



Summary 4: The role of integrated livelihoods approaches

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Introduction

Social protection has emerged rapidly as a key development and humanitarian policy issue in the last decade. At the same time, there have been major food price shocks in many countries in the last 5 years. As a result, interest in social protection and food systems is converging and many donor agencies and governments are looking at how different social protection instruments might better support or enable the different components of food systems and maintain their resilience in the face of major shocks and stresses. These summaries, based on a series of reports, explore the impacts of different social protection instruments on resilient food systems and provide a set of key messages for policy makers and programmers working on social protection and food security.

Defining a food system

We conceptualise a food system by drawing on a shared and common definition of food security ('when all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life' FAO 1996) and we focus on four specific dimensions of food security:

- The availability of food: the supply of food at the macro national (global) level
- People's entitlement to food (henceforth called 'access to food'): households' ability to produce and/or purchase food
- The utilisation of food: the intake of sufficient, safe and quality food
- Crisis prevention and management: maintaining availability, access and utilisation in contexts of emergencies, shocks and stresses

Impacts of integrated livelihoods programmes on food security

This Briefing Paper explores evidence on the impacts of integrated livelihoods programmes on resilient food systems, focusing specifically on impacts on the availability of food, access to food and the utilisation of food, all in the context of specific shocks and stresses. The paper draws on evidence from four types of integrated programme (see Box 1).

Box 1: Types of integrated programmes

The first group of integrated programmes follow a type of "graduation" model and includes the Chars Livelihoods Programme (CLP) and Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction (CFPR) in Bangladesh, CGAP-Ford Foundation pilot projects in Haiti, India, Pakistan, Honduras and Ethiopia, and the Protracted Relief Programme (PRP) in Zimbabwe. In the majority of these programmes a large value asset transfer (usually livestock) is received by beneficiaries (most often women). At the same time as the asset transfer, beneficiaries receive a number of complementary programmes and services, including skills training (which includes how to look after the asset, market-based skills), a monthly cash stipend, homestead gardens; a savings scheme, free access to health care, social development training and awareness (such as nutrition education, awareness on hygiene). Within approximately 18-24 months, it is expected that beneficiaries will "graduate" out of the programme.

The second category includes the DFID-funded livelihoods projects in India. Projects in Andhra Pradesh, Madhya

Pradesh and Orissa (amongst other states) aimed to improve rural livelihoods through increasing agricultural production and productivity of rural farmers. The integrated components included agricultural inputs and improved farming practices (including crop intensification and diversification), watershed interventions, capacity building and technical support for self-help groups, micro-finance and community seed banks. This group also includes the World Food Programme MERET-PLUS programme (Managing Environment and Resources to Enable Transitions to More Sustainable Livelihoods Through Partnership and Land User Solidarity), which mainly focuses on improved management of soil and watershed interventions, with the addition of a food-for-assets component.

The third group consists of the Millennium Development Villages (MDV) projects implemented in fourteen villages across ten countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The project implements interventions in five sectors: i) agriculture: agricultural inputs (improved seeds, fertilizers), farmer training, access to loans and savings; ii) health: water and sanitation interventions, basic health education, increasing dietary diversity, nutrition interventions at clinics, schools and at household and community levels; iii) education; iv) infrastructure; and v) business development.

Finally the fourth category includes both the Meket Livelihoods Development Project (MLDP) in Ethiopia and the Integrated Food Security Programme (IFSP) in Malawi, which comprised a number of agricultural, water, health and income generation interventions, with the addition of a cash/food transfer. These are similar to the first category of programmes, but without the explicit emphasis on graduation.

What do we know about the impact of integrated livelihoods programmes on food availability?

Across all the types of programmes, evidence from impact evaluations suggest that a key contributing factor to reducing household vulnerability to food insecurity is increased agricultural production and productivity. In some programmes – notably DFID-funded India, Zimbabwe’s PRP, the MERET-PLUS in Ethiopia, Malawi’s IFSP and MDVs where agricultural productivity is a main programme objective – programme interventions have resulted in increases in the production of additional crops (in the *rabi* season in India), improvements in land-based productivity resulting in increased yields and a greater diversification in agriculture. While the primary focus of the “graduation” model programmes is to generate income through assets such as livestock, programme evaluations still report an increase in agricultural productivity due to complementary programme interventions in vegetable / homestead gardening. In the case of CLP, for instance, beneficiaries receive skills training in homestead gardening as well as the provision of quality seeds and fruit saplings, help developing compost pits and in the marketing of surplus products.

Another key finding is the importance of increased food availability through community-run grain and seed banks in the MDLP and the DFID-funded projects (in Madhya Pradesh, Western Orissa and Andhra Pradesh) to respond to predictable seasonal and unpredictable shocks and stresses. An important function of the grain banks are that they are able to respond much more quickly to local food shortages than centralised food security programmes (see also Maunder, 2013 in this series).

What do we know about the impact of integrated livelihoods programmes on access to food?

Increased incomes from programme interventions are another key factor which promote household food security, in particular facilitating better access (and in some cases utilisation) to food. Across the different types of programmes, various programme components are reported to contribute to this impact. In particular, households from the BRAC graduation model (CFPR and pilots) report increased expenditure on food. In the case of CFPR this is attributed to the availability of the regular cash stipend during the first 18 months of programme participation, and a stronger asset base generated by the programme’s transfer. Similarly, reports from the DFID-livelihoods programme suggest that the availability of consumption credit at the same time as generating income from diversifying livelihoods is a key contributing factor smoothing consumption over food insecure periods. In CLP, Bangladesh, the availability of short-term public works programme (and also found in DFID-funded Andhra Pradesh project) is seen as a critical factor which ensures consumption smoothing in the *monga* season (for more detailed discussion on public works see McCord, 2013 in this series).

What do we know about the impact of integrated livelihoods programmes on utilisation and nutrition?

While three of the types of integrated livelihoods models (MDVs, MDLP and “graduation” model) also include “social” type trainings and awareness (such as nutrition education, hygiene awareness such as washing hands, and water and sanitation interventions) it is difficult to assess the extent to which these components have contributed to final nutrition outcomes. There are possible explanations for this. One is that although education and awareness is given to beneficiaries, they do not put it into practice due to prevailing socio-cultural norms. The other is that it is very difficult to separate out the impacts of different components in an integrated programme. Other evidence of the programmes’ final impact on nutrition (measured by stunting, wasting or BMI indicators) seems to be mixed. A study from the Millennium Development Villages reports a reduction in stunting across nine village sites (out of fourteen village sites in ten countries) (Buse et al., 2008) and there is evidence of a significant reduction in stunting in Mulanje district of Malawi, where the IFSP was implemented (Webb, 2011). Evidence, however, is inconsistent from the “graduation” model programmes despite findings of improved diet and food security: the Fonkoze CGAP programme in Haiti for instance, found a reduction in severe wasting among beneficiary household children from baseline to 24 months but reports suggest that moderate malnutrition actually increased from 18 months to 24 months (Huda and Simanowitz, 2010); studies from CLP demonstrate some improvements in women’s BMI but no significant differences in under 5 wasting and stunting between beneficiary and treatment groups (Goto and Mascie-Taylor, 2010; Mascie-Taylor, 2010).

What do we know about the impact of integrated livelihoods programmes on crisis and emergency response?

A key function of integrated livelihoods programmes appears to be their ability to smooth predictable seasonal food insecurity. The roles of grain banks, short-term public works programmes, reliable access to income and diversified income are key features which contribute to crisis prevention and management.

There is relatively little evidence available however on how integrated livelihoods programmes support households in the contexts of unexpected large-scale shocks or food price spikes. The PRP in Zimbabwe offers some (but still limited) insight here. Given the situation of protracted political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe, the PRP was designed to be flexible, enabling the use of appropriate interventions to respond to the current need. During periods of hyperinflation and high food prices, when the value of cash diminished dramatically, food transfers were deployed instead to cover the food gap. The value of the asset transfer was also increased during the course of the programme, in order to increase households’ buffering capacity in the event of drought or other shocks (for detailed discussion on cash transfers see Holmes and Bhuvanendra, 2013 in this series). Evidence of the impacts of the programme from its final evaluation however, is not yet available.

Key messages for policy makers

1. The integrated approach – which uses layers or sequenced programme interventions – demonstrates positive effects on improving food availability and access: In this review, tentative evidence suggests that layering and sequencing the following types of components have been beneficial to food security outcomes: i) impacts on increased productivity and production appears to be a result of combined components such as agricultural inputs, technology and skills training ii) the provision of consumption smoothing stipend / consumption credit at the same time as households are starting to generate income from the longer-term asset base and livelihood diversification; and iii) the ability to reduce seasonal risks through the provision of additional targeted interventions (such as public works, grain reserves) at particular times of the year.

2. Integrated programmes show positive results on smoothing consumption, particularly for predictable seasonal deficits where programme interventions can be planned for in advance: Integrated programmes which incorporate specific interventions to reduce vulnerability to seasonal food insecurity include short-term public works, community grain banks and a focus on diversifying livelihoods. It is important also to note however, that increased assets bases do not necessarily act as a buffer – evidence from the Haiti show that households were reluctant to sell their assets, and continued to reduce quantity and quality of food to cope with food insecurity.

3. There is little evidence yet on the effectiveness of integrated programmes to help households' resilience to larger unpredictable shocks: however, evidence does suggest that where cash components are used in the context of food price crisis decreases in purchasing power can be seen, so there is a need to consider index-linking or cash / food / voucher combinations. Moreover, there is some evidence that "thresholds" matter, but we still know relatively little about what those thresholds are (evidence from Zimbabwe for example suggests that increasing the value of the asset was a significant element in improving household resilience to shocks, but more evidence on this is currently unavailable).

4. Despite increased availability and access, there is not a strong link to improved nutrition outcomes: even when there has been a focus on integrated components such as health care, sanitation, and nutrition awareness raising, only a few programmes show significant results on nutrition indicators such as wasting, stunting and BMI. It is not clear from the literature why this is, and merits further investigation.

5. More focused M&E needs to be integrated into integrated programmes to understand the impacts on food security outcomes (especially in the context of final outcomes on nutrition): This includes more strategic assessments of the programme components to help the design of future programmes, especially in the context of food security.

6. Many programmes target women but we know relatively little about sustainability of programmes and impacts on gender equality more broadly: With some exceptions (e.g. CLP and CFPR) there has been relatively little investigation on the impacts of programmes on gender equality, despite a focus on women as recipients on the basis of their experiences of poverty. Given the strong links between women's empowerment and food and nutrition security, assessments of programmes' impacts on key dimensions of gender equality (such as control over income, decision-making, childcare practices, divisions of labour in the household, time poverty) are critical to understand in more detail the linkages and bottlenecks between programme impacts in terms of increases in food availability / access and nutrition. A key question also remains, however, as to the sustainability of integrated programme interventions, and their ability to break households out of poverty in the medium to longer term.

7. Specific design features, such as the scale of the programme and length of programme intervention need to be considered: most integrated programmes that are discussed here are relatively small scale programmes funded by donors and implemented by (international or local) NGOs. Many of the programmes are relatively expensive compared to other social protection interventions because of the large value of transfers, the multiple programme components and the intense investment in programme staff time with beneficiaries (in terms of training, social awareness raising etc.). However, proponents of integrated programmes argue that these features are a pre-requisite for supporting households to move out of poverty. The intense nature of these programmes does raise specific considerations about the potential replication and scaling up of these types of programmes in other contexts.

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