



UNOCHA

NEW THINKING ON FOOD SECURITY

A DISCUSSION PAPER

By the Pastoralist Communication Initiative

Summary: Poverty and vulnerability is spreading at an alarming rate in Ethiopia. Attainment of all the 2015 Millennium Development Goals looks increasingly unlikely despite economic growth rates and major policy initiatives like the Sustainable Development Poverty Reduction Programme, the Lowland Food Security Strategy and the Safety Nets Programme. Food aid has kept people alive, but new thinking is needed to break the cycle of dependency and support seven million people who are food insecure.

Are current policies working?

- How deep is the problem and what is causing insecurity?
- Is resettlement the right solution?
- Has agricultural development-led industrialisation made sufficient impact?
- Could current land use policies be strengthened?

Sustainable Development Poverty Reduction Programme

The SDPRP is growth led, but Ethiopia's economic performance over the last decade has been highly volatile. High growth rates have been undermined by shocks that have deepened poverty. Volatility stops farmers taking risks. They focus on protecting their minimum livelihood rather than exploiting opportunities.

Dr Alex de Waal: "Economic volatility contributes to poverty. We should therefore be thinking about reducing fluctuation rather than maximising growth."

Urban food security and support for pastoralists needs to be addressed. If food security is a central theme it should not displace other poverty issues. Land policies need to be strengthened to make it more productive

Dr Alex de Waal "Food security may be too narrowly defined. We need to look beyond production and emergencies and include non-agricultural interventions such as urban development, marketing, health and education."

Focus on livelihoods – *human security* - rather than growth-led strategies. Let communities identify their best livelihood options and empower them to find solutions. Popularise the SDPRP and allow numerous voices and differing views to be heard.

The Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP), was completed in Ethiopia in July 2002. IMF member countries prepare the SDPRP in consultation with stakeholders and development partners including the staffs of the World Bank and IMF. It is updated every three years with annual progress reports that describe the country's macroeconomic, structural, and social policies in support of growth and poverty reduction, as well as associated external financing needs and major sources of financing. SDPRP 1 is presently under review and evaluation while the second phase, SDPRP 2, is being designed. As such, inputs from different stakeholders into this process are extremely valuable.

Safety Net Programme

Food aid has kept people alive but done nothing to address the causes of food insecurity. A good safety net should replace food aid and support households **before** they are forced to adopt other strategies that undermine their livelihoods. Safety nets work towards food security, through protection against shocks rather than being simply food aid. They also have wider economic benefits. They secure wider income and employment growth.

But they must be planned and designed with the people they affect. Interventions must not erode productive coping mechanisms.

Dr Stephen Devereux: “The right kind of safety nets can support and even transform livelihoods, but the wrong kind of safety nets can undermine livelihoods and leave people dependent and vulnerable.”

Safety nets in pastoral areas are complex. What is the source of people’s vulnerability and is it externally imposed? Pastoralists face issues such as insecurity, access to cross border markets and drought. Water access and markets are likely to be effective safety nets. De-stocking and restocking are also important. With mobile populations there may be certain times of year when employment generation schemes or public works are more easily implemented.



Jijiga Market: Photo UNOCHA/PCI

In February 2004, the Government of Ethiopia and its donor partners held a joint mission to design a national “Safety Net Program”. It is due to be phased in for 5 million chronically food-insecure people in 214 woredas over the next three years. The Safety Net Program is based on the idea that the predictably vulnerable require predictable assistance if they are to protect or rebuild assets, and that providing consistent, multi-year assistance to vulnerable households in ways which strengthen them and their communities’ coping abilities is necessary to re-attain and maintain food security in the long-term. It is designed around three basic mechanisms that transfer resources: “Unconditional transfers, Conditional Transfers, and Public Works”. Labour intensive public works are meant to provide resource transfers to chronically food insecure families capable of providing labour. Conditional transfers are meant to provide resources that support or enable positive behaviours (education, skills transfer, training, health practices). Unconditional transfers are meant to provide resources to labour-poor chronically vulnerable households unlikely to benefit from Conditional Transfer activities.

Lowland Food Security Strategy

The Food economy in lowland areas is very different from that of the highlands. Food security in these areas should look at support for livelihoods. Food security can be created through better access to markets, addressing cross border trade and advocacy, conflict resolution, mobility and access to water.

Dr Stephen Devereux “In lowland areas people’s access to food is more indirect, so they are subject to different risks, such as market access and price fluctuations”.

A strategic choice needs to be made on whether to transform or support pastoralism. But either way pastoralists must be politically empowered to be able to influence policy. Why not ask them what the policies should be? Indigenous knowledge must be taken into account. Women must also be

involved; their knowledge of food security taken into account and support given that is appropriate to their way of life. Also it needs to be recognised that there are many different livelihoods in a single region. Perhaps there should be a disaggregated strategy that focuses on the needs of different groups.

The Ministry of Federal Affairs is currently leading a Task Force to design a 'Food Security Strategy for Lowland Areas' to complement the Federal Food Security Strategy. This is in recognition of the fact that past strategies have been based on agriculture, and that food security issues are very different for pastoralists than for farmers. The Federal Food Security Strategy sees pastoralism as unsustainable in the long term and therefore advocates for relieving pressure on rangelands through promoting agro-pastoralism and sedentarisation along river banks. The New Coalition for Food Security doesn't say much about pastoralism, but has a more positive outlook, promoting activities which support pastoralist livelihoods such as strengthening veterinary services and savings activities.

This paper has been prepared using comments and discussions from a meeting held in May 2004, to brainstorm the new thinking and critical questions which could help improve food security in Ethiopia, with lead presentations from Dr Alex de Waal* and Dr Stephen Devereux**. The meeting was called by the Pastoralist Affairs Standing Committee and the Pastoral Forum Ethiopia with support from UNOCHA-PCI and attended by representatives from the federal parliament, federal ministries, donor agencies, international and national NGO's, civil society and academic institutions.

The meeting concluded with a commitment to continue the process and called upon UNOCHA as a co-ordinating body to take the next steps. These were to:

- ensure that the food security concerns mentioned at the meeting were placed at the heart of the UN Country Team's efforts to

address food security through inputs into the SDPRP2

- ensure the active participation of communities and civil society in designing the SDPRP2 and the associated food security strategy, with special reference to the most chronically food insecure and those in the lowlands.

Participants also made suggestions as to other future activities:

- A study into the alternatives for Food Aid in Ethiopia.
- A second workshop with a smaller policy-making group to discuss these issues further.

A SHIFT IN THINKING

- What turns good policies into good implementation?
- What are the gaps between federal and woreda level?
- If you solve the poverty issue will food insecurity solve itself?
- Is food security dealt with as a development issue or a relief issue?
- Is food aid the best form of safety net or is it part of the problem?
- Are safety nets benefiting the poorest of the poor?
- How appropriate is food aid in pastoral areas?
- Does Ethiopia need its own specific poverty line?
- What would Ethiopia do without food aid? What are the alternatives?
- Is civil society sufficiently contributing to the debate?

***Dr Alex de Waal** is an activist and a writer of several books on famine, human rights and conflict in Africa especially that include *Famine Crimes; Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa*. He is editor of the 'African Issues' series, served as Associate Director of Africa Watch and was a founder and director of African Rights. He is currently one of the directors of Justice Africa.

****Dr Stephen Devereux** is an economist working on food security, rural livelihoods, social protection and poverty reduction at the Institute of Development Studies, U.K. His research experience is mainly in Africa, especially Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi and Namibia.

This paper was written by UNOCHA-PCI with the support of IRIN. For further information or a full copy of the presentations please contact Meron Yohannes at UNOCHA-PCI, myohannes@un.org, Tel no. 444196/539999.

The opinions expressed are taken from comments at the meeting and do not necessarily reflect those of the United Nations.