability and poverty is a fundamental rationale for the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) Working Paper series on *Livelihoods and Chronic Conflict* (Schafer, 2002: 1). It has determined the choice of the case studies in this paper, which provide a summary of how food economy analysis works as a tool for understanding households' livelihoods and how it can be used to quickly incorporate a changing array of political, economic and social factors.

2.1 A discussion of terms

2.1.1 Livelihood analysis

Livelihood analysis is based on understanding how people survive: their major assets, and the strategies they use to make a living. It differs from earlier analytical models, like the 'basic needs' approaches, which used the alternative starting point of trying to understand what people need. It goes beyond analysis on a sectoral or disciplinary basis and looks at people's ability to obtain access to resources and entitlements, and the options they will seek to utilise in the event of a negative hazard (Farrington et al. 2002).

Food economy analysis is referred to as a livelihoods-based approach at several points in this paper because it was born out of the above concepts. It arose in response to the realisation that to assess food security it was not sufficient to look solely at the availability of food. Following on from Amartya Sen's theory of entitlements (Sen, 1981), it was recognised that understanding people's ability to obtain access to food was vital to appreciating the causes, timing and geography of hunger and famine. In trying to understand people's food-acquisition strategies, the food economy analyst is led into an assessment of their ability to obtain basic non-food goods and services, and how this may change in times of stress. In this way food economy analysis demands an investigation into both cash income and cash expenditure in order to build up a 'watertight' picture of the household cash economy; it also involves an assessment of how households prioritise their expenditure, and of the level that households consider to be a minimum. This is a statement about poverty, which is a central concern of livelihood analyses.

2.1.2 Livelihood zones and access groups

One of the benefits of using the food economy framework in the analysis of livelihoods is that it is an 'area-based approach'. According to Schafer (2002: 8), a key feature of such an approach is the merging of geographic and socio-political boundary definitions. This is possible within the concept of food economy or livelihood zones.¹

¹ To all intents and purposes, 'food economy' and 'livelihood zones' are synonymous.

Livelihood zones demarcate population groups who share similar options for obtaining access to food and cash income, and who are therefore subject to similar risks. For example, districts of northern Kenya commonly known as pastoral areas contain within them several livelihood zones. These include: riverine zones, where people live from irrigated agriculture and a little livestock production (with the balance of livestock to crops often determined by cultural background); a camel-keepers' zone where pastoralists manage herds of both camels and goats; and a cattle zone. Within these zones there are urban areas where people's main productive asset is their labour, and where those engaging in menial daily tasks live alongside better-off traders and civil servants. Hence, livelihood zones take into account more than just ecology, and are partially defined by such factors as the major market for the sale of labour or products, or ethnicity. They are often, but not always, geographically continuous.

The concept of 'access groups' is fundamental to livelihood zones: people with the same general access to food and income sources are grouped into one livelihood zone. The same concept applies one level of disaggregation down within a livelihood zone to economic groups. Beyond the general geographic stratification, food economy analysis classifies populations within a livelihood zone into economic groups with similar relative access to food and income. These access groups that are essentially representations of typical households of particular economic standing are the main subject of analysis, and final statements about food access make separate reference to each of these groups.

2.1.2 Political economy and food economy

Typically, political economy refers to the economy of a larger geographical unit, like a nation-state, in contrast to the economy of an individual or a household. Classical political economy had 'as a central concern the construction and exploration of the concept of the market' (Lively and Reeve, 1988). Social concerns were hardly included, and the role of the state and politics varied with different schools of thought.

In the context of food economy analysis, the political economy appears in two respects. Firstly, it acts as contextual information in the construction of a food economy baseline – the operating environment that defines the constraints and opportunities amidst which people live. Secondly, changes in the political economy commonly result in macro-level economic changes – for example, through changes in market access, or the introduction of new pricing policies, or changes in the levels and accessibility of state benefits – and these can be imposed on food economy baseline information to assess the impact on people's exchange entitlements at the household level (see Section 3 for a fuller description of food economy analysis). The Zimbabwe case study in Section 5 offers an example of this.

2.1.3 Situations of chronic conflict and political instability (SCCPI)

SCCPI have been described as countries or areas where the state is non-existent (such as in Somalia and southern Sudan) or where it has been co-opted by the ruling party, who tend also to be the economic elite (such as in Zimbabwe), and where it has little or no external legitimacy. Another distinguishing characteristic of SCCPI is that there tends to be a policy of deliberate destruction of livelihoods (Schafer, 2002), particularly those of the opposition or of the less-powerful sectors of society.

Kenya has been chosen as a case study in this paper because allegations of corruption among the ruling party have discredited the government internationally. The International Monetary Fund

(IMF) and World Bank development funding has been halted – in 1997, the World Bank, the IMF and the donor community suspended US\$500 million in aid because of corruption, and in late 2000, the IMF withheld US\$20 million, again because of corruption, and a failure to privatise – although emergency funds were distributed at unusually high levels in 2000 and 2001. In addition, pastoralists in Kenya have traditionally had very little power or influence over the actions of the state; for example, their grazing land has been squeezed as it has increasingly been utilised for game parks or mechanised farming,² and this has had an increasingly adverse effect on people's traditional livelihood strategies.

Zimbabwe provides another important case study in this paper, and was chosen to illustrate one approach for analysing and measuring the impact of disintegrating livelihood options in a situation where the state has gradually lost all practical meaning as a governing institution, and has become, instead, a primary tool for ensuring the survival of the ruling political elite.

² Attempts are being to be made to include pastoralists in certain aspects of governance and development; for example, through consultation in preparation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper in 2001.

3 Food Economy Analysis

3.1 The history of food economy analysis

The food economy approach first appeared in 1994, within Save the Children (UK) (SC–UK). It arose out of two decades of experience with food security assessment, and in particular the search for causal links between nutritional and economic indicators in the Sahel and Ethiopia. Helicopter-assisted surveys in Ethiopia in 1991 and 1992 already contained basic aspects of today's food economy conceptual framework (Holt and Lawrence, 1993). They defined differences between zones in terms of economic geography, and characterised household access to food and to cash income according to wealth strata.

In 1992, SC–UK was invited by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO's) Global Information and Early Warning System to contribute a methodology for dealing with food access as opposed to food supply. The food economy approach grew out of this project in two ways. Firstly, the framework underlying the computer model developed for the project is the basis of food economy (SC–UK, 2000). It expresses households' sources of food as a proportion of a threshold requirement and develops a picture of how people survive that is comparable across wealth groups and geographical areas (see 3.3 for more details). Secondly, during the field work for the project, many of the procedures and interview techniques that are still being used (and honed) in current food economy work were developed.

From 1994, food economy analysis took on a life of its own beyond the computer project, with separate projects and documentation (Allen, 1994). A major early experience was the establishment of the Food Economy Analysis Unit (FEAU), through a technical collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP) in southern Sudan which lasted into the present decade. The FEAU was born of a perceived need for tighter geographic targeting of food aid and for an assessment approach based on understanding livelihoods and therefore allowing for both food and non-food recommendations.

The WFP/SC–UK project was developed to meet a specific set of circumstances. At the time, there was no regular food security monitoring in southern Sudan, although one-off assessments were run by various members of Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) and the relief wings of the opposition factions. However, there were national and international personnel with a brief to observe the food security situation; and WFP employed over two dozen expatriate food monitors, responsible for assessing need throughout the vast, mainly inaccessible areas of Sudan. Food economy analysis helped WFP monitors to order and express more cogently their knowledge of areas with which they were dealing and the framework helped new staff learn about southern Sudan through a logical process of analysis.

The approach used in southern Sudan differed in several ways from recent food economy analyses in places like Kenya, Burundi and southern Africa. Firstly, since markets in southern Sudan were not well understood and there was virtually no cash economy, the work in southern Sudan concentrated overwhelmingly on food access, with minimal cash and expenditure information. In all other areas of Africa, where cash economies are critical to the household equation, food, cash and expenditure information are all essential components of the baseline profile.

Secondly, in the first few years in southern Sudan, little emphasis was given to using food economy analysis as a predictive tool, or to linking the economic analysis to any available political analysis. Teams were sent on a largely reactive basis from one location to another, according to where OLS members understood there to be a food security problem. In recent years, a more systematic

approach has been advocated, incorporating one-time baseline assessments, more regular and less-intensive monitoring assessments to assess change, and emergency assessments (usually concerning displaced people and not based on a food economy approach). Given the number of staff involved in OLS, and the many calls for crisis-related assistance year after year, it was important to have an assessment system that economised on field work and built institutional learning. Food economy analysis seems to have adapted well to these requirements, and opportunities for its use have increased with the growing interest and capacity in early warning and drought management shown by the relief wing of the major opposition faction.

In the last six years, several different applications of food economy analysis have developed. While it is commonly associated with relief planning, recent evidence has suggested its applicability in areas of development planning and evaluation. Food economy based studies of the impact of local non-governmental organisation (NGO) project inputs on household food security in Boloso Sore, southern Ethiopia (Bush, 2002) and in northern Ethiopia (Boudreau and Holt, 2000) seem to suggest the potential for the approach to provide a perspective on household economic status and livelihood trends especially germane to poverty reduction programmes. As a tool for providing information for relief and development planners, it has helped to bridge divides between the two.

Assessments of refugee camps have required a special adaptation of the methodology, since the enquiries have been into single sites rather than populations in their own, wider geography of land, labour opportunities and commodity markets. SC-UK's East Africa Food Economy Assessment Team began refugee inquiries in 1996 in northern Kenya (Lawrence et al. 1996) and despite initial doubts, there was sufficient success for food economy work to be used as the basis for monitoring displaced populations in sites in Burundi (Holt and Le Jeune, 1999), and to make one-off assessments of refugees in Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda and Bangladesh (see, for example, Coutts and Hussein, 1999). In a sense, such site-specific food economy assessments are not dissimilar to those undertaken in areas of active conflict in southern Sudan where assessment teams could not travel far and neither could the local population. In circumstances where fighting was further away, or had passed some time ago, it has been possible to develop an understanding of how both displaced people, and residents, struggle to establish a livelihood in the face of significant disruption (even if they know it is temporary), and how a pattern of economic life develops which links displaced and host groups (Coutts and Hussein, 1999).

Food economy is also becoming integrated into early warning systems at the national level. Its central role in the Food Security Assessment Unit (FSAU) developed for Somalia has been a prominent example (see Box 1), but perhaps the greatest scope has been where government or United Nations (UN) and NGO monitoring systems already exist. The strength of the food economy analytical framework as a basis for analysing the indicators and determining the effect of any change is constantly being tested in practice. Work at this level is currently being developed by the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID's) Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) project (Boudreau, 2000) and by SC-UK in Ethiopia through their project that is designed to strengthen the early warning system in Amhara Region (see the case studies described in Sections 5 and 6 for more detailed examples of this point).

The application of the food economy approach at this level has been aided by the development of the food economy spreadsheet. This was developed by the Food Economy Group (FEG) in order to make easier, quicker and more transparent the analysis of how wider economic changes, particularly as reflected in information from monitoring systems, will affect a household's food and cash economy. The spreadsheet is structured such that information on changes in prices and production can be entered and used in a series of calculations aimed at assessing the effect on the baseline household economy. These calculations are made explicit at each stage of the analysis. Apart from its use for the analysis itself, the spreadsheet also helps at the early design stage of a

monitoring system as it highlights what information should be collected, and how it will be used. The spreadsheet is currently being developed by FEG and FEWS NET into a tool for use at the national level in conjunction with livelihood zoning maps to allow for transparent input of current monitoring information (such as district-level production figures) and the subsequent output of potential food shortages by livelihood zone and economic group.

Box 1 Using the food economy approach as the basis for early warning in Somalia

Developing the Food Security Analysis Unit (FSAU) and food economy approach

The FSAU was founded in 1995 to provide decision-makers based in Nairobi with regular information on the food security situation in southern Somalia. From its inception within WFP, food economy analysis was the fundamental analytical tool for the Unit. In 2002 the Unit moved from WFP to FAO. Increasingly it is asked to provide information (in addition to food-aid estimates) relevant to the many agencies operating rehabilitation and recovery programmes in Somalia.

How the food economy approach is used

Firstly, baseline food economy profiles and maps provide information on the many different livelihood systems in Somalia (these profiles are available from fsauinfo@fsau.or.ke or www.unsomalia.org). Secondly, the existing analytical framework based on food economy organises a large amount of monitoring information on food security indicators in a logical way, allowing for successive analysis of the effects of change on household-level access to food.

Over the years, food economy zones have been defined and refined, and information on food and income sources and expenditure patterns for different types of households is stored in reports, analytical spreadsheets and a database. Changes are monitored through the regular collection of field information and remotely sensed data. An annual needs assessment and situational analysis is conducted to make predictions for the year ahead.

Initially the system worked on the basis of Somali food monitors gathering information in the field and sending it to Nairobi for analysis. However, increasingly, monitors are being provided with the necessary analytical skills and equipment to conduct the analysis in the field.

The challenges of working in the unstable environment of Somalia

Insecurity and consequent lack of field access frequently inhibits operations in Somalia. This may constrict the gathering of field data, but in many cases an analysis of the effects of change can still be conducted since the baseline profiles are readily available and all that the analyst need do is to construct a likely scenario of changes in specific options to run the outcome analysis. This can be done remotely and field-checked later when the area opens up. In this way, the upfront investment in baseline work tends to pay off in situations of insecurity, like Somalia.

In addition to being able to analyse potential outcomes remotely, food economy affords a useful stratification of groups in Somalia, where so many different livelihood systems co-exist. In this way, sub-groups receive special analysis of the effects of conflict or changes in market access and more appropriate targeting of assistance is encouraged.

The demand for large-scale, indeed country-wide, needs assessments has been another growing feature. In Kosovo soon after the 1999 air strikes, WFP commissioned the FEG to undertake assessments of the food aid needs of the majority Albanian population in Kosovo – rural and urban – and the various ethnic minorities (Lawrence, 1999). Similarly, in Sierra Leone a national-level assessment was carried out by the WFP to determine food needs for 2002, following large population movements and resettlement after the intervention of the UN peacekeepers and disarmament exercises. In these cases, the food economy methodology proved adaptable to achieving rapid, large-scale coverage. In both Kenya³ and Sierra Leone, where ownership of the

³ See Section 6.

findings by the government and agency partners was a key consideration, large numbers of government, NGO and UN staff have been trained and have played a strong part in the assessment. Involving large numbers of people in assessments that require rapid results necessitates a considerable amount of attention to organisation together with some simplification of the method. For example, in Kenya only one or two socio-economic groups were interviewed; in Sierra Leone only a couple of the major food and income sources were quantified. It is often not possible to visit all areas in the time available, and particular care must be exercised in arriving at the selection of areas that will be assessed using criteria agreed jointly between all parties in the assessment, in order to enable reasonable extrapolation to the other areas.

Thus, a methodology originally developed for populations threatened by drought has been used increasingly in SCCPI, and has proved remarkably successful in providing quantified information on households' economic options, even in these unstable environments. As well as providing recommendations for food aid planners based on real information from the populations of the SCCPI, it can act as a starting point for further investigation of such issues as trends in social capital and kinship support.⁴

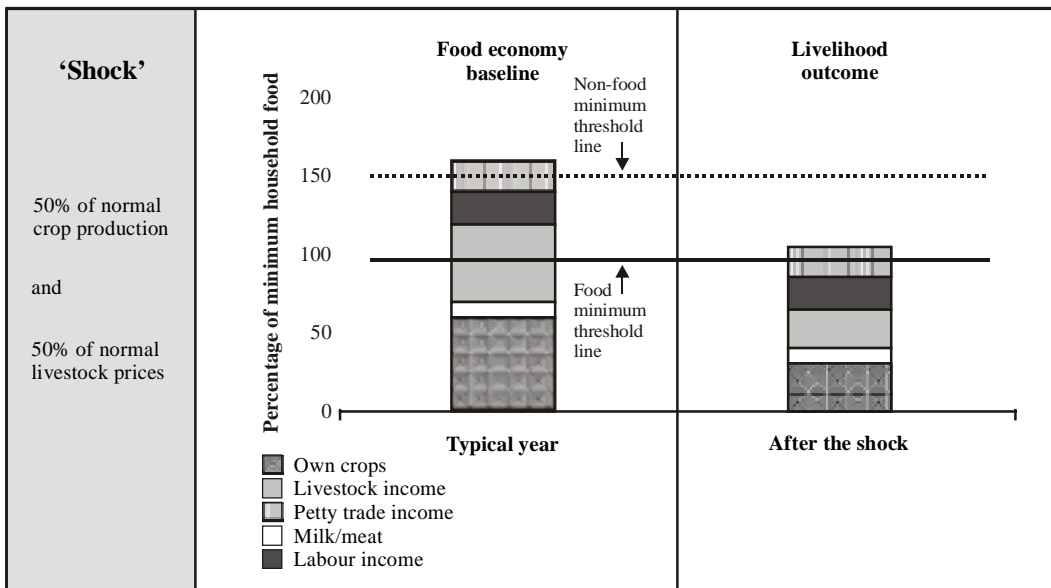
3.2 What is food economy analysis?

Food economy analysis is an analytical framework designed to help decision-makers understand the effects of different 'shocks' on households' livelihood options. The framework organises information from and about rural and urban households, and it enables analysts to make arguments for interventions that reflect the reality of life for these communities (see Figure 1).

The 'filter' through which the model analyses the effects of shocks is a food economy baseline. Baselines are established using a structured approach and relatively rapid but intensive field work (see Box 2).

⁴ In Somalia, for example, FSAU reports are increasingly trying to cover all disciplines (see, for example, the breadth of the FSAU Focus Report on Gedo Region (FSAU, 2002)). However, political analysis itself is not an intended output of the food economy approach, and better links between the economic and political spheres would strengthen the interpretative ability of those using the food economy framework to analyse the effects of change generated by political forces.

Figure 1 Simplified illustration of the food economy analytical framework

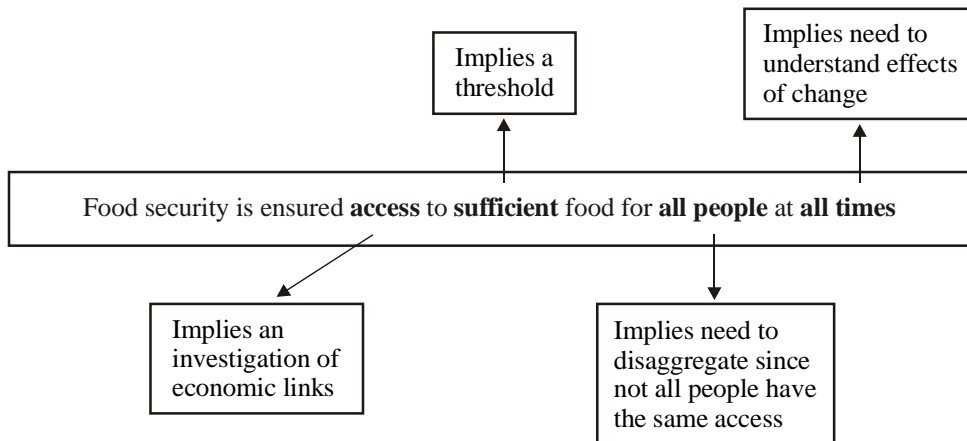


Box 2 What is food economy analysis?

Food economy analysis takes as its starting point a standard definition of food security and uses its implications to help frame the requirements of enquiry.

Access to food is the guiding concept, encompassing both production and market options: People obtain food through producing it themselves, or through some kind of exchange, or through non-reciprocal transfers (gifts, welfare).

A key aspect of food economy analysis is measuring 'sufficiency' against a set standard: minimum calorie requirements in the case of food. This is represented by the bold dashed line in Figure 1 the calorific requirements for a household for a year.



For cash income, sufficiency is measured in terms of whether, in what circumstances, and at what 'cost', cash income meets a household's minimum expenditure requirements. The minimum expenditure requirements is represented by the dotted line in Figure 1.

3.3 Baselines – the field practice

Prior to beginning a food economy analysis it is necessary that the participants are absolutely clear about its purpose. The food economy approach is an objective-led, or question-led, assessment tool. That is, every question that is asked in the field is part of an attempt to answer a few big questions which are framed from the start (including the basic one, ‘how do people survive’). It is not an approach that starts with a checklist of questions and attempts to synthesise these into ‘an answer’ after the assessment.

The three following basic steps are involved in conducting a food economy analysis.

3.3.1 *Defining the food economy zones in the area of analysis*

The total area covered by the assessment depends on the question to be answered. For example, in the Kenya case study, the assessment was of the districts that were repeatedly recipients of food relief and known to be areas of food scarcity in drought. In the WFP Sierra Leone 2001 assessment that aimed to inform WFP programming for 2002, the assessment focussed on the residents, internally displaced, refugees, and returnees in rural areas, particularly in the parts to which people were likely to return in 2002 (Lawrence and Banham, 2002). The zones used in the assessment are shown in Figure 2.

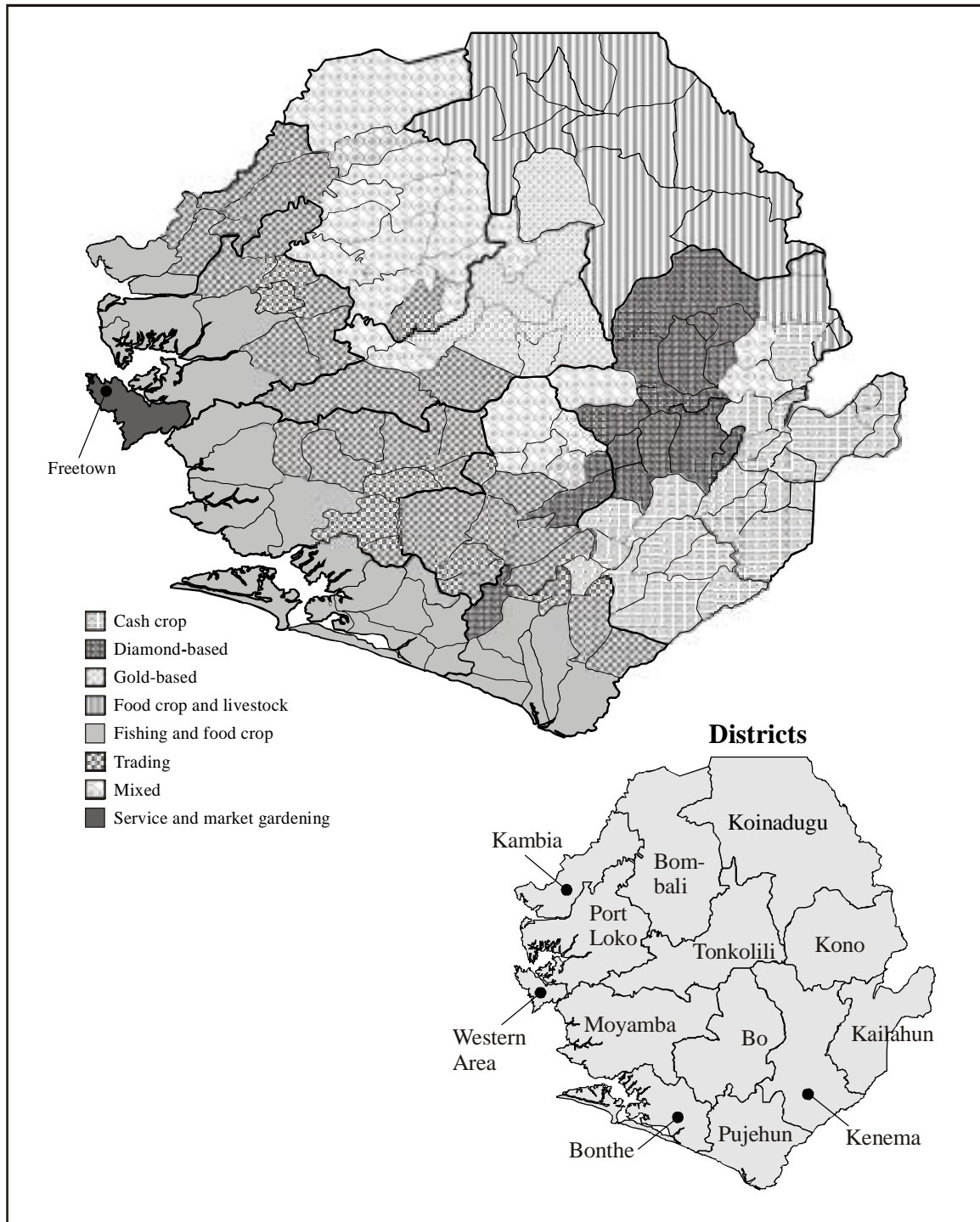
Food economy zones are defined by classifying the major underlying determinants to households’ food and income – such as soil, proximity to rivers, cultural preferences and access to markets – together with the major sources of food and cash income for households, and grouping together similar areas or discrete populations. This process of ‘zoning’ is generally iterative, but starts with a consideration of secondary source data, such as agro-ecological or farming system maps. Input is gathered from local experts in the centre where the assessment begins – normally the regional or national capital. The zones are refined as more information is gathered from sources closer to the communities, such as lower-level agricultural officers. In the case of a rapid assessment, there may be less time and scope to refine the zones, but refining can be continued after the assessment. This is the case in Kenya, where FEWS NET, the Government and WFP’s Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM) Unit have identified the need for a map of the country’s food economy zones, and are refining the information gathered in earlier assessments. Similarly, in Somalia food economy zones are constantly being refined, as experience and changing circumstances highlight such new groups as peri-urban dwellers that need to be considered independently.

3.3.2 *Socio-economic differentiations*

The second stage in the creation of a baseline is to define the groups that will be assessed within each zone. This is done by classifying together people with similar strategies and a similar ability to obtain access to food and cash. This tends to be virtually synonymous with a village’s wealth classification and hence this stage is called a ‘wealth breakdown’ (SC–UK, 2000) or ‘socio-economic differentiation’. However, the purpose of the assessment may demand differentiation according to other criteria, such as length of stay in the area, or ethnicity.⁵ In such cases, the categories are more aptly described by the term ‘access groups’, rather than ‘wealth groups’.

⁵ For example, in Sierra Leone a two-way stratification was used, firstly by wealth and then by settlement status, i.e., resident versus internally displaced person (IDP) versus returnee. The percentage of the population falling into the different socio-economic groups was estimated. See also the example of DRC in Section 4.

Figure 2 Draft food economy zone map of Sierra Leone



This subdivision takes place during interviews in sample communities selected after the zoning. During these interviews, villagers explain the reasons and attributes of local differences in wealth, and estimate the proportion of the community that falls into each wealth group. The number of groups is limited only by relevant differences in access and often more than four groups are identified, including at times specific gender groups such as the poorest female-headed households⁶ who are distinguished as labour-, land- and capital-poor. The production and exchange characteristics for households in each group are established, such as the typical area of land cultivated, the number of children educated and the number of livestock owned. Relationships between the different wealth groups are discussed at length; in Ethiopia, for example, discussions may focus on who owns the village's plough oxen and the arrangements by which non-owners can use them; or in Somalia, discussions are centred on the providers of *ermansi*.⁷

3.3.3 Socio-economic interviews to establish food and cash income options

The third stage in the interviewing process is the collection of information on household-level food and cash income and expenditure. This gives rise to a baseline profile like the one summarised in the bar chart in Figure 1.

This information is gathered through focus-group interviews with each economic group. The purpose is to quantify households' options and strategies for obtaining access to food and income. It is at this stage that the concept of the threshold is used and the 'adding-up' begins. The relative importance of each food source is calculated by converting the source into calorific equivalents and expressing these as a proportion of the minimum calorific needs of the household.⁸ The ability of households to buy the food they need to make up a production deficit, both in relatively stable and in abnormal times, is assessed by exploring the cash income available from different sources, and by cross-checking households' total cash income against cash expenditure.

Investigations into cash expenditure are important in two ways. Firstly, it is much easier to arrive at a reliable estimate of total cash income when one has an idea of cash expenditure to act as a starting point. Secondly, food economy analysis is commonly used to assess the ability of households to meet both their food and non-food needs, and therefore demands an estimate not only of households' minimum food requirements, but also of their minimum non-food requirements. To assess minimum expenditure requirements, the field investigator first looks into normal cash expenditure on food, health care, education and other essential items. He or she then assesses how households prioritise expenditure in times of food security stress. Judgement by the field teams, after debate with villagers and with each other in analysis sessions, leads to a deduction of the items that should be included in a non-food basket representing minimum non-food requirements. The cumulative cost of these items becomes the cost of a basic food basket typical of the zone in question. Minimum non-food expenditure is then converted into food or calorie equivalents to make it possible to compare its relative value to total food income and remaining cash income. This is represented by the dotted line in Figure 1.

Another important part of these interviews is finding out from people what options they can, and have previously, reverted to in times of stress; these might include changing expenditure patterns, finding new income sources, or drawing down on existing stocks and surpluses.

⁶ This is not to say that all female-headed households would fall into the poorest group; rather, the poorest of the female-headed households tend to distinguish themselves as particularly poor given their labour deficit.

⁷ *Ermansi* is a form of wealth-sharing common among pastoral groups in Somalia and northern Kenya, where wealthier households loan poorer kin livestock during hard times. It may be withdrawn during severe drought.

⁸ This minimum calorific need is taken to be 1900 kcals per person per day. However, practical exceptions are made when the purpose of the assessment is to calculate the calorific deficit in order to plan food aid at a level of 2100 kcals per person per day.

The number of villages and interviews used to construct a baseline depends largely on the purpose and time scale of the assessment.⁹ For example, in the 2001 Kenya rapid assessments approximately four days were spent in the selected food economy zones of each district where twelve interviews were conducted per zone. In other exercises, where more time is available, such as the Arusha, Tanzania baseline, a minimum of 35 interviews were conducted in each zone.

3.3.4 The analysis steps in a food economy baseline

During the creation of a food economy baseline, analysis of the information takes place at three stages. These stages occur in Steps 4, 5 and 6 shown in Box 3.

Box 3 Steps in a food economy baseline

- 1. Food economy zoning**
Level: At national or sub-national, e.g. regional level
- 2. Preparation for the field work**
Level: At same as **1** where the team is assembled (see Box 2)
- 3. Local public and private sector interviews**
Level: In largest, local economy centre, for example Woreda town in Ethiopia, or district centre in Kenya. Interview government (Ministry of Agriculture) key informants and traders
- 4. Socio-economic differentiation**
Level: Done in the village or cluster of villages, for example ‘locational’ level in Kenya
Analysis: Daily and mid-point
- 5. Socio economic interviews**
Level: With the people of concern, e.g. villagers
Analysis: Daily and mid-point
- 6. Final analysis**

Firstly, in the field there is a daily review of the information obtained, cross-checking for inconsistencies and ensuring that reported food income adds up to minimum food requirements, and cash income to reported expenditure. Secondly, there is a mid-way analysis session, highlighting points to clarify later; and thirdly, a final analysis involving all team members is held at the end of the field work. The second session may be sacrificed if the assessment is very rapid, for example, in places considered to be too insecure for prolonged visits.

Establishing the baseline is the first step in using the food economy framework. Stage two is quantifying the extent of the hazard, or ‘shock’.

3.4 Hazard information

Information on shocks is derived from a number of traditional sources – national agricultural monitoring systems, remote sensing data or price monitoring systems, for example – and, where necessary, gaps are filled through targeted field enquiry. This situation is represented on the left-hand side of Figure 1.

3.5 Outcome analysis

Outcome analysis, the last step of the process, is where baseline information and hazard data are combined to determine the effect of different hazards on households’ access to food and cash

⁹ See SC–UK (2000) ‘The Household Food Economy Approach Resource Manual’ pp. 73, for more information.

income. This step is where the dynamic ‘modelling’ takes place, allowing analysts to create scenarios or run actual data to see who will be affected, and how, by different combinations of shocks. It can be conducted in various ways, depending on circumstance and the analyst. In some cases, ‘back of the envelope’ methods are used; but increasingly, dedicated food economy spreadsheets are used to store baselines and run the outcome analyses.¹⁰

3.6 Distinguishing features of the food economy approach

Several features of the method distinguish the food economy approach from other livelihood assessment approaches:

3.6.1 Quantification

The method translates access to food and cash income and cash expenditure into common ‘food equivalent’ units. This allows for quantification, which in turn makes possible a comparative analysis of seemingly incomparable groups of people and geographic areas, both in terms of current food access and of poverty; such an analysis offers guidance in the prioritisation of scarce resources between competing areas. The food economy baseline applies a quantified threshold for both *minimum food requirements* and *minimum non-food requirements*, incorporating access to health, education and longer-term livelihood inputs into its outcome analysis.

3.6.2 Disaggregation

The approach involves disaggregation according to common food economy zones and into common access groups within those zones. Such disaggregation can promote appropriate targeting, as it enables an analysis of how different groups will be affected by the same set of shocks. In the Kenya case study described in Section 5, the drought broke at the same time as the supply of relief declined, and the number of food aid recipients had to be reduced. Previous studies (Sharp, 1999) and practical experience in the Kenya Emergency Operation (EMOP) showed geographic targeting was the most efficient way of achieving this. After extensive field work and using technical mapping procedures, livelihood zones were matched with administrative boundaries down to the locational level.¹¹ The number of people in each zone was then calculated using government census figures. Based on findings from field work, a proportion of the population in need was estimated for each zone and from this the number of beneficiaries could be calculated for each district. Following the final decision on levels of need, the rationale for the numbers targeted was officially communicated to the District Steering Groups who took part in the assessment and have responsibility for the final division of food aid.

3.6.3 Prediction

The approach allows predictive analysis for decision-makers and planners, using scenarios based variously on changes in weather, policy and economy; on conflict or other political events; and on change brought about by local development interventions.

¹⁰ For more information on food economy analysis, visit the FEG website www.foodeconomy.com

¹¹ This is the fourth administrative level in Kenya – national, provincial, district, location.

4 How does Food Economy Analysis Contribute to Decision-making in SCCPI?

Food economy analysis highlights the consequences (both positive and negative) of change on people. This aids appropriate decision-making in SCCPI, and is particularly helpful in determining appropriate responses and targeting of both relief and development interventions.

4.1 Targeting

In SCCPI, targeting relief is notoriously difficult. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, agencies operating in areas of chronic political instability like southern Sudan typically lack the appropriate tools with which to include in an assessment all the population of a geographic area whilst making meaningful disaggregations amongst them, resorting instead to the traditional list of ‘vulnerable’ individuals (elderly, disabled, children, etc.). This may be because the population data necessary to select a random or purposeful sample is not available – this was the case in North and South Kivu, DRC when a food economy assessment was instigated. Or it may be that agencies only gain funding to react in SCCPI in times of crises, and the nature and timing of the funding precludes sample surveys. Therefore, implementing bodies resort to rapid assessments, where teams may not even reach household level, but concentrate on finding out from officials what precipitated the crises and how many people are affected.

Secondly, it has been a challenge to determine the unintended effects of targeting, and to know how the assistance will affect the existing balance of power within communities. Occasionally the adage ‘do no harm’ gets overtaken by the overwhelming pressure to ‘get the food delivered’. Food economy has proven to be a practical, relatively quick approach to identifying how different livelihood zones and access groups are affected by any set of ‘shocks’. Thus it provides information that can form the basis of a disaggregated determination of needs, and it indicates who may benefit or lose from particular targeting arrangements, particularly if intra-community targeting is to be attempted.

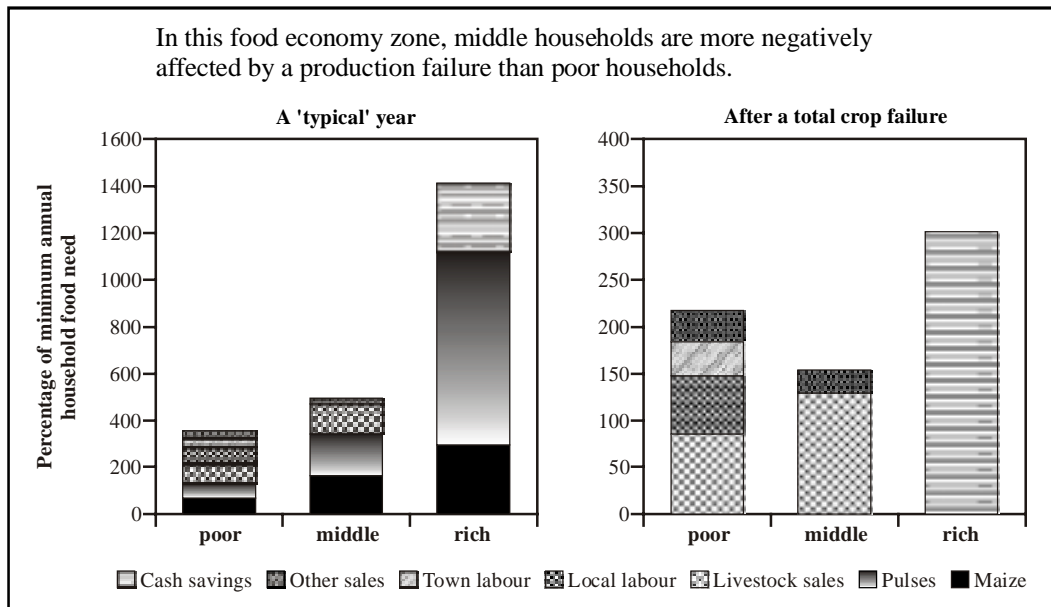
4.1.1 *The benefits of disaggregating by access group*

Access to food is inevitably determined by power relations within and between communities. Because they tend to control the means of production, richer households are more powerful (and vice versa); they own more land, they control more capital, and they have more links to politically powerful elite who determine policies beneficial to them. Food economy analysis, because it maps the links between access to food/income and control over resources, helps decision-makers see who is likely to lose and who might win given certain scenarios where a combination of natural hazards and political changes are occurring.

Because the analysis refines aggregate populations into common access groups (households that obtain their food and cash income in more or less similar ways), and because common access groups imply common opportunities and constraints, it is possible to determine not only the groups who lose given certain hazards, but also those who will benefit from support to a specific opportunity or the lifting of a particular constraint (see Figure 3). The former group is important for appropriate emergency targeting in SCCPI; the later for improved targeting of emergency and development support. The practical constraints to using information on access groups for targeting within a community – the tradition of using village committees as the final (and often efficient and

fair) selectors of beneficiaries, and the knowledge that relief tends to be shared within a community anyway – has meant that ‘wealth breakdown’ information has yet to be used systematically in this way for targeting. Rather, it is used to provide a better estimate of the proportion of people in need (and of total relief volumes) for each area.

Figure 3 Helping to target through disaggregating by access group



Food economy analysis has highlighted that poorer households are not always the most vulnerable to the existing hazard. This is because who is most affected depends on the dialectic between a set of hazards and the livelihood options of different groups.

In the graphic presented above, poorer households diversify income and food sources to offset risks inherent in recurrent hazards. Middle households, however, tend to employ higher risk (higher return) activities than the poor in an attempt to increase their wealth, but they have yet to establish the asset base that helps richer households withstand shocks. Analyzing these dynamics case by case provides information to determine whether traditional targeting of the poor is always the most appropriate option.

4.2 Determining appropriate responses

Emergency assessments carried out using a food economy framework start with the livelihood components of different households, i.e., the baseline, and add the specific nature of the shock into the equation later. In doing so, they may highlight the importance of development options in addition to (or in some cases instead of) emergency relief. For instance, rapid assessments in Kenya in 2001, carried out using food economy principles, found that ‘poor’ pastoralists in northern Kenya were less in need of immediate food assistance than better-off pastoralists, but that development assistance was quickly needed both to help establish poor pastoralists and to offset the negative effects this group’s ‘alternative’ strategies were having on the resource base for better-off pastoralists (see the Kenya case study for more on this subject).

Another recent case in the Limpopo Basin of Mozambique highlighted that households in the riverine areas affected by the 2000 floods were far more resilient than aid agencies had first thought (Boudreau, 2001). In fact, these households, given their links to the South African mining market, could have recovered quickly even without food aid. Rather than the 12-month general ration distributed after the floods, it would have been more appropriate to concentrate on developing local markets to offset the likely future decline in African mine employment, or to invest heavily in HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention campaigns.¹²

¹² An informal survey conducted by the District Health Officer in this area of Mozambique in late 2000 found extremely high rates of HIV amongst pregnant women. This high rate is undoubtedly related to the migratory mining activity.

4.3 Food economy assessments in conflict situations: Kivu Province, DRC

Assessments in DRC stressed the need to implement more consultative programmes that tackle longer-term issues.

Towards the end of 1999, SC–UK wanted to establish longer-term (food security-related but non-food aid) programmes in South and North Kivu Provinces, DRC. Food economy assessments were used to gather livelihood information to provide the basis for analysing needs. Sporadic conflict had occurred in the area (often along inter-ethnic lines) since 1993, and 1996 and 1998 were considered by locals to be war years. The SC–UK and Congolese NGO’s staff who were available to conduct the assessment had no experience in food economy. The assessment leaders were expatriates, and as violence on an individual level was being targeted at expatriates, they were unable to enter the area, but were managing assessment from Bukavu and Goma towns.

As a rule, field teams that are made up of personnel with no previous food economy experience are led by practised food economy analysts, because the combination of using informal interview techniques and making calculations as the information is obtained can be awkward at first and is helped by a good understanding of the subject. In this case it was not possible, but the teams were trained and supported throughout, with the team leaders checking for inconsistencies, particularly by making sure that reported food income ‘added up’ to minimum food requirements, and that reported cash income made sense in relation to reported expenditure.

Another way in which this assessment differed from those in a more stable environment was that the assessment team relied more than usual on household-level information. There was no secondary information available, such as that on crop production, so information from focus groups on prices and income, had to be cross-checked more than usual in each village.

The nature of SCCPI is that they are changeable, which suggests that choosing a representative, baseline year to provide the picture of food and cash options for comparison with the current situation might be impossible. However, the situation in DRC is persistent – the conflict ebbs and flows, and its effects are felt in variable ways at different times by different groups. People live within this environment, in many cases having to flee from time to time, but generally trying to revert to their known lifestyle, for example by returning to where they came from after a few weeks, or borrowing or renting land to cultivate from their hosts in new areas. The concept of a baseline year that provides a basis for comparison was found to be workable in this context, although the year itself varied between areas.

One of the advantages of using the food economy framework in the DRC was that it contributed to the level of detail of the assessment. Food economy assessments often result in a comparison between food economy zones that are distinct geographic areas. In this assessment six zones were compared, but the differences and similarities between ‘host’ and displaced populations were also investigated. In North Kivu it was found that the poor – both ‘hosts’ and those who were displaced – had very similar livelihood options and that this had implications for targeting assistance. The assessment also highlighted the major livelihood differences amongst the displaced people, who in such situations are often treated as a distinct and homogeneous group.

On the other hand, the food economy framework can make field work more manageable as it sets out exactly what information is necessary. This was found to benefit field workers in DRC, who had to undertake a comparative analysis of several areas, all of which included both displaced and sedentary populations. However, the full-time input of the analysts who were working with the teams but were based in the major towns was required to order, dissect and draw conclusions from the information (King and Adams, 2000).

Food economy analysis also allows for the consideration of such multiple problems as the simultaneous occurrence of drought and an influx of displaced people. The major concern prior to the assessment in DRC was to understand how people were faring after the conflict; but the approach enabled the assessors to compare the effect of other livelihood disruptions, such as limited road access and the subsequent constraints to cash income from palm oil sale, livestock looting, and drought.

The assessment in the DRC resulted in several recommendations. The report stressed the need for longer-term solutions, rather than just the emergency interventions that are so common in SCCPI. It emphasised the multi-level effect of conflict – on households, the community, national infrastructure, cross-border links – and the need to advocate and look for solutions at all levels in a coordinated manner. It recommended that in the period before peace, programmes should be designed that simultaneously promote peace and tackle food-security issues since the two are intertwined. Suggested interventions included: disseminating information on the current land laws to villagers; setting up discussions on land use and, possibly, giving credit to the poor to rent land; facilitating the return home of displaced to relatively secure areas; and targeting healthcare, education, and food aid to the landless, whether displaced or resident.

5 Case Study: Zimbabwe – Using a Livelihoods-based Approach to Monitor Urban Food and Income Security in a Politically Unstable Environment

The following case study describes how food economy analysis has been used to establish an urban livelihood baseline to monitor the effects of macro-economic shocks on household access to food, cash income and such other basic services as health and education in a situation of severe political instability.

5.1 Background to the crisis

Zimbabwe has become, in a relatively short period of time, a classic case of state-sponsored violence designed to support the political ends of Robert Mugabe. His struggle to remain in power is at the root of key policy decisions taken in Zimbabwe over the past five years, and these policy decisions have led to a myriad of economic consequences (Prendergast, 2001).

5.1.1 Threats to Mugabe's power

Since 1998, two key threats to Mugabe's power have materialised, leading to a progressive decline in the political situation. Firstly, in 1998 the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) started to call for constitutional reforms aimed at limiting the power of the President and increasing the accountability of the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ). Mugabe countered this threat by holding a referendum on his alternative proposal which outlined reforms aimed at increasing his powers and extending his length of rule. Voters rejected Mugabe's proposal in the referendum held in February 2000. Secondly, the Movement for Democratic Change was formed in September 1999 creating, for the first time since Mugabe came to power, a legitimate opposition party to the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF).

5.1.2 The political reaction

Mugabe's reactions to the threats included three important decisions that have had substantial macro-economic impacts:

1. In 1997, in an attempt to build a new support base, the GoZ issued unbudgeted payments to a contingent of war veterans;
2. Mugabe sent a significant military force to DRC in response to Laurent Kabila's request for assistance (Prendergast, 2001);
3. A week after the 'no' vote in the referendum, Mugabe deployed a militia made up of recently paid war veterans to occupy white-owned commercial farms. During these invasions 31 people were killed and hundreds were beaten and tortured.

5.1.3 Macro-economic consequences of the political actions

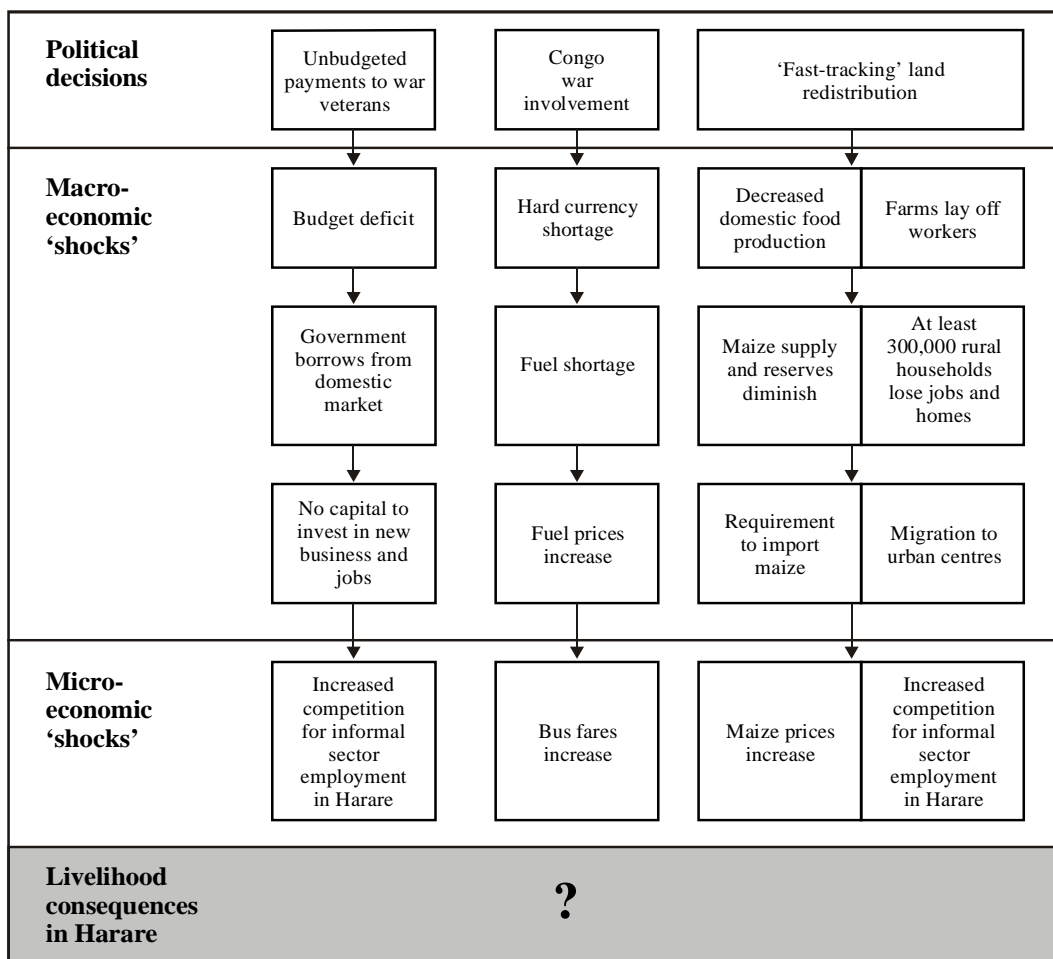
Each of the decisions above elicited a set of economic consequences. The unbudgeted payments to war veterans led to a serious budget deficit (between 20 and 25% of gross domestic product (GDP)) which Mugabe financed through borrowing from the domestic market, leaving little capital for investment in new business and growth. Meanwhile, war in DRC drew down foreign exchange reserves, which translated into a fuel shortage from December 1999. The commercial farm invasions led to a tailspin in domestic food production and a significant rise in rural unemployment.¹³ The result is that domestic food shortages will have to be filled through imported maize and prices will increase just as people lose income from employment.

5.1.4 Linking the macro-economic consequences to household-level livelihoods

Figure 4 illustrates the connections between the political action, the macro-economic consequences and the micro-economic shocks. But in 2000, the following questions remained unanswered:

- How are these micro-economic shocks affecting the livelihoods of different types of urban households?
- At what level of shock will people begin to lose access to basic food and non-food commodities?

Figure 4 Links between the macro-context and micro-economic 'shocks'



¹³ Commercial farms employed over 600,000 people in Zimbabwe. Since the invasions, more than half of these people have been laid off.

5.2 Background on the urban livelihoods assessment and monitoring system

Given the growing need to answer these questions, agencies in Harare formed a working group on urban vulnerability and began to explore possibilities for carrying out an urban assessment. The working group was comprised of members of a wide range of institutions, including FEWS NET, the Consumer Council of Zimbabwe, the University of Zimbabwe, CARE International, FAO, SC-UK, Southern African Development Community's (SADC's) Food and Natural Resources Department (FANR), the WFP VAM Unit, the GoZ Social Welfare Department, and the Harare Urban Councils.

After a series of discussions between January and April 2001 on methodological approaches and implementation procedures, the assessment took place in May 2001, led by FEWS NET with technical support from the FEG.

The intention of this case study is not to recount the findings of the assessment,¹⁴ but rather, to show how using a livelihoods approach in an urban setting fraught with political unrest was not only possible, but important in answering key questions about the effects of macro-economic changes on urban incomes and livelihoods.

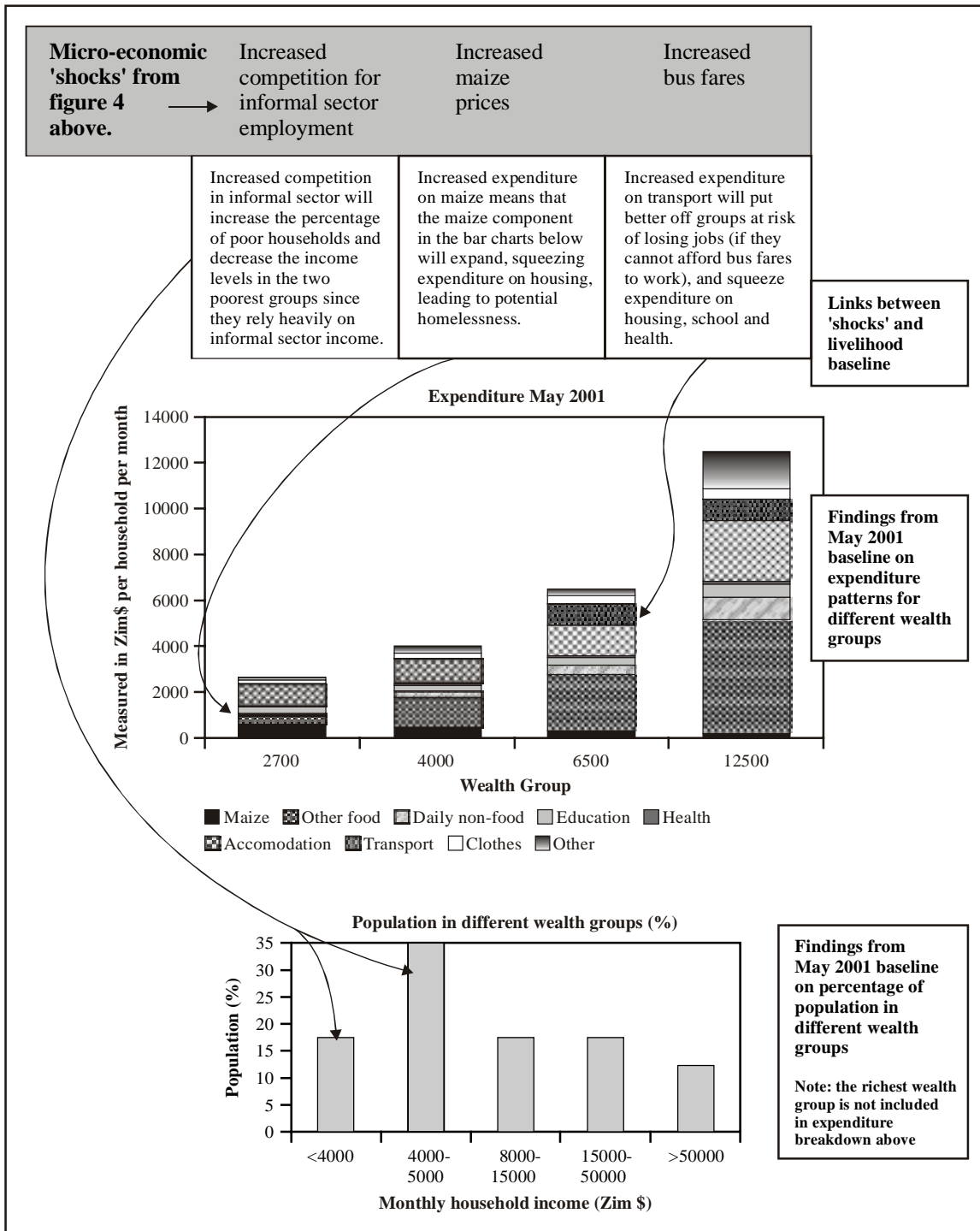
5.2.1 Strengths of the system

The application of the food economy approach worked well in Zimbabwe for a number of reasons. Firstly, establishing the urban monitoring system on the foundation of a quantified livelihoods baseline was essential because the alternative – which was to track indicators that reflected changes in the macro-economic context – told decision-makers about changes in the macro-context, but nothing about the effects on livelihoods. If the objective of the monitoring system was to be achieved, i.e., to link decision-makers with information about urban livelihoods to encourage appropriate responses to improve these livelihoods, then livelihood outcomes had to be the output, not hazard outcomes. Without the livelihood baseline, it is impossible to analyse livelihood outcomes with credible accuracy.

Figure 5 illustrates the importance of having a quantitative livelihood baseline to link to the macro-economic context. The findings of the baseline assessment highlighted the substantive differences in income for groups in urban Harare, with the poorest households earning less than Zim\$4,000 per month, and the better-off households earning over Zim\$50,000. Income groups also corresponded more or less to particular income-earning options; poorer households tending to rely almost exclusively on the informal sector while better-off households have both more reliable and more substantial incomes. These differences translated directly into constraints on expenditure and differences in the relative proportion spent on, say, food versus clothing or transport. The assessment found that a particular burden on poor households was the cost of accommodation, and it was not difficult to see how a small change in prices of any commodity would lead to a difficult choice between essential goods.

¹⁴ For copies of the Urban Vulnerability Baseline Assessment (June 2001) and the Urban Vulnerability Update (September 2001), please contact Elliot Vhurumuku, FEWS NET Country Representative, Zimbabwe, E-mail evhurumuku@fewsn.net; Phone +263 4 729196.

Figure 5 Linking macro-economic shocks to the livelihood baseline



The baseline context helps decision-makers see that an increase in maize prices may eat into poor households' ability to pay for accommodation (since this represents by far the highest proportion of non-food expenditure for this group), thus putting them at risk of going homeless; it helps analysts determine the point at which middle-income households will no longer be able to afford to pay for both transportation and food; and it shows that increased competition for informal sector employment in a stagnant or declining economy will increase the percentages falling into the lower two income categories, and will likely reduce the amount these households will be able to earn. This analysis is the first step in helping decision-makers understand the parameters in which urban households are making ends meet, the severity of the current crisis in practical terms on real people, and the types of support that might be needed both now and in the future.

The second, and perhaps overriding, objective was to develop a practical monitoring system built upon this baseline that could provide decision-makers with information on declining access to food and essential cash income in relation to minimum needs. Having this capacity provides decision-makers with a powerful tool: the analytical means to predict the outcomes of different scenarios. In theory, therefore, various political and macro-economic scenarios could be designed and filtered through the baseline picture. The result would be a detailed picture of the costs and benefits of different policy choices. Grounding this cost-benefit analysis in a livelihoods context could be the basis for strong people-oriented arguments to counter the dictates of rhetoric based on political power plays.

5.2.2 Weaknesses of the system

Two issues have created the biggest challenges for the system: Firstly, the GoZ's existing monitoring system does not collect the types of information required to provide the updates; and secondly, setting up a system depends on the capacity of people in local institutions – and this capacity has been undermined by the political crisis.

Further to the first point, it was difficult to obtain current secondary-source information. For example, data from the Zimbabwe Central Statistical Office is generally published at least one year after the data were originally collected and, given the rapidly changing environment in Zimbabwe, was not very useful for understanding the current situation.¹⁵ Also, because so much of the required data on informal incomes is not traditionally collected by GoZ, updating the system requires extra periodic field work and, therefore, a significant management component. Someone needs to be responsible for organising field teams, training them, collecting their information and analysing it. At present, this resource is provided by FEWS NET in Harare. But one could question the long-term sustainability of such a system. There have been discussions about institutionalising the system within the University of Zimbabwe or in the Zimbabwe Consumer Council, but concerns about capacity and lack of funding have kept this from happening. For the moment, the system will be managed and maintained by FEWS NET, which has an institutional commitment to improving the quality and flow of information in this current crisis.

Secondly, setting up the monitoring system has been no small challenge given the current capacity within Zimbabwe – the very nature of a rapidly changing environment means that people are in the process of changing focus and re-evaluating their lives. Some are understandably thinking about leaving the country and protecting their families to the best of their abilities, which means that finding staff to keep the monitoring system going is difficult.

¹⁵ Urban Vulnerability Baseline Report, FEWS NET/FEG, June 2001

5.3 Lessons learned

Two important and related lessons can be highlighted. Both have to do with the process by which the work was conducted and the importance of involving a wide range of interested actors.

Firstly, it became increasingly clear that getting decision-makers involved from the beginning in discussions related to the monitoring system was critical to the overall usefulness of the output from the system. It was important to help people understand the expected outputs of the system from the start to make sure it met their expectations, and to ensure their interest and involvement. To this end, an urban assessment steering committee set up by FEWS NET and involving UN, GoZ, NGOs and local institutions was a powerful conduit for guiding the assessment process and publicising the outputs of the work. Providing information as a 'perfect finished product' is less useful in the long run than providing good information through a well-organised 'process'.

The second lesson is the importance of building a consensus from the actors involved and especially in order to put together an appropriate response. While building consensus takes time and effort, it is particularly important in SCCPI, where powerful actors tend to manipulate different agencies towards their own ends rather than towards the ends of helping less-powerful people.

6 Case Study: Assessments in Kenya in 2000/1 – Finding the Balance between Immediate Needs and Development

This case study illustrates the potential for, and importance of, adopting a livelihood assessment approach in a situation where rapid, wide-scale quantification of relief needs is required. It shows how the food economy approach changed relief assessments in Kenya to allow for the inclusion and incorporation of development messages in the findings and outputs. Finally, this case study makes the basic point that an ‘either relief or development’ approach to rapid assessments is misguided. In unstable, complex environments it is not just possible, but necessary, to encompass both.

6.1 Background to assessments in pastoral northern Kenya

Conflict over resources, a changing environment and political competition have created a state of constant flux in northern Kenya. Historically the arid pastoral areas of the north have been politically and socially marginalised. Few attempts have been made to understand the pastoralists’ livelihood system, and in the past, outsiders typically believed that settlement and agriculture would bring ‘civilisation’ to the area. Misconceptions over the economic value and social fabric of the pastoralists lead to misguided development policy in these areas. Although these perceptions are changing and recent Government of Kenya (GoK) policy encourages more local-led development, the area’s infrastructure and economic links remain poor at best.

Livestock raids have been a constant part of pastoral life in this area, but conflicts are increasing with the introduction of small arms into the area, declining environmental resources, and state-sponsored aggression.¹⁶ As an indication of this increased insecurity, the UN gives the majority of the northern districts a Level 3 classification security rating, and its vehicles and personnel are not allowed to travel in these areas without armed escorts.

Drought builds on the effects of this increasing insecurity. Arid northern Kenya has always been considered drought-prone. In past decades, droughts were an expected occurrence every eight to ten years¹⁷ (interview in Mandera district and town, August 2001). The last decade, however, has been particularly dry with rainfall in eight out of ten years falling below average, and the occurrence of two severe drought events (see Figure 6).

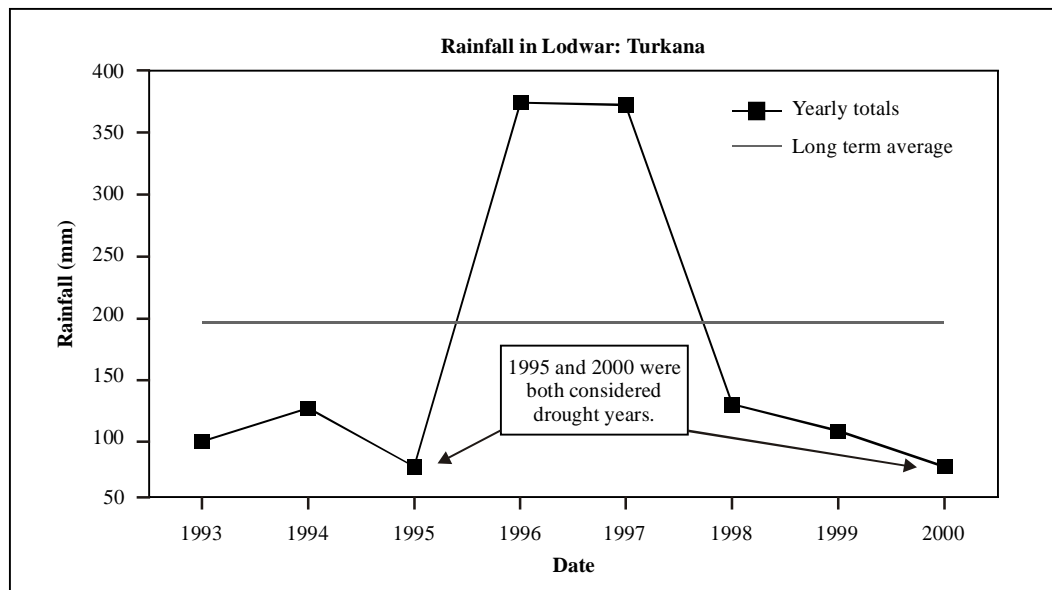
6.1.1 *The evolution of the livelihoods rapid assessment approach in Kenya*

The Arid Lands Resource Management Project (ALRMP),¹⁸ a GoK agency responsible for providing early warning information on the northern pastoral areas in Kenya, supports a famine early warning system in ten arid districts. This system was designed to be operated at district level, and when drought conditions reach a certain intensity, the ALRMP conducts rapid needs assessments. Over the last decade the project has increasingly taken on the role of highlighting pastoral issues in the national policy arena.

¹⁶ For example, in the Rift Valley the Pokot tribe were assisted to conduct commercial cattle raids against the northern Turkana tribe; and the Sudanese government has given weapons to the Taposa (of Sudan) which has contributed to increasing conflict in the Karamajong cluster.

¹⁷ This corresponds with the description in Buchanan-Smith and Davies (1995).

¹⁸ ARLMP is a bilateral initiative between the GoK and the World Bank, based in the GoK Office of The President. More details are available from that office, in the project proposal.

Figure 6 Evidence of drought in northern Kenya

All but 2 of the past 8 years have seen below average rainfall in the northern pastoral areas.

In addition, the ALRMP was influential in establishing Kenya's current institutional framework for food security and drought management. During the 1999 drought, The Kenya Food Security Meeting (KFSM) was established to build a genuine partnership between the GoK, donors and NGOs on food security issues (KFSM, 2001; Anderson, 2001). For the first time in Kenya, GoK and UN agreed to plan and deliver food aid jointly, resulting in impressive gains in transparency of decision-making and targeting of aid.

The Kenya Food Security Steering Group Meeting (KFSSG), a sub-group of the KFSM, was established soon after and was tasked with coordinating national approaches to food security assessments, food aid targeting, improved information flows, and capacity building of district-level food security structures.

Three 'national' assessments were designed and organised by the KFSSG between the middle of 1999 and the end of 2001 to answer the need for national-level information on the prioritisation of relief interventions and the targeting of food aid.

In the 1999 assessment, the country was divided into four livelihood zones (pastoral, agro-pastoral, marginal agricultural, and high-potential), but later, more in-depth and comparable information was needed to inform targeting of relief and, later still, to determine when, how and where emergency interventions could be phased out. The latter two assessments provided this information using a food economy framework to structure the field information collection and subsequent analysis. These assessments refined the four original national livelihood zones to more than 20 distinct zones. They provided a comparison of livelihoods before and after the three years of drought. Using rapidly constructed baselines, the framework enabled analysis of which shocks were affecting, or had affected, districts/divisions and the positive or negative changes they brought to households' food security and livelihood strategies. For the first time the assessments went beyond collecting indicators focused on the outcomes of the drought (such as the numbers of displaced and malnourished, and of livestock deaths) and built up livelihood pictures that helped solidify an understanding of the inter-related causes behind particular outcomes.

6.2 A practical way of incorporating livelihoods analysis into rapid assessments of complex systems

6.2.1 Objectives

Continuation of the drought into 2000 and on-going food aid planning¹⁹ meant that a crucial objective of the assessments in the October to December rains of 2000 and 2001 was to provide quantified recommendations on food aid needs. At the same time it was vital that the particular constraints and opportunities of different communities be considered, in order to help people move beyond the need for relief assistance in the coming years.

Through a process of dialogue and debate, an assessment approach was developed by the KFSSG to meet these requirements. It aimed to be inclusive of district GoK personnel, steering away from the previous model of centrally based (mainly non-GoK) staff being the core of assessment teams and undertaking all the analysis. Hence, the majority of personnel collecting and analysing the information were selected from NGO and WFP field staff and GoK district personnel. The approach was based on the food economy framework, which had a number of advantages over past assessment approaches, including more useful disaggregation, quantification of potential food aid needs, and an improved understanding of causal relations between hazard and outcome that provided guidance on development responses.

6.2.2 Assessment process

As explained in Section 3, the first step in food economy work is to establish livelihood zones which then guide the sampling of villages/communities for the assessment. In the first zoning stage of the assessments, district- and national-level key informants established intra-district livelihood zones and ranked the major food and income sources for typical households in each zone. Following this classroom work, the district-level teams, supported by food economy advisors, conducted six days of field work to refine this starting-point picture and to find out more about current shocks. Finally, all the assessment participants were brought together again to analyse the data, including shock information on the drought (using local production figures and remote-sensing imagery such as the Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI)). This included an initial analysis of how conflicts had affected communities' access to livelihood options.

Information was extrapolated to the non-assessed districts at several levels. Firstly, livelihood zones were aggregated, drawing together areas with similar livelihood options. Secondly, the shock information from central sources including the Ministry of Agriculture, FEWS and WFP VAM covers the whole country and areas facing similar problems were grouped. Finally, communities' abilities to cope with the ongoing drought and conflict were extrapolated from the field findings to non-assessed areas.

6.2.3 Findings

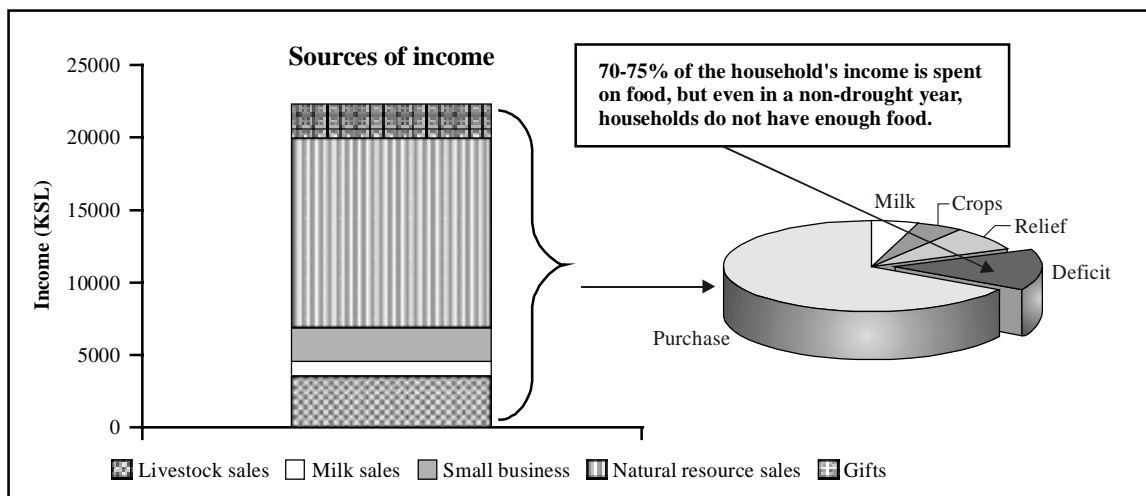
The assessment findings and recommendations were presented in a short report to KFSM members interested in relief and recovery planning. Because the information was quantified and summarised, gains were made in the comparability and depth of information available to the sub-committee of the KFSM responsible for food aid planning. The findings both established a strong framework for prioritising relief needs and provided a powerful justification for development planning. In addition,

¹⁹ In August 2000 over 4 million people were receiving food aid through the GoK/WFP EMOP.

the report stressed the need to adapt the food security coordination structure to take on longer-term issues that would enable it to reach beyond the annual cycle of emergency assessments and response.

One of the assessment findings – the case of northern pastoralists who have settled after losing their livestock – provides an interesting example of the need for development rather than relief programming (see Figure 7). Districts like Turkana, Mandera, Isiolo and Garissa are composed primarily of pastoral zones, with some agro-pastoral parts where crop production is practised, particularly along rivers. Within the pastoral zones large numbers of households (around a third of the districts' population) have settled, either in small *bullas* around water points or on the edge of towns (ALRMP internal communication, Mandera office; Coutts, 2001; KFSSG, 2001; KFSM and ALRMP, 2001).

Figure 7 Poor 'settled' pastoralists in northern Kenya



Every year, these poor 'settled' pastoralists spend excessive time and energy collecting bush products. These are no longer 'coping' strategies, but desperate measures signaling extreme poverty in the face of no other livelihood options. Meaningful assistance needs to address these issues to prevent further marginalization of these households and the spiraling degradation of the local environment.

At the start of the drought, most outsiders perceived the settled pastoralists as a population particularly in need of relief assistance. However, the assessment in December 2001 showed that these households had been less affected by the drought than those with more livestock. Although less-affected, they were no less in need of long-term help. In fact, these households, facing extreme poverty every year, have turned to a number of potentially destructive livelihood strategies, such as collecting and selling bush products, like firewood. These 'new' livelihood strategies damage the natural environment that supports the livelihood of better-off pastoralists.

The number of pastoralists permanently settled within the arid northern districts is growing. As their links to the pastoral economy decline, they are increasingly becoming a marginalised group within an area already considered to be on the periphery of Kenya. As their livelihood options shrink and their marginalisation increases, the risk of conflict grows accordingly (Swift and Kratli, 1999). It is vital that the circumstances of the settled pastoralists be addressed in a meaningful way to prevent spiralling negative consequences for them and the wider community.

Settled pastoralists are between two worlds – the urban cash economy and the herder society. Support to these groups needs to extend well beyond food aid, encompassing arenas from the policy level down to the ground. Some of these options include: setting up a disaster management policy in Kenya that supports pastoralists in dealing with the repeated (and now expected) shocks they face; establishing a land policy that ensures pastoralists can maintain their access to grazing and water;

injecting cash into the local economy in order to help build small businesses, for example in butchery and livestock trade; and paying for education in marginal agricultural areas or amongst households infected with HIV/AIDS.

6.3 Lessons learned

6.3.1 Strengths of the approach

The assessments in Kenya had three major strengths particularly relevant to SCCPI. Firstly, the food economy framework provided a rigour to the analysis, and a transparency that facilitated the involvement of many actors at different levels. It allowed for an appropriate division of labour, with specialists like FEWS NET and the WFP VAM Unit providing shock information on rainfall and grazing, field workers preparing baseline food economy profiles and a core multi-agency group designing, facilitating and finalising the assessment. Having an agreed-upon, well-articulated assessment framework reinforced Kenya's food security coordination, and enabled discussion and consensus-building around the results. This is vital in situations where there are concerns over manipulation of information by people in power.

Secondly, the assessments increased the involvement of GoK in the process and devolved more of the process to lower levels with high participation of district officials, particularly from the Ministry of Agriculture. Food economy analysis, because it structures field information, helped them to frame and articulate existing knowledge, and to contribute their local knowledge substantively to the analytical process, thereby helping to reduce the centre-bias typical of rapid decision-making.

Thirdly, because food economy baselines are built up around field interviews, the assessment provided real perspectives from communities affected by ongoing drought. It highlighted communities whose priority need was for development assistance and it brought to the attention of donors, NGOs and GoK the situation of marginalised groups. In SCCPI, emergency responses tend to offer up a path of least resistance; by framing a rapid assessment in practical livelihood terms, longer-term development solutions are highlighted, helping decision-makers move beyond reactive short-term options.

6.3.2 Weaknesses of the approach

The approach required a high degree of coordination (over 20 districts were included in each assessment) and needed backstopping by an experienced food economy analyst. In part this was because the assessment approach was being developed iteratively, and because (particularly in the January 2001 assessment) so much information was generated that distilling it required considerable technical and management skills.

In addition, linkages between field and headquarters still need to be strengthened. The process for transferring information between the district and the centre needs to be improved in order to effectively monitor livelihood baselines in the future. At the national level a great deal of work still must be done to strengthen practical links between relief planning, development, and poverty eradication.

7 Lessons Learned on Using Food Economy to Connect Livelihood Analysis with Political Economy Information

7.1 The possibility of conducting livelihoods assessments in SCCPI

In SCCPI, where information is needed quickly and where the effects of changes need to be understood in quantitative terms, common knowledge suggests that livelihood-based assessments are too difficult to implement. The rapid assessments in Kenya in 2001 and the national-level assessment of Sierra Leone illustrate that, on the contrary, it is quite possible to conduct assessments that provide information on households' assets and strategies, as well as on current food security, with many participants and a large geographic scope. The Zimbabwe case study emphasises the argument that, not only is it possible to base assessments in these situations on a livelihood approach, it is essential. Without a livelihoods approach less detail would have been available on the consequences of unbudgeted payments to war veterans, the DRC war involvement, and 'fast-tracking' land redistribution on urban households.

7.2 Food economy as a livelihood analysis tool

Food economy analysis enters into livelihood analysis via a specific food security angle. Although the term 'food economy' might imply an exclusive focus on food, this is not at all the case. Looking into how people get access to food naturally leads to consideration of cash income sources, because so many people, whether in rural or urban areas, buy the bulk of their food. One of the benefits of food economy analysis is the facility it gives to judge whether households' cash income is sufficient, which comes through an understanding of expenditure patterns.

Studying the household economy sheds light on a wide range of livelihood issues. The issue of land tenure was central in DRC and this may not have been realised if a more conventional emergency assessment had been undertaken because the area was insecure. In the Kenya assessment, it was clear in the field work that pastoralists' ability to cope with drought is directly related to their freedom to move to new pastures, and that this is best promoted by community land management. Yet there are competing interests between different groups in the pastoral economy, such as between poorer settled households who need to cut timber for firewood and herders seeking to conserve the environment for browse and grazing.

Through an examination of expenditure, the importance households ascribe to such services as education, health, water and transport becomes apparent. For example, in the case of HIV/AIDS, the approach has highlighted the competing demands for health care and food purchase in households afflicted by HIV/AIDS, and how that may lead to children dropping out of school and households being unable to invest in agricultural inputs.

However, food economists do not claim to cover all aspects of livelihood analysis in equal depth. Food economy's comparative advantage is in understanding the ways and means by which people obtain food and generate income, so the most telling recommendations tend to relate to economic interventions or political actions that have direct economic consequences. Yet it can provide a starting point for further investigation into such livelihoods-related phenomena as the work that was done in Somaliland in 2001 to assess the impact of the ban on livestock exports on the environment of the rangeland (FSAU/FEWS, 2001).

7.3 Food economy compared to principles of sustainable livelihoods

According to the Department for International Development's (DFID's) definition, a sustainable livelihoods approach has six underlying principles: it should be people-centred, responsive and participatory, conducted in partnership, sustainable, dynamic, and multi-level (DFID, 2000).

The food economy approach is people-centred and participatory in that it is based on asking people, themselves, to describe their livelihood options, their constraints to becoming wealthy, how they mitigate against various risks, and their priorities for making their livelihoods more secure. The situation and needs of the rural poor are communicated up to decision-makers in a manner easily accessible to people pressured to make quick decisions. This makes it a powerful medium for the transmission of local knowledge. There is less experience of channelling information back following the analysis, or after decisions on the response have been made, to the people met in the information gathering.²⁰

With regard to partnership, the food economy approach is increasingly being used in partnership with the public sector, as was illustrated in the two case studies, but there is limited experience of the public sector being involved.

An observation underlying the development of the food economy approach in some of the poorest parts of the world, like highland Ethiopia, was that in most years people do survive and make a living. The approach seeks to understand how they do that, it is designed to highlight constraints and opportunities rather than count 'beneficiaries'. Many assessments conducted in SCCPI are designed exclusively to determine relief needs and are implemented in response to a specific shock such as a raid or drought. They tend to concentrate on detailing the nature of the shock and on trying to find out how many people were affected. In contrast a livelihoods approach, like food economy seeks to provide support to households to help them manage shocks and build a sustainable livelihood.

The sustainability of the approach itself has been questioned because it has not been readily adopted, without technical support, by local southern institutions. However, it has been evolving and providing high quality information for more than 15 years, and demand continues.

Lastly, the principle of multi-level is discussed below.

7.4 Using food economy to connect livelihoods to the political economy

Studying access to food quite naturally leads to a study of who has power over which resources, how these resources determine the relative distribution of wealth in a community, and in turn, how wealth determines access to food. Most importantly, it highlights who will be most affected if certain components of access are eliminated or changed.

Highlighting who needs assistance most (whether they be the poorest or the richest) on the basis of a standard analytical framework can help to fortify the arguments of agencies in the face of politically motivated manipulation. And good information, joined to a system where it can be disseminated and publicised, helps empower local communities to claim what is rightfully theirs. In combination with democratic distribution mechanisms designed to get the assistance to those who need it most, livelihoods-based targeting can be a powerful tool for reducing the 'diversion' factor.

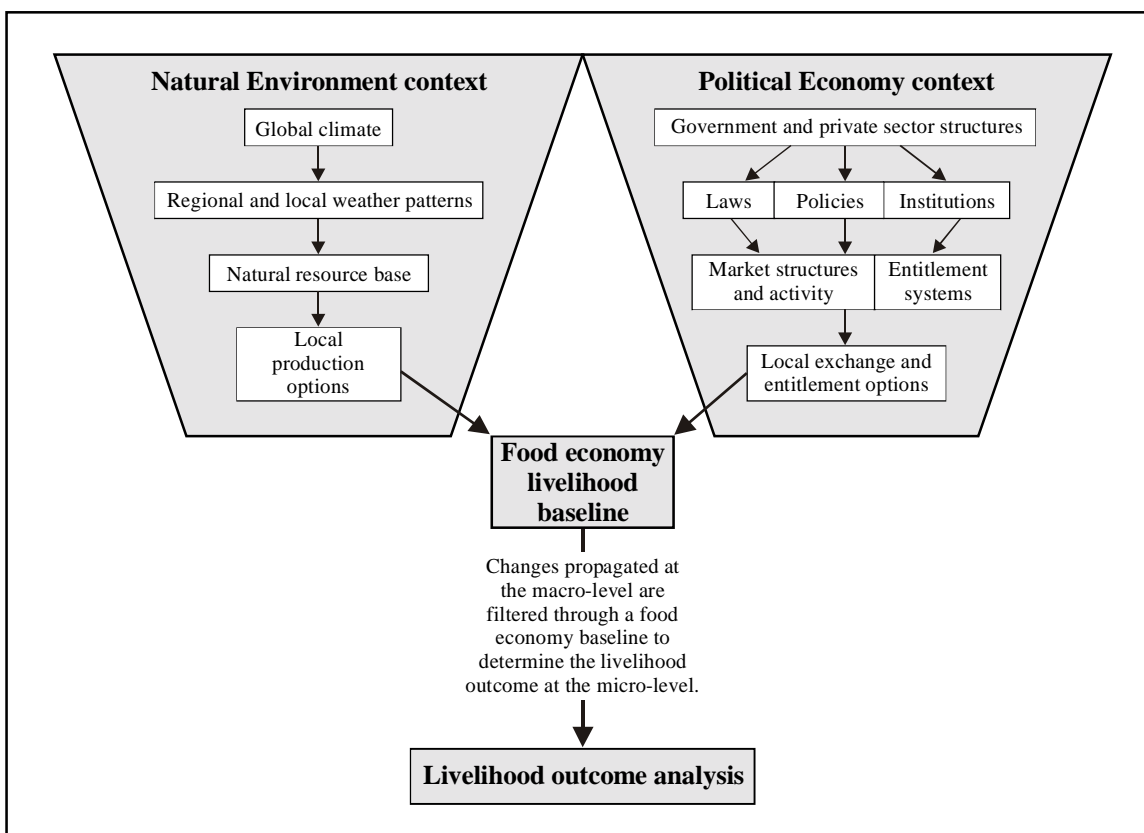
²⁰ An exception to this could be the FSAU, where increasing this dialogue is being sought (personal communication, FSAU 2002).

The case studies highlight the gains made through using food economy analysis as a basis for rural and urban assessments. One major advantage of the analytical framework is that it promotes meaningful coordination. The framework promotes a logical division of labour amongst information providers, and the value of different types of information at multiple levels (both on the hazard and livelihood side) is enhanced, rather than lost. In addition, the approach promotes the achievement of consensus by ensuring that all participants utilise their skills and knowledge strategically within a framework that results in quantified outcomes. This consensus is essential for rapid action in situations of chronic political instability.

Perhaps the most important contribution that food economy analysis makes is to define the connection between people's livelihoods and a changing array of hazards, which increasingly include by-products of unstable political economies. By filtering the hazard analysis (whether production-oriented or market/entitlement-based) through a food economy baseline, a variegated outcome analysis is provided of the effects of changes in political economy or the natural resource base across a larger national context. Without such a profile, decision-makers/information-users would have only a specification of the 'hazard' – for example, that drought is likely to affect a certain area of the country, or that a conflict has broken out between two warring groups – but they would be left without an understanding of how the drought or the conflict will affect the people living in those areas of the country.

The schematic figure (Figure 8) below draws parallels between the synthesis of drought or flood early warning indicators and food economy's livelihood information, and the analysis of political economic changes in light of the same, detailed livelihoods information.

Figure 8 Links between food economy and the political economy context



Already, the food economy framework is used to combine information on weather patterns with baseline livelihood information, for example in Somalia. The framework has also been used in an end-to-end analysis linking the effects of the 1997 El Niño to household food security in Zimbabwe (Boudreau, 1997).

The Zimbabwe case study illustrates how national-level economic decisions can be combined with livelihood information to measure the effect on the poor. This collaboration needs to be further developed in practice by political economists and livelihood analysts working together to integrate their knowledge.

The importance of this is emphasised by the fact that subsistence economies are becoming a thing of the past. Food economy work throughout Africa repeatedly shows that in rural areas the poor, in particular, buy most of their food, but remember their fathers or grandfathers producing it. Most of the cash they earn to purchase it comes from off-farm income. Hence their livelihood security is linked to functioning markets and government policies that affect prices and priority goods and services, such as health and education.

7.5 Recommended future developments

Livelihoods and conflict are linked; competition for scarce resources is a major factor in many of the world's sub-national conflicts, and analysing access to scarce resources is at the centre of food economy analysis.

Food economy studies could play a crucial part in the process of planning for peace because they highlight areas at high risk of food insecurity and suggest starting points for community-level planning. The information collated on the asset bases and livelihood preferences of households in a food economy zone could play a part in triggering and facilitating inter-community discussions on such topics of mutual concern as markets and land use, particularly in Kenya and Sudan, where a good deal of food economy work has already been done. The information on variations in access to, and importance of, available resources²¹ provides a strong basis upon which to lobby on behalf of marginalised communities for the inclusion of their needs in future policies and laws that relate to their livelihoods.

One reason that, to date, food economy has been used for this infrequently is that it is better known for its relief-related output – expressions of food deficits in a community – than for the details it uncovers on livelihood resources and goals. Emergency and development planners and implementers do not have a long history of sharing information and working together. A more holistic approach would increase the likelihood of food economy information being used for a wider purpose than food aid planning. Equally, if food economy information were fed back to communities and into multi-level, holistic frameworks such as the proposed Integrated Planning for Peace Framework for Sudan,²² it would contribute to institutionalising cross-sectoral planning approaches.

In order for the approach to measure the effects of different changes on household and community access to food and cash income good information is required from specialists in the hazard fields. Food economy analysts do not claim to be such specialists, yet they are often forced to take on the task of a climate scientist or a political economy or market specialist on the fly, because the links between disciplines remain fragmented at best.

²¹ For example, for the Dinka share-croppers in Darfur, pastoralists in northern Kenya and the people of North and South Kivu, DRC.

²² This is work in progress commissioned by the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) Partners Forum for Sudan, and funded by UNDP.

In an ideal world, political economists would provide analysis to market analysts who would use it to produce estimates of the effects of political economy changes on the markets. They would provide output in the form of price changes for specific commodities to food economy analysts who would then determine the likely effects of these price changes on household income and expenditure patterns. Critical translation points occur where disciplines (such as climate science and weather, or weather and agronomy) meet, and improving these 'synapses' is one key to improving livelihood analysis.

8 Conclusions

The following points summarise key arguments made in this paper related to how food economy contributes to assessment principles and outcomes in situations of chronic conflict and political instability.

- Food economy analysis functions around a model that makes it possible to analyse the effects of both natural and man-made hazards on household access to food and income. In SCCPI, this facility is absolutely crucial if the objective is to design strategies for supporting and promoting livelihoods rather than just reducing the immediate effects of a hazard.
- Food economy translates livelihoods analysis into practical, quantified information for decision-makers, with a practical economic geography attached. It is based on foods but tells a rounded story of how poor people cope and how communities are internally differentiated. Quantification and disaggregation are essential for prioritisation and targeting in SCCPI.
- It is a robust and transparent approach remarkably adaptable to war and peace, town and country – incorporating the essential elements of livelihood analysis in an approach that can be used to rapidly understand livelihood outcomes in complex emergencies.
- Because the framework logically organises and structures different types and levels of information, it provides a powerful impetus for coordinated information gathering and analysis. This same facility helps build consensus around findings and conclusions, leading to faster and more accurate decision-making.

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