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In brief

• This paper is concerned with food security in the Great Lakes region of Africa. It concludes that many food security interventions there have failed to address the needs of people affected by crises.

• The same stereotyped interventions are being used, largely because these responses are not based on an understanding of the real needs of people, and insufficient attempts have been made to find out what those needs might be. Many responses were based on questionable and untested assumptions, were plagued by logical inconsistencies, and provided poor value for money.

• The paper calls on humanitarian agencies to acknowledge that there is a problem, and to increase their commitment to confronting it. Although many of the recommendations have been made before, this study aims to add urgency to agency and donor attempts to improve food security responses.

About HPN
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Network Paper

Missing the point
An analysis of food security interventions in the Great Lakes

Commissioned and published by the Humanitarian Practice Network at ODI

Simon Levine and Claire Chastre

with Salomé Ntububa, Jane MacAskill, Sonya LeJeune, Yuvé Guluma, James Acidri and Andrew Kirkwood

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Chapter 1
Introduction

The Great Lakes region of East and Central Africa is naturally blessed: two rainy seasons a year give it great agricultural potential, lakes and rivers provide abundant fish and timber and minerals abound. Yet in the last decade it has been the scene of probably more human suffering than any other part of the world. The aid community has reacted to the many crises in the region with a multitude of interventions. This paper is about those interventions, which were aimed explicitly to improve the food security of people affected by crises: the study did not examine other interventions that may have had food security impacts, for instance health care.

The study

The study attempts to answer the following questions about food security interventions in the Great Lakes:

- What responses have agencies and institutions in the Great Lakes used to promote food security?
- How do these interventions compare with the constraints to food security that can be or have been identified?
- Are there any constraints which agencies have not addressed, and if so, why?
- Are there any institutional or structural factors which affect how organisations have responded to food insecurity, and what impact have these had on the quality of response?

The paper is based on the findings of seven case studies conducted in three countries (Uganda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)) under the direction and support of Save the Children UK. (Some of the results are also relevant to other places, for instance southern Africa or the Horn.) In each case, the study sought to analyse in detail the actual livelihood situation of people affected by specific crises, and the constraints they faced in their food security. An analysis was then done of the food security interventions that were implemented, to see how and why they were carried out, how well they were targeted, and what impact the interventions had on food security. Factors that affected responses were inferred from a variety of sources: interviews with key informants from agencies and donors; the documentation of agencies active on the ground; and the experiences of the researchers themselves in a range of organisations in the region over several years.

The seven case studies were:

- in **Burundi**, the responses in 2000 to 2001 to the lengthy drought in Kirundo Province, and to the forced displacement of the civilian population of Bujumbura Rural Province from 1999 to 2001;
- in **DRC**, two urban crises – the volcanic eruption in Goma in January 2002 and the ethnic war in Bunia town in 2003 – and interventions as displaced people returned home to the Masisi plateau in 1999–2003; and
- in **Uganda**, the displacement in Kasese District from 1996 to 2000 caused by armed conflict, and the situation in Gulu District in 2001 to 2003, where war with the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has led to the displacement of almost the entire rural population.

The case studies were chosen with three criteria in mind:

- they should represent as well as possible the full range of crisis situations in the Great Lakes (from natural disasters to conflict, from displacement to recovery, and in urban and rural settings);
- good information should already be available on people's livelihoods and food security constraints, in order to minimise the amount of field work needed for the study; and
- they should be reasonably representative of the range of interventions used in the Great Lakes region.

Work began by reviewing the literature on livelihoods and food security. Researchers visited the crisis sites and interviewed – where available – staff of institutions working in food security at the time of the crisis, including UN agencies, NGOs and donors, as well as central and local government or the *de facto* authority. Project documents, including assessments, proposals and impact studies, were also often shared with the researchers. The study was not designed to evaluate any particular intervention, and so there was no field research of projects. All the information about the interventions was obtained from the implementing institution itself, or occasionally from existing literature. For the Uganda case studies, existing food security information was not detailed enough, so a food security assessment was carried out using the 'household economy' approach.[1] Otherwise, the methodology was the same.

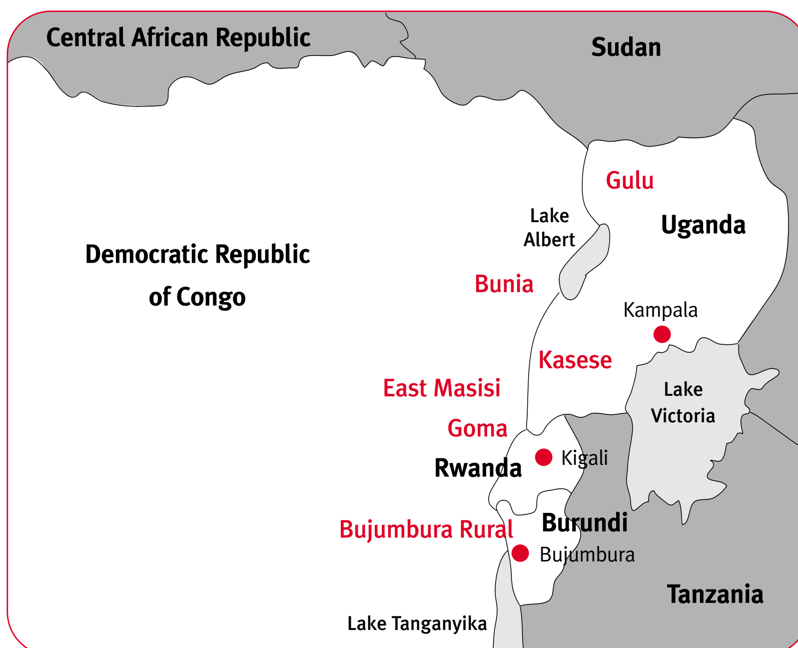
Structure of the report

This report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 presents the seven case studies. Each case identifies the constraints to food security, and discusses the main responses.
- Chapter 3 looks at the link between the responses and the constraints, analysing the 'criteria of appropriateness' for each intervention to see to what extent these criteria were met. It also explores the constraints to food security that were not addressed by agencies, and discusses evidence of the impact of the interventions.
- Chapter 4 examines how the aid effort was managed, and explores some of the causes of weaknesses in the humanitarian response.
- Chapter 5 summarises the main conclusions and presents recommendations.

Chapter 2
The case studies

This chapter outlines the livelihood constraints and vulnerabilities of different population groups in the seven case studies. It also describes the humanitarian interventions of various agencies. Only brief descriptions of the case studies are provided here. More details, particularly on the constraints to household food security, are given in Annex 1.



Bujumbura Rural Province, Burundi (1999–2001)

Context[2]

The Burundian government used a policy of *'regroupement'* in the civil war, forcing rural people into camps to isolate the rebellion. In Bujumbura Rural, the hinterland of the capital, around 300,000 people were forced into camps in August 1999. The camps were dismantled from mid-2000, though many people left only in June 2001. Movement from the camps was restricted by insecurity and military policy.

Before the conflict, Bujumbura Rural was densely populated and land holdings were small, but Bujumbura city provided a market for higher-value crops and significant non-agricultural work opportunities. Inter-agency assessments in 1999 and 2000 revealed that livestock had been lost (by looting and sale), income from coffee had been lost as gardens were neglected through insecurity and fishing had been interrupted. People lost access to markets and to work opportunities in the city, because of insecurity and increased transport costs.

The humanitarian response

The response was delayed by insecurity and political uncertainty. Food aid distributions were irregular, and did not reach all the camps. Looting by combatants often followed distributions.

Therapeutic and supplementary nutrition centres were opened, the latter giving dry take-home rations to children, an extra food ration for the family and nutrition education for mothers. These continued in the absence of accepted data on malnutrition rates. Demonstration gardens were run to teach mothers how to grow vegetables. Seeds and tools distributions, organised throughout the country each season, continued where security permitted. Support was also given for water supplies, distributions of non-food items, public health, such as mosquito control, and health services. Returnees in Bujumbura Rural were given help to rebuild houses, many of which had been destroyed or looted.

Gulu District, northern Uganda (2001–2003)

Context[3]

In 1996, three-quarters of the district population of around 400,000 was forced to move into designated camps by the military; others fled into unofficial 'camps' around trading centres. By the end of 2002, almost the entire rural population was displaced. Conditions in camps were (and remain) poor, with frequent human rights abuses (killing, looting and abduction of adults and children). Gender power relations have been identified as a problem for women.[4] Global acute malnutrition has fluctuated between 5% and 15% since 1998. Before the conflict, the district was a remote but fertile agro-pastoral area. The war has curtailed agriculture. Livestock has disappeared through raiding and distress sales; since 2002, internally displaced people (IDPs) have had extremely limited access to their home fields, and renting land has become increasingly difficult, forcing most farmers to abandon all crops except greens and sweet potatoes. The staple crop, cassava, has been badly hit by disease. By 2003, two-thirds of the population were surviving by borrowing or renting very small plots (0.1–0.2 hectares).

The humanitarian response[5]

Until July 2002, a partial ration was given in 'official' camps (where food security was assumed to be worse), with small food for work projects in some 'unofficial' camps. From July 2002, a full ration was given to registered IDPs in all camps – though around 15% of IDPs were still not registered in 2003.[6] The ration was suspended for four months due to supply problems in 2002. Where full food rations were not given

(pre-2002, or post-2002 in Gulu town) food was distributed to people with HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, to children who had escaped from the LRA and to schools. Seeds and tools have been distributed annually to a few households, targeting women's groups, people with HIV/AIDS and LRA abductee children. One NGO also gave vouchers to 4,000 households that were redeemable at 'seed fairs'. Various small programmes run by NGOs and local government have promoted improved seed varieties, coffee production, organic farming, oil crops, environmental work and agro-forestry, though most of these activities were cut in 2002. Overall, only 3% of households have been assisted with agricultural programmes.[7] There has been support for health services, water supplies and distributions of non-food items. Both therapeutic and supplementary feeding centres have been run by the local authority or with NGO assistance. Infrastructure rehabilitation projects have been implemented through government structures in donor projects, and through normal local government spending.

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A camp in northern Uganda, 2003/2004

Kasese District, Uganda (1996–2000)

Context[8]

Rebel attacks in 1996 caused mass displacement from highland areas towards areas closer to Kasese town. Around half the displaced settled with host communities in trading centres and villages, the rest in 20 camps. Out of a district population of around 400,000, probably 80,000–100,000 people were displaced. By 2000, the rebellion was contained and most IDPs had returned home. The district also suffered poor rains in 1999 and 2000, resulting in three consecutive poor harvests.

Little is known about the livelihood patterns of either the IDPs in camps or those in host communities. The former were reportedly able to earn some money by working either in town or as hired agricultural labour, and many may have found small plots to cultivate. Many took personal risks, visiting their village fields to find food.

The humanitarian response

There are few records of the precise assistance given.[9] Food distributions began within days of the first displacement, and continued on a large scale for those in camps until 2000. Theoretically, full food rations were given, but with little coordination (or even sharing of camp registers) between agency teams; one source mentions 50% rations in one camp.[10] Nearly all assistance was restricted to IDPs in camps, either on principle (ICRC) or because of difficulties in identifying IDPs in host communities. Hosts received no support.

There were only occasional attempts to find IDPs land for cultivation, and there were no other significant food security interventions. Local NGOs that had been running development programmes closed these down during the emergency. Other assistance included water and sanitation, health, supplementary and therapeutic feeding programmes and distributions of non-food items. Seeds and tools were distributed to around half of returnee households. The 'improved' varieties of seed yielded well in some places, but poorly in others.

> **Box 1**
>
> **Assessment and analysis**
>
> The cases for this paper were selected in part because sufficient assessments had been done to allow identification of the main constraints to household food security. Therefore, in terms of assessment and analysis, the cases are neither typical nor representative of the average case in the Great Lakes. Kasese is probably closer to the average level of understanding of constraints to food security, in the sense that little was known about the exact nature and scale of the problems encountered by the population.

Northern Kirundo Province, northern Burundi (2000–2001)

Context[11]

The area was affected by conflict from 1993, when most livestock were lost. Relative calm returned in 1996, though the civil war continued to affect the economy. Drought followed repeated poor rains from 1997 to 2000. A malaria epidemic struck the country at the end of 2000.

In the past, this was an agriculturally productive area, with livestock, coffee and dry-season market gardening in the lowlands, as well as extensive fishing. The area has also profited from cross-border trade with Rwanda in foodstuffs, livestock and labour migration. Ethnic

differences have been important in determining opportunities, with much of the lucrative trade and political power held by a small number of people.

The drought caused the loss of around half the harvest in mid-2000.[12] As people turned more to the market for food, prices for some staples doubled, and the price of labour dropped. Poorer households resorted to temporary migration to Rwanda (where labour rates were higher), planting crops in the marshlands, harvesting early, selling crops pre-harvest, reducing consumption to one meal a day, cutting essential health expenditure and going into debt. The number of people without any livestock more than doubled between August 2000 and January 2001.

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A trader in Eastern DRC

The humanitarian response[13]

A general distribution of 50% rations to all households was planned for September–December 2000, but due to pipeline problems only about half of this was distributed.[14] At the same time that the pipeline problems started, food was made available to pilot a school feeding intervention for a third of schools in Kirundo Province, covering areas less severely affected by the drought. The pipeline problems led to debt, loss of livestock and reduced harvests the following season because of migration.

Supplementary and therapeutic feeding centres were run, with demonstration vegetable gardens and cooking lessons. Seeds and tools distributions were conducted for 'vulnerable' households, though criteria were vague. Goat distributions were started to aid recovery in 2001, after the crisis. The area also benefited from small-scale agricultural development.

> **Box 2**
>
> **Marketing madness in Masisi**
>
> A farmer in Masisi sells a 100kg sack of beans for $6–10. Transport costs to Goma are $2–3, where the sack is worth $15–18 – a return of 70% on the trader's investment within a few days. The cost of transporting the sack to Nairobi from Goma is about $15 (excluding 'taxes'), and once there it could fetch $45. So a trader can make $20 net profit on a sack of beans in a week or two; allowing a fortnight for the round trip, a return on investment of over 600,000% a year. The farmer worked for four months to grow the beans for just $6 – and this is not the net profit.

Eastern Masisi, North Kivu, DRC (1999–2003)

Context[15]

The Masisi has vast grazing lands for cattle, but since the 1970s the majority of the population has been marginalised as control of land has become concentrated in the hands of a few families. Ethnic dimensions to the exploitation led to ethnic conflict in 1993 and 1997. This destroyed most of the livestock, displaced much of the population and prevented movement and trade between urban and rural areas.

Calm returned from 1999 to the eastern side of Masisi, where this case study focused, though the west remained insecure. A number of household economy and livelihood studies showed that, by 2002, matters had improved markedly: the number of livestock had increased, work for food became rare and seeds were in good supply and easily acquired. Constraints to production were access to land, diseases of small stock, plant diseases (of taro and cassava), and access to tools. However, the main livelihood difficulty was not production but lack of cash – due to low farm-gate prices and poor access to markets, caused by poor road infrastructure and insecurity.

The humanitarian response[16]

As peace gradually spread westwards, agencies moved in with three basic programme types: a general distribution of free food aid and non-food items; road reconstruction

(through cash for work and, where funds were not easily available, food for work); and seeds and tools distributions with a seed protection ration. Several agencies ran small livestock credit programmes, with limited success. An attempt was made to establish a seed multiplication centre from 2001, but access difficulties limited supervision and plants died. Supplementary and therapeutic feeding centres were run with demonstration vegetable gardens and cooking lessons. Other assistance included water and health.

Road construction appears to have made a significant impact on household food security, through direct employment, improved security of movement, reduced transport costs and improved marketing – bringing higher prices to producers.[17]

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Goma after the eruption, 2002

Goma town, DRC (February–July 2002)

Context[18]

Goma is a thriving commercial centre of some 400,000 people, in a strategic location on the border with Rwanda. A volcanic eruption in January 2002 destroyed most of the commercial centre of the city and some 15,000 homes. Business collapsed, not only because of the destruction but also because most of the population had suddenly lost its purchasing power. Access routes into the town were cut by lava, causing food price rises for about two weeks until roads reopened. Most displaced people found refuge with host families until the lava cooled sufficiently for rebuilding, some six months later. Worldwide television coverage of the eruption ensured it received international attention.Before the crisis, people lived by trade, artisan work and some employment. Peri-urban agriculture was negligible. Immediately following the eruption, average incomes for all economic classes fell by around a half to two-thirds, though nearly all could still just cover their minimum energy requirements. Petty trade in foodstuffs by the poor was depressed further by distributions of free food. People reduced expenditure, drew on savings and went into debt. More people sought daily labour, causing a fall in daily rates, though markets quickly re-established themselves. Recovery was well under way within six months.

The humanitarian response[19]

A one-week general food ration was distributed to most households within five days of the eruption. Repair work on roads cut by lava began quickly, re-establishing trade across the town within two to three weeks, and allowing food to enter from rural areas through normal marketing channels. Free food distributions continued until the end of April 2002, targeted at those who had lost houses, though beneficiary lists omitted an estimated 25% of those displaced, and included many who were not displaced.[20] Other relief items were also distributed to the displaced. An assessment in February 2002 by SC-UK established that food was not in short supply, and this led to more cash-based interventions.[21] Several agencies used both cash and food for work for rehabilitation. Both beneficiaries and agencies preferred cash, but food for work continued where cash was not available. Feeding centres for malnourished children were run, with demonstration gardens and cooking lessons for mothers/carers. Seeds and tools were distributed to households who had lost homes. There were also some micro-credit projects and a limited intervention with small livestock.

Bunia suburbs, Ituri District, DRC (2003)

Context[22]

Although it had suffered from chronic regional conflict, until recently Bunia was an important trading town, with a strong informal economy. It had been a haven for IDPs from the surrounding Ituri region, until ethnic fighting from January to June 2003 caused most of the population to flee. Security returned with the arrival of French-led forces in June 2003, and within two months around 120,000 of the original population of 225,000 had returned. But the town remained cut in two, largely along ethnic lines, with power still in the hands of tribal warlords. This case study does not cover the IDP camp outside the town.

Before the crisis, most people depended on the market for food, although this was supplemented by agriculture (cassava is the staple) and livestock.[23] Apart from limited

Table 1: Summary of the case studies

	Case study	Dates	Crisis characteristics and livelihoods	Constraints to household food security	Humanitarian response
Displacement	Bujumbura Rural, Burundi	1999–2001	Conflict, severe insecurity, forced displacement. Most of the population in camps. Traditionally an agro-pastoral area with strong peri-urban influence: close to Bujumbura markets.	Limited access to land and capital (loss of livestock). Restrictions on movement (insecurity, transport costs), limiting work opportunities. Poorest: lack of labour, lack of access to food.	Free food assistance, seeds and tools, non-food items (NFIs), health, water and nutrition.
	Gulu District, Uganda	2001–2003	Conflict, forced displacement, severe insecurity, majority of the population in camps. Agro-pastoral area traditionally.	Limited access to land, capital (loss of livestock), natural resources. Cassava disease (Cassava Mosaïc Virus (CMV)). Restrictions on movement, limiting work. Poorest: lack of labour, lack of access to food.	Free food assistance, nutrition, seeds and tools, small scale agricultural development, small scale FFW, infrastructure rehabilitation, health services, water, NFIs.
	Kasese District, Uganda	1996–2000	Conflict, displacement, poor rains. Half of the IDPs in camps and half with host community.	Little known. Limited access to land for IDPs. Cassava disease (CMV). Loss of assets (capital) and lack of work opportunities.	Free food assistance, seeds and tools, nutrition, water, sanitation and health and NFIs. Assistance mostly for the camps.
Rural context	Northern Kirundo, Burundi	2000–Jan 2001	Affected by conflicts and population movements in the first half of the 1990s. Indirectly affected since. Drought causing major losses in agriculture, livestock, exchanges (trade, labour) with Rwanda.	Small land holdings (high pop. density) and poor soil fertility. Lack of livestock. Drought leading to high food prices, low labour prices and lack of access to food. Poorest: shortage of labour.	Free food assistance, school feeding, nutrition, seeds and tools, small-scale livestock and agricultural development.
	Eastern Masisi, North Kivu, DRC	1999–2003	Recovery following insecurity. Return of displaced people. Agro-pastoral area traditionally.	Small land holdings (ethnic, power relations) and limited access to natural resources. Very limited access to markets. Lack of livestock despite recovery. Cassava disease (CMV).	Free food assistance, NFIs, CFW, FFW, seeds and tools, infrastructure rehabilitation, small-scale livestock and agriculture development, health, water.
Urban context	Goma, North Kivu, DRC	Feb 2002–July 2002	Thriving market town, indirectly affected by conflict. Volcano eruption causing displacement and loss of assets.	Loss of assets and income opportunities. Lack of demand for goods and services. Poorest: shortage of labour.	Free food assistance, NFIs, CFW, FFW, infrastructure rehabilitation, shelter, nutrition, micro-credit, small-scale livestock programme.
	Bunia Suburbs, Ituri, DRC	2003	Market town. Conflict, displacement, insecurity. Economy normally based on trade, agriculture.	Loss of assets and income. Lack of demand for goods and services. Lack of access to peri-urban land. Cassava disease (CMV). Poorest: shortage of labour.	Free food assistance, CFW, FFW, nutrition, seeds and tools, infrastructure rehabilitation.

formal employment, the main economic activities were trade, artisan work and unskilled labour. All of these activities were severely curtailed during the worst of the conflict in 2003. Looting and displacement left most people with few assets. People's coping and distress mechanisms were reduction of expenditure, sale of remaining assets, cultivating around houses (switching to vegetables and short-cycle, calorie-rich crops like sweet potatoes), collecting and eating fruit, and taking risks to go outside the town to cultivate. As a result, most people managed to obtain sufficient food, helped by reduced expenditure on healthcare (provided free by NGOs) and education (some free material from UNICEF). Trade was re-established after June 2003, as traders found alternative supply centres and routes, and middle-men from neutral ethnic groups bridged the north–south divide. Within two to three months, supplies and prices of most goods, including seeds, returned to something approaching normal.

The humanitarian response[24]

A one-off food ration was given as displaced people returned. Although there is no evidence of a systematic assessment of food needs, free food continued to be supplied to those camping near the barracks of the UN contingent and to all sick people in hospitals, and an extra food ration was given to households with a malnourished child. Therapeutic and supplementary feeding centres were run by two NGOs.

There was some cash for work for rehabilitation, but sufficient cash was not available from donors and food for work predominated. Seeds and tools were distributed by several agencies to returnees, IDPs and families with a malnourished child. Vegetable seeds were also provided, as diets were presumed to be poor, though the assessment found that they had remained surprisingly well-balanced and diverse.[25] Non-food items were distributed and support was given for water and sanitation.

Chapter 3
The relevance of the humanitarian response

The seven case studies show what is probably the fairly typical range of food security constraints in different situations in the Great Lakes region.[26] The very different problems which people faced are summarised in Table 2. Table 3 describes the interventions made in the case studies. There was little variation: three kinds of project were run as ‘standard’ in all seven case studies (free food distributions, seeds and tools distributions and feeding centres).[27] Although some other interventions may have been significant in one or two cases, only the three mentioned were regarded as generally appropriate for whole classes of people (all displaced, all malnourished). Furthermore, although all seven cases were chronic, conflict-affected emergencies, programming was ‘borrowed’ from responses to natural disasters: no major response strategy had been designed specifically for the

Table 2: Summary of constraints to food security in each case study

Constraints	Buj. Rural	Gulu	Kasese	Masisi	Kirundo	Bunia	Goma
Security	+	+	+/–	–	–	+	–
Lack of availability of food	+	+	–	–	+	–	–
Lack of access to food	+	+	?	–	+	–	–
Lack of cash	+	+	?	+	+	+	+
Land (quantity or quality)	+	+	+	+	+	+	–
Loss of assets (and capital)	+	+	+	+	+/–	+	+
Access to markets	+	+	?	+	+/–	+	–
Access to work	+	+	+	–	+/–	+/–	+
Low demand or prices	–	–	?	+	+*	+	+
Access to natural resources	–	+	?	+	–	+/–	–
Access to basic services	+	+	?	+	?	+ in south	?
Crop disease	–	+	+	+	–	+	–
HIV/AIDS	not assessed	+	not assessed	not assessed	not assessed	not assessed	not assessed

Notes: + indicates that it was a significant constraint to many people
– indicates that it was not a significant constraint to many people
+/– indicates that it was a secondary constraint to many, or a major constraint to fewer people
* retail prices of food were high, but low farm-gate prices were a cause of food insecurity

Table 3: Comparison of food security interventions in the case studies

Food security interventions undertaken	Buj. Rural	Gulu	Kasese	Masisi	Kirundo	Bunia	Goma
Free food aid	+	+	+	(+)	+	+	+
Feeding centres	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Seeds and tools	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Food for work	–	(+)*	–	+	–	+	+
Cash for work	–	–	–	(+)	–	(+)	(+)
Demonstration gardens/ cooking lessons	+	–	–	+	+	+	+
Agriculture development	–	(+)	–	(+)	(+)	–	–
Livestock development	–	–	–	(+)	(+)	–	(+)
Road rehabilitation	-–	+**	–	+	–	+	+
Micro-credit	–	–	–	–	–	–	(+)

Notes: (+) indicates that the intervention was carried out (by one or more agencies), but only on a small scale compared to other types of intervention
* FFW in Gulu was carried out in a limited way before the crisis became more severe in mid-2002
** Road reconstruction came out of normal public expenditure, it was not a humanitarian intervention
*** About to begin in late 2003

Great Lakes situation in particular, or a political or conflict-based crisis in general.

Was the humanitarian response adequate? Was it appropriate? To answer these questions, this paper sets out the circumstances in which each type of intervention would be appropriate, and compares this to the actual circumstances in each case.

Free distributions of food

Free distributions of food have consumed by far the largest share of donor money and public spending combined, and was the single largest aid item in most of the seven case studies. It was the largest component of every Consolidated Appeal in the region, and usually accounted for between one-third and three-quarters of all non-refugee assistance. Food aid cost around eight times more than all public expenditure combined in Gulu District in 2002–2003.

Food aid in the form of free distributions is the appropriate response when the following three conditions all apply:

1. targeted households lack access to food; and
2. there is a lack of availability of food and inelastic supply (making income support ineffective in helping to increase access to food through the market); and
3. alternative ways of helping people get access to food would either take too long or might not be practical or reliable.

Additionally, food distributions may be appropriate for a short-term, rapid intervention of food aid (for instance a one- or two-week ration), where there is reason to fear possible hunger, without knowing whether the above conditions are met.

Did these conditions apply in the seven case studies? What efforts were made to find out if they did? Even without an assessment, the immediate reactions in Goma and in Kasese, and one-off distributions to returning IDPs in Bunia, seem reasonable. Distributions that last only one or two weeks are unlikely to have negative effects (except possibly a distraction of aid energy and funds from other potential activities). This discussion focuses only on the longer-term response.

In three out of the seven cases, agencies tried to establish whether or not appropriate conditions for food aid applied: in Gulu, in Bujumbura Rural and in the Kirundo drought. Despite serious access problems in the first two areas, best possible assessments were done to establish whether – and how much – households lacked access to food. In all three cases, the conditions were met and there was no obvious intervention that could have replaced food aid in the short term. In Gulu, agencies, in particular WFP, undertook regular assessments in order to adjust food rations as circumstances changed. Gulu and Bujumbura Rural show how, even in extraordinarily difficult circumstances, some assessment can be achieved and important information acquired.

In Kasese in 1996–2000, no evidence was found of attempts to assess the food needs of IDPs, even though the emergency (and food assistance) lasted for more than three years. IDPs staying with hosts were *presumed* to be food-secure, while those living in camps were *presumed* to have no independent sources of food and needed a 100% ration. There were no impact assessments or mortality surveys on camp populations, IDPs outside camps or host communities. There is therefore no way of knowing if the response was necessary or adequate. The fact that just five years ago competing agency teams were giving the same people full rations with little coordination illustrates how far things have moved forward. Within Gulu, too, there has been progress, with more comprehensive assessments, building on the emergency food needs assessment (EFNA) methodology developed in 2000[28], and the emergency food security assessment (EFSA) methodology in 2003–2004. Serious attempts to assess differences in the food security situation between official camps and spontaneous camps began in 2001.

In the other three case studies in DRC, the available evidence showed surplus food, with low or near-normal prices on the market. Clearly, food aid was not an appropriate response. The livelihood problem faced by households was lack of income. In Goma, an appeal for food aid continued for months *after* a SC-UK/WFP assessment had shown that free distributions of food were not appropriate. Lack of donor response meant that food assistance ended, but only after three months.

Targeting[29]

Applying the logic of the criteria of appropriateness in the Goma case to the way food aid was targeted raises suspicions that food assistance was a knee-jerk reaction to people's suffering, rather than a measured response to assessed need. The three months of food assistance targeted households that had lost houses in the eruption, though no reason was suggested as to why people who lost houses would lack food as a result. They would have had extra needs (in particular, meeting the cost of rebuilding), but not extra food needs.

A similar willingness to suspend programming criteria in the face of human suffering has been evident in what can be called medical and social targeting. Individuals or households affected by HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis were given special food aid rations in Gulu town based on their medical condition. Many, but not all, of those households would certainly be food-insecure, but so were many households not affected by HIV/AIDS. Households affected by AIDS may be better served with other assistance, most obviously with improved healthcare.

There are many other examples of questionable targeting. Child abductees received food aid, often for long periods, though their status was unconnected to food security. Families with a malnourished child were given a household ration in Bunia, with no evidence to show a link between a child being malnourished and the household lacking food. (Malnutrition could be caused by disease, intra-household distribution problems or lack of specific nutrients – see below.) Agencies continued to hand out food to such groups without knowing to what extent they lacked food – just as they continued assuming that people who lived in camps all had a different food security status from those who found refuge outside camps.

Food aid has also been justified as a way of protecting livelihoods, not just lives, and in particular for protecting assets.[30] This argument is appealing, and the wisdom of protecting livelihoods is not questioned. But is food aid the right tool for the job?[31] Simple analysis suggests that this was not so in the case studies, as the example of Kirundo reveals.

During the period of the intervention, labour rates were depressed and livestock prices tumbled as people sold animals. Households typically sold two goats, often their only animals, mostly to meet non-food needs. The typical price of a goat at the time was just $7 (half the normal price). Food aid was being sold at around $0.06 per kilo, so to prevent the sale of one goat, an extra 120kg of maize would have been needed, or an extra five months' partial ration for the household. The costs of food aid for each area are not clearly distinguished in public documents, but the average regional cost (excluding the DRC) is $0.53 per kilo of maize.[32] It would therefore have cost over $63 per household to prevent the sale of one goat worth $7. Giving households cash directly, supporting wage rates through cash for work, or intervening in the livestock market to protect prices would all have given more to households at far lower cost.[33]

Box 3
Value for money[34]

A recent evaluation of food aid in DRC was happy to note that food aid contributed to wider wellbeing, because two-thirds of the food was being sold to cater for other needs, rather than being eaten. But how cost-effective is it to give food to people who need money?

Most food aid in eastern DRC is transported from Uganda. Maize was bought at $220 per tonne and beans at $340 – but it cost another $400 per tonne to transport. Managing the process cost $180 per tonne, so by the time the food reached the beneficiary, the donor had paid $800 per tonne for maize and $920 for beans. Meanwhile, farmers in the region could not find markets for their crops, and were selling maize and beans at just $60–100 a tonne. The beneficiaries, who needed money and not food, were selling part of their food for just $60. In the end, it cost $15 (to the donor) to deliver the equivalent of $1-worth of food to the recipient.

The costs of getting it wrong

Two arguments could be used to justify food aid in a situation of food availability: specific households may nonetheless need food, and in general giving food when it is not needed is less serious than failing to give it when it is. Neither argument can be accepted. The many potential negative side-effects of food aid operations are well-known: distortions in the local economy, the creation or strengthening of corrupt elites, feeding war economies and giving commodities inappropriate to local tastes (Gulu, Kirundo and Bujumbura Rural; it is not known what was needed in Kasese). Signs of all these were evident in the case study areas. Second, the food aid pipeline is limited. Food assistance was needed in at least three of the seven cases. Lives and livelihoods were put at risk because rations were cut due to lack of food in the pipeline. And yet, at the same time, food aid was being distributed either where it was not needed, or for non-emergency programmes such as school feeding. Third, food assistance is an expensive option where food is available. It can cost much more than giving people the cash they need to buy food (see Box 3). Since aid budgets for the Great Lakes are always insufficient, inappropriate use of funds can mean lives lost.[35]

Table 4: Matching the criteria for food distributions with their use in practice

	Buj. Rural	Gulu	Kasese	Masisi	Kirundo	Bunia	Goma
Lack of food at household level	+	+	?	–	+	–	+/–
Lack of opportunities to buy	+	+	?	–	+	–	–
Cheaper/more practical than alternatives	+	+	?	–	+	–	–
Were criteria of appropriateness met?	Yes	Yes	Not assessed	No	Yes	No	No
Was the intervention implemented?	Yes*	Yes*	Yes	Yes	Yes*	Yes	Yes

Note: * indicates that, though used, pipeline problems prevented planned rations from being given.

Seed protection ration

Food was also distributed in most of the cases for a 'seed protection ration'. This two- to three-week ration is supposed to precede a seed distribution, enabling recipients to cultivate and preventing them from eating their seeds. In practice, it has often been distributed after the seeds, because of logistical problems.

Seed protection rations would be appropriate where:

1. there is a lack of access to food at household level; and
2. there are grounds for believing that without the ration people would be forced to eat their seeds and would still not have anything to plant; or more broadly
3. there are grounds for thinking that they would be unable to plant their seeds properly because they needed to work for cash to meet food needs.

Condition 1 with either condition 2 or 3 would have to apply. Previous arguments about the use of food aid where there is general availability of food also apply here.

The case studies showed how people do their best to protect future production, so condition 2 did not generally apply. In the Great Lakes, with two rainy seasons a year, sowing time is usually quite soon after a harvest period, and so it does not come at the hungry time of year, even following a poor harvest. Food needs assessments were not done for the specific recipients of seed assistance, who were chosen by very different criteria (see below).

Evidence of condition 3 is also doubtful. It is normal for many people (around one-third to half the population in the case studies) to work for others to meet food or other cash needs during planting time. Why would their seeds need less 'protection' than those of people who received seeds from agencies? In fact, the evidence is that such a ration was not needed. These households typically spent a maximum of two to three days a week (both man and wife) working for payment, and the rest of the time on their own fields. For the poor, the biggest constraint to production in all the rural case studies was access to land for cultivation. Families with fields of a quarter to half a hectare, much of which was taken up by crops such as cassava and bananas, did not have enough land to absorb all of their labour at planting. (Livelihood research shows that people are more likely to neglect their fields at weeding time, because of the need to work for others, since this is when hunger is greater.)

No study has been done to see if there is an increase in agricultural productivity as a result of the seed protection ration. Everything known of rural livelihoods in the study areas says that this is unlikely. Such rations involve a separate logistical distribution system from the seed distribution for a one-off distribution of two weeks' food. Its cost-effectiveness in contributing to household food security should be questioned.

Food for work

Food for work (FFW) has been used for food assistance in Bunia, Masisi and Goma, and had been used in a small way in Gulu before 2002. It was also planned for Burundi, but suspended after early implementation difficulties, and then not resumed because of pipeline problems. In order to benefit from this assistance, a household has to have available labour. This means that FFW will not help households where there are no able-bodied people. Neither will it add value to a household where all available labour is already productively employed. In theory, the advantages of FFW over free food are that useful work can be achieved (asset creation), and that aid can be self-targeting on the poor, by setting a pay rate that will be attractive only to the intended group. In practice, both have been questioned, with the lack of surplus household labour preventing the poorest from benefiting proportionately.[36] It may also be argued that having to work for food brings greater self-respect and prevents the culture of idleness, boredom and alcohol so prevalent in camps.

In summary, FFW is appropriate only where these conditions all apply:

1. targeted households lack access to food; and
2. there is a lack of availability of food and inelastic supply; and
3. targeted households have labour potential that is not currently used or only poorly paid; and
4. security and access permit implementation.

Table 5: Matching the criteria for FFW with its use in practice

	Buj. Rural	Gulu	Kasese	Masisi	Kirundo	Bunia	Goma
Lack of food at household level	+	+	?	–	+	–	+?
Lack of availability of food	+	+	–	–	+	–	–
Implementation is possible (access, security, etc.)	?	?	+	+	+	+	+
Were criteria of appropriateness met?	Possibly*	Possibly*	Not assessed	No	Yes	No	No
Was the intervention implemented?	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

Note: * = if implementation modalities could be found where access was restricted.

Where food supply is plentiful, paying for work in food would generally be inappropriate. There may be some situations where security would dictate a preference for paying for work in food rather than cash, but given its inefficiency, one would have to show good reason why FFW is appropriate.

It is known that food was available in the three cases in DRC where FFW was used, and that food was also generally available in Gulu prior to 2002, where FFW was being used, meaning that FFW was not appropriate. FFW could have been appropriate in Kirundo. It could also have been appropriate in Gulu if implementation problems had been overcome.

Overall, the conclusion must be that FFW is rarely appropriate in the Great Lakes region.

Cash for work

Cash for work (CFW) was sometimes used as an alternative to FFW, but is appropriate in quite different circumstances. These are where:

1. targeted households have surplus labour; and
2. *either* food is not the primary economic problem *or* access to food for some households is lacking; and
3. food is generally available for those with purchasing power; and
4. the risk of inflationary pressure is low/a depressed economy needs a cash injection; and
5. security and access permit implementation.

Like food for work, CFW can be self-targeting by setting wage rates that will only attract those with no better alternatives. Another advantage of CFW is that it treats people affected by crisis as active agents in their own lives, by giving them choices.[37]

Table 6 illustrates the different conditions that would call for free food distributions, FFW or CFW. CFW is generally much cheaper than FFW for two reasons: the cost of the food ration is far higher than a daily wage rate, and the costs of managing the logistics of storing and paying out food are higher than simply keeping accounts of cash. (In the DRC, the cost of a day's labour on CFW was about one-fifth of the cost of the food given in FFW. However, a recipient could buy twice as much food with the CFW money as s/he would receive in a FFW ration.)

Evidence showed that CFW could have made a significant contribution to the emergency needs of people in all cases, except for Bujumbura Rural because of implementation difficulties. (Those in Gulu would probably not have been insurmountable.) However, CFW was only used as a response in Goma, Masisi and Bunia, and on a relatively small scale. Agencies that undertook CFW also ran FFW programmes, but only because donor funds for CFW were limited. Programming under these kinds of constraints should have given the humanitarian community cause for concern. It is hard to imagine a hospital treating infections with chloroquine on the basis that 'we don't have antibiotics and this is the only medicine available'.

Table 6: Comparing the conditions for free food aid, FFW and CFW

	Food aid	FFW	CFW
Lack of food at household level	+	+	+/–
Lack of availability of food	+	+	–
Surplus labour at household level	+/–	+	+
Food is not the primary problem	–	–	+
Helping old, weak, child-headed households	+	–	–
Asset creation (public, private)	–	+	+
Sluggish, non-inflationary economy	–	–	+

Notes: + indicates a necessary, not a sufficient condition for the intervention
– indicates that the intervention is inappropriate for responding to that condition (though it may be needed for other reasons)
+/– indicates that the intervention may be applicable whether or not the condition is met

Box 4

Why are agencies reluctant to use cash for work?

- It is much easier to get hold of food than to get donors to pay cash.
- There is a belief that food will help the children, but 'men will drink the money'.
- There is a belief that staff and local partners are more likely to mismanage (or misappropriate) cash, or that cash can be stolen on pay day.
- FFW is done by everyone, but agencies are less familiar with CFW.
- FFW is taken as 'normal', but a special justification is demanded for CFW.
- CFW is 'unsustainable' (FFW is not assessed by the same criterion).

Seeds and tools distributions

Seeds and tools distribution is a common intervention in disaster situations.[38] Distributions of free seeds of staple food crops and tools (usually hoes) were used in all the case studies. In one case, a project used seed vouchers to target needy households, where it believed seeds were generally available; this will be considered separately.

Seeds and tools distributions are an appropriate support to independent production where:

1. targeted households lack these seeds and tools; and
2. there is a general lack of availability of seeds or tools of the right quality; and
3. this lack is limiting production.

The study could not find, in any of the case studies, evidence of any assessment to establish the availability of and access to seeds and tools prior to distributions. Perhaps this explains why 'seeds and tools' always seem to go together, since there is no reason to think that there should always be a connection between lacking seeds and lacking tools. Seed needs were generally *inferred* from food needs assessments. Of the available evidence, one study indicated that availability of seeds has generally *not* been a problem even in conflict zones, though it only covered Gulu.[39] Household economy studies also indicated that seeds were accessible even for poor households in all cases (except Kasese, where there was no study of IDPs). Tools were reportedly a constraint in Masisi and Bunia.

Why are seed needs inferred from (assumed) food needs? It appears that agencies use a model of a subsistence household economy, where crops are used first for eating, after which surpluses are used for seed and then, if sufficient, for sale. According to this model, a food deficit necessarily implies that a household will not have enough seeds for sowing. However, dozens of household economy assessments in the region have shown that the majority of poorer households (the bottom third to half of the population) rely heavily on the market for their food, as even in good years they do not grow enough food for consumption – though they also sell food crops. If seed distributions were the answer in cases of 'lack of surplus production', then it could be argued that handing out seeds of staple crops should be a permanent feature of economies in most of the Great Lakes region.

Even where there was a lack of seeds, it was unclear if this would limit production. There was no evidence of fields being prepared but left unplanted, or fields left unprepared, because of a lack of planting material; households lacking seeds find a substitute crop, such as sweet potato vines. Household economy studies in Burundi and Uganda have repeatedly shown that, with less access to land, households abandon crops like maize and beans (sown from seed) in favour of those that giver higher value, principally sweet potatoes and cassava (planted from cuttings). It may be that standardised packages of seeds are in fact designed more for the needs of better-off households.

Few attempts were made to measure impact, and not all studies are in the public domain. The occasional evaluations have taken one of two routes. One approach involved asking recipients if they felt that the distributions helped. In Burundi, where farmers knew that distributions were a tri-annual routine, it is not surprising that they said they were very useful even though over half the seeds were eaten because they arrived after farmers had already planted their own seeds, or because the quality of seed given was so poor.[40] A second approach was to see any production from donated seeds as the impact of the distribution, assuming a) that without it, farmers would not have planted anything; and b) that any change in the food security situation from planting to harvest time was a result of the project. It is hard to rely on evaluations based on such questionable assumptions. No studies are available which sought to examine whether these general seed distributions had helped production *by looking at what happened in the fields of non-beneficiaries.*

Box 5

Why are seeds and tools so persistent? An actor-oriented analysis

There is no logical explanation as to why distributions of seeds and tools are such a common feature of humanitarian response. Maybe a different kind of analysis is needed. An actor-oriented approach looks at the interests of each actor.

- Donors allocate budgets to a crisis because they want to help – and seeds and tools enable them to spend money easily, with tangible 'results', because the success of the actual output, the distribution, is almost guaranteed.
- Agencies also want to help, and in the absence of obvious alternatives, seeds and tools are manageable. It is relatively easy to get money for seeds and tools, and the 'give a man a fishing rod' approach plays well in publicity at home.
- Agency staff may have their own interests. Seeds and tools keep projects (employment) going, and some may also be able to find small employment opportunities in distributions for friends. (A few may be able to profit from purchases or transport deals.)
- Local authorities are usually not specialists in humanitarian aid, and they may take seeds and tools at face value, as helping their people to produce. Claiming to bring any kind of distribution to their people can win support, or may be used in some way as patronage. Personal profit may also be possible.
- Community leaders rightly aim to get as much of the aid effort to their communities as they can. Some of the less honest can profit, using the distribution to reinforce their prestige, or by diverting aid and selling places on beneficiary lists.
- The local population, like everybody else, will always prefer something to nothing. The seeds may be the wrong ones and late, but it is a free meal, and a hoe is always useful.
- Seed companies in the region make profits from sales to humanitarian agencies, and will use what influence they have to ensure that distributions continue.

Table 7: Matching the criteria for seed distributions with their use in practice

	Buj. Rural	Gulu	Kasese	Masisi	Kirundo	Bunia	Goma
Lack of seeds is limiting factor to production	Unlikely	–	–	–	–	–	–
Targeted households do not have access to seeds	?	–*	–*	–*	–*	–*	–*
Good-quality seeds unavailable	+?	–	–	–	–	–	–
Were criteria of appropriateness met?	Unlikely	Not met	Not met	Not met	Not met	Not met	Not met
Was the intervention implemented?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: * not assessed, but other evidence indicates that it is unlikely for most targeted households.

One project in Gulu used vouchers and seed fairs. In this situation, it was believed access was lacking, and that this could be a limiting factor to production, but seeds were generally available. Targeted households were allowed to 'buy' the seeds they wanted, in the quantities they chose. This method also kept the money in the local market, rather than going to large seed companies, and it cost less than a third of a seed distribution (several million dollars could have been saved across the region by using this approach more widely). This approach may be more broadly applicable, assisting people to access other items, which are generally available, such as tools, or even food and non-food items.

Targeting

Targeting of seeds and tools distributions has been based upon criteria quite unrelated to household access to these commodities. In Goma, families who had lost houses were targeted; in the three DRC cases and in Kirundo they were a standard response to having a malnourished child in a feeding programme; and in Burundi they had become a tri-annual routine, using vague targeting criteria ('the vulnerable') that meant NGOs could choose beneficiaries from any projects they were running.

Targeting seeds to malnourished children is problematic because it is so deep-seated and widespread in the region. The response seems to be dictated by a desire to help without quite knowing what else might be better. However, seeds of staple crops can only help a child, or its siblings, avoid malnutrition (the stated objective of these projects) if:

1. malnutrition is usually caused by a lack of access to sufficient, quality food at household level; and
2. this is caused by a lack of household food production; and
3. the main limiting factor to production for these households is access to seeds.

All of these assumptions are questionable – and yet remain untested. Although the link between food and nutrition seems obvious, causes of malnutrition have not been well-studied in the region, and various possible explanations, including health and childcare, need examining (see below, on supplementary feeding centres). A child's lack of access to food cannot be assumed to be linked to crop production. Even if poverty is a causal factor in malnutrition, it is a leap to assume that lack of staple seeds is the limiting factor to production. In the rural case studies, land was the main limiting factor for poor households. It seems likely that the value to beneficiary households has been the consumption value of the seeds, which is unlikely to have had a major impact on child malnutrition. There are no examples of attempts to assess the impact of seeds interventions on malnutrition, though an inter-agency study in eastern DRC was planned for 2004.

Overall, the distribution of seeds of staple crops has limited relevance in the case studies.

Supplementary feeding centres

Supplementary feeding centres (SFCs) have been a standard response in all seven case studies. (Therapeutic feeding centres are a medical intervention, and are not considered in this study.) In these SFCs, the carer has been given a weekly dry ration (unprepared food to take home). This ration is supposed to be prepared for, and fed to, the malnourished child, as a supplement to his/her normal share of the household's food.

There are two arguments for SFCs. One is a medical justification: the free food ration will encourage mothers to bring children to health centres, to receive vaccinations, for instance. This is analogous to the educational justification for school feeding, and will not be dealt with here. This study looks only at the justification for SFCs as treatment for moderate malnutrition and preventing under-fives from becoming severely malnourished. The rationale is that children with moderate malnutrition are given extra food in order to prevent them from becoming severely malnourished, when they would need therapeutic feeding. The intervention should catch children before they are at high risk of death.

SFCs would be appropriate where:

1. the child's malnutrition is caused by an individual lack of access to food of sufficient quality and quantity; and
2. the food quality of the SFC ration is the correct one for the child; and

Table 8: Matching the criteria for SFCs with their use in practice

	Buj. Rural	Gulu	Kasese	Masisi	Kirundo	Bunia	Goma
Malnutrition caused by child's lack of food	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
SFC food is correct treatment	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
SFC food given to child	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
Were criteria of appropriateness met?	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Was the intervention used?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

3. there is reason to believe that the food given is actually consumed by the child.

Although these criteria seem simple, the reality is that little is known about the causes of malnutrition in the case studies. The major immediate causes of malnutrition are variously believed to include lack of protein, calories, or micro-nutrients, and malaria, water-borne diseases, HIV/AIDS or other diseases. Since the quality of food given in SFCs varied, and it is not known what children actually need, it is not certain whether the second criterion has been met.

If it is true that malnourished children lack access to food of sufficient quality and quantity, then there are two further possibilities: a) there is a lack of sufficient, quality food at household level; or b) there is food at household level, but the child is not getting enough (distribution factors in the household). The answer has a bearing on how any extra ration will be used. If the problem is care, then extra rations may not help the child. But if the household lacks food, it is hard to believe that the ration will be given only to the child.

The impact of SFCs has not been studied, making it impossible to say with any confidence how helpful they are. In any case, the majority of malnourished children have not attended SFCs. Despite years of running costly SFCs in the region, little has been invested in trying to find out the causes of malnutrition, or in thinking about alternative (or complementary) responses.

Demonstration gardens and cooking lessons

The twinning of feeding programmes with demonstration gardens and cooking lessons is widespread in the region. (They were being supported by three international agencies in Goma, four in Masisi, and two, plus a local NGO, in Bunia.) The idea is that malnutrition is caused by mothers not understanding how to grow nutritious food for their children, or not knowing how to prepare a varied diet using locally available ingredients.

Cooking lessons would be appropriate for preventing malnutrition if the following conditions applied:

1. diet is the main cause of a child's malnutrition; and
2. households have access to alternative food; and
3. maternal ignorance is the reason for these alternatives not being taken up.

The first condition has already been questioned. The second is questionable for many poor families in the case studies, who are known to live extremely close to the minimum threshold for survival. The third condition may also not apply. Work elsewhere suggests that lack of maternal time for childcare is a cause of malnutrition, rather than simply ignorance.[41] Without any study showing the impact of cooking lessons it is hard to understand why they have, in some countries, been a standard emergency response to malnutrition.

Demonstration gardens are also problematic. They rely on assumptions that:

1. malnutrition is caused by lack of vegetables;
2. households have at their disposal land available for vegetable production;
3. households have surplus time for tending these gardens;
4. households do not use their land or labour for vegetables (or use them inefficiently) because of ignorance; and
5. any vegetables grown will (at least in part) be fed to children.

Every case study has shown that poorer households are less likely to have land suitable for vegetable cultivation, and they have the least surplus labour. There is no reason to plan an intervention based on five assumptions, which, though probably sometimes true, are unlikely to be the norm.

Road reconstruction

Road reconstruction was carried out on a large scale in Masisi, and critical roads were repaired in Goma, by NGOs that recruited labour locally. It has also been done in Gulu, but paid for through normal state public budgets and using professional contractors. It has usually been classified as an 'infrastructure project' rather than designed to maximise food security. The use of FFW or CFW for construction has already been discussed; this section looks at road construction/rehabilitation itself as a food security intervention.

Improved roads can contribute to food security where the existing poor state of a road:

1. affects access to markets (and humanitarian aid); and
2. market access is a factor in food security; or
3. affects security (both on and off the road); and
4. affects the cost of access (in money or time) to essential basic services.[42]

In the case studies, these conditions were clearly met in Goma, Masisi, Gulu and probably Bunia. It should be noted that movement along a road can sometimes be improved through better security (achieved by clearing tall grass on the roadside), as much as by laying tarmac or adding murram. Few NGOs have been involved in road construction. Since market access has proved to be such a critical factor in food security in the case studies, road repair deserves more consideration as an important potential intervention.

Impact assessments were carried out by the two main NGOs doing road reconstruction in Masisi, showing that the improved road increased freedom of movement through better security as well as reduced transport costs, and brought huge changes in farm-gate prices. After repairing a 12km stretch of road, the farm-gate price of potatoes jumped from $3 per sack to $11. That road repair cost under $35,000, and so would have paid for itself in one season just by helping 4,000 households sell one sack of potatoes each. Other benefits of the road included better access to health and education services.

Non-relief aid

Many agencies ran what could be termed 'non-relief' operations, including agricultural development programmes that involved introducing new varieties of crops, agricultural extension, agro-forestry, tree planting and environmental conservation, promoting cash crops, micro-credit and livestock. Some agencies have also focused on education and health.

The concept of a continuum from emergency through relief to development has been challenged academically by those who speak of a 'contiguum', meaning facets of both emergency and development paradigms can exist together. This has not filtered through to practitioners, who still seem to think in terms of temporal phases of a crisis.

In six of the case studies (Bujumbura Rural was the exception), non-relief programmes were relevant and necessary, because research clearly showed that, even in the most difficult circumstances, all but the most destitute households were economically active. It is, however, rare to find developmental projects done on the scale required to respond to emergency needs. They have worked with hundreds of households rather than with the tens of thousands that needed help, because the humanitarian community has not seen such interventions as a vehicle for responding to crisis. Thus, just 3% of households received any assistance at all in agriculture in Gulu, although almost all engaged in production at some level.

What was not done

Despite differences in the constraints people faced, the range of food security interventions was narrow, with thinking dominated by food – consumption needs or production. Agencies made little use of available information about actual constraints to food security.

Access to land

Access to land for cultivation was a major factor in all five rural cases, and to some extent in one of the urban ones. Interventions in this area – for example trying to find temporary land for the displaced, prioritising security-related access issues or addressing structural problems of control over land (often related to ethnic issues) – were not, however, a major focus for agencies. The one exception could be Bujumbura Rural, where the international community pressed hard for the internment camps to be closed.

Markets

There were problems linked to markets in all seven cases, either facing farmers as producers (selling crops for low prices) or rural households as consumers (buying food). Problems included insecurity and road infrastructure disrupting access to markets; structural problems in marketing systems; and temporary distortions in markets related to demand/supply issues, such as the rise in food prices, and the fall in livestock and labour prices that accompanied drought. Almost the only intervention that addressed markets was work on roads. There were no attempts to assist food security by deliberate price controls, for instance sale of food or seeds at cost price, or the purchase of livestock at a normal price, or to help farmers find markets. The apparent success of cash-based interventions suggests it could be useful to pay more attention to the cash economy.

Freedom of movement

This was highlighted as a key issue in several studies. It affected access to markets, labour opportunities and natural resources such as forests, where people needed to go to fetch firewood and charcoal. Access issues were mainly related to insecurity, to prices exacted by military 'gatekeepers' or to the cost of legal permits (for trade or charcoal). Intervention could target the last two factors.

Ethnic factors

Ethnic issues have been behind almost all the conflicts leading to crisis in the Great Lakes. In Gulu, clan links were key to gaining access to land, and so social exclusion could

be a serious problem. In Masisi, ethnic factors played a role in excluding people from humanitarian aid. Where these factors are well understood, local initiatives could help mitigate these problems, even if 'peace projects' cannot be expected to end wars.

Support institutions

In Kirundo, as elsewhere, farmers had no access to emergency loans except through highly exploitative pre-harvest sales or loans at exorbitant interest rates, causing indebtedness that greatly retarded household economic recovery. Where micro-finance institutions exist, such as the COOPEC of Burundi, would emergency loans not be a highly profitable venture, even at rates only a fraction of those currently paid?[43]

Access to work

Lack of opportunities to earn cash income was one of the greatest problems in all the case studies. A few cash for work projects provided short-term labour opportunities, but on a relatively small scale. There were no recorded interventions designed to assist households to find existing work opportunities. Many displaced people did not have the contacts, the mobility or the time to go to urban centres looking for work. Could agencies have played a mediating role? Infrastructure projects taking place around crises, particularly in Gulu, were not seen as opportunities for humanitarian intervention.

Loss of labour

The households most vulnerable to food insecurity were those with inadequate labour. Labour shortages resulted from the direct impact of conflict (injury, death, recruitment/abduction) and from indirect impacts, for instance men fleeing insecurity or migrating in search of work, or increased rates of HIV/AIDS. Many households were vulnerable to temporary labour shortages through sickness or, for women, the sickness of a child. Although healthcare was a priority for some agencies, the aim has generally been to return health services to a 'normal' or pre-crisis level. There has been little analysis of the food security impact of improved health services.

Loss of assets, lack of capital, lack of ability to take risks

Although some food security studies have used aggregate or average data for the whole population, the economic possibilities of different households are often determined by their ability to find small levels of investment. Little has been done to help prevent a loss of assets in crisis, for instance through cash-based or market interventions. Despite widespread loss of small stock from preventable sickness there was very limited investment in veterinary care in any of the case studies. Mechanisms for helping people to regain access to assets have been largely limited to providing free hoes and, occasionally, distributing small animals on a credit-in-kind basis. Is there potential for a wider use of micro-credit, loaning tools for carpentry, tailoring, metalwork, schemes for renting work tools, or supporting people during the lean time before they get returns on investment?

High expenditure on social services

Despite support for health services, these have not always been free, since drugs were often in short supply in state health centres. Typical costs across the case studies of sending a child to primary school (including uniforms and learning materials) were $5–10 per year. (A household would have to sell 80% of a full food aid ration to earn enough money to pay for four children in primary school.) Households were often expected to pay for water even when it was known that they did not have enough money to feed themselves. Supplying uniforms, free equipment for schools, free healthcare and drugs, or dispensation from water charges have rarely been seen as potential food security interventions.

Support to a productive environment

Longer-term approaches could consider environmental interventions relevant to people's felt needs. This would certainly include agricultural technology. If food can be delivered to all IDPs, why not disease-resistant cassava cuttings and high-yielding sweet potato vines?

HIV/AIDS

Displacement and militarisation are two of the factors most strongly associated with a rise in HIV rates. It is acknowledged that AIDS can be a significant cause of food insecurity for households that depend upon able-bodied labour for their livelihoods. Yet apart from food assistance, interventions to reduce the spread of HIV or mitigate the impact of AIDS were virtually absent from all the case studies.

Chapter 4
What went wrong?

The evidence presented in the previous chapter suggests that many, if not most, food security interventions in the Great Lakes region have failed to address the needs of people affected by crises. This chapter examines why the humanitarian effort has often been inappropriate.

Problem analysis

One of the most important findings from the case studies is that responses were often implemented without a proper analysis of the problem, instead relying on untested assumptions. Sometimes assessments were simply not done, using the justification that it is an emergency. But some of the cases show that it is possible to conduct quite rapid assessments even in difficult security environments (in Bunia, Gulu, Bujumbura Rural).[44] A related problem is that, where assessments were carried out, the results seemed to be driven by a desire to find out what one could do (from a limited range of options) or, more commonly, to justify a predetermined response (for instance assessments to quantify food rations in Gulu and Bujumbura Rural).

These pressures seem to be exacerbated by the fact that people affected by crises quickly become 'beneficiaries', leading the humanitarian community to overestimate its own importance: 'unless we give it to them, they won't have it'. This was evident in the relatively few assessments that were carried out, where responses tended to focus on 'needs', that is people's need for assistance. Few assessments began by looking at what people were doing for themselves; this would have encouraged agencies to realise that, although many food security needs are urgent, people can usually survive for the few days required to do an assessment.

While immediate actions to save lives may be justifiable without rigorous assessments, inadequate analysis is less excusable weeks, months and even years into the crisis. It could be argued that implementing inappropriate interventions – due to inadequate problem analysis – is sometimes worse than doing nothing, for three reasons: aid itself has had negative impacts (for example on prices); irrelevant aid has often wasted scarce resources; and it has given rise to a false sense that something was being done, preventing discussion and analysis around what really needed doing.

Monitoring and impact assessment

It is recognised that there are often pressures to start interventions without being sure that they are the right ones. But attempts to monitor impact in the case studies were rare. It was rarer still to find an impact assessment that made a credible case for attributing change to project interventions. As a result, responses sometimes continued for years in the absence of any serious attempt to test the assumptions upon which the activities were based. Moreover, other interventions continued without serious consideration of more cost-effective or practical alternatives.

Coordination

From the case studies, there is evidence that agencies have improved coordination in the last few years. However, coordination often remained limited to avoiding duplication by sharing information about activities, rather than sharing analysis of problems and potential response strategies. As a result, information on livelihoods and constraints, available from previous assessments carried out by other agencies, was often ignored, even when easily available. Moreover, agencies are not exposing their analyses to peer review, and potential synergy between agencies is lost.

In the case studies, only WFP in Uganda has seriously involved other agencies in its assessments, and in Burundi WFP and SC UK worked together to do assessments in a formalised partnership. Different agencies have carried out assessments in the same place with no prior consultation, much less an attempt to share methodologies and objectives or to see how one assessment could be made more useful to everyone. Nutrition surveys become more useful when a series of studies is done over time to give a picture of change. However, agencies often carry them out according to their own timetables. Agencies have at times come together regularly to discuss an overview of a political crisis, but these occasions have rarely been fora for debate around thematic subjects such as food security. A notable exception is CSOPNU, a forum of agencies working in northern Uganda, which has commissioned research on land as a factor in food security.

Knowledge management

This has been particularly difficult in the Great Lakes. In the Kasese case study, it was difficult to find anyone who could remember what programmes had been run a year or two previously, or the rationale for any decision-making. Given the pressures of organising emergency responses in complex and difficult circumstances (often including personal danger), field staff are more concerned with what they see as managing life-saving work than with research and report writing. But head offices and donors have allowed the lesson-learning process to be sidelined. One agency in the DRC explained that it did not do impact assessments because projects were short-term emergency interventions.

Staffing levels often compound the problem. Staff in emergencies are usually over-worked. Adrenaline-based responses rarely include adequate reflection and study.

Agencies and donors may have to rethink appropriate staffing levels – though the ability to recruit personnel to the Great Lakes region has been a constraint reported by several agencies.

In DRC and Burundi, there has been a rapid turnover of senior (expatriate) staff, who often leave these highly stressful environments within a year or 18 months. Delays in recruiting senior staff have sometimes made proper handovers impossible. This has hampered the development of an in-depth understanding of complex problems. In all three countries looked at here, incoming staff have encountered established patterns of response, built up over several years. Accepting these ready-made solutions has almost become part of staff induction.

The separation of emergency and development response

Although journals may talk of a 'development–emergency contiguum', the divisions between development and emergency run right through most agencies. Different departments have developed different cultures, standards, practices and operating norms; the two worlds often have separate chains of command and are judged by different criteria.

Some of the results of this dichotomy are:

- short funding horizons of six to 12 months, that restrict meaningful food security responses;
- 'developmental' funding is unavailable for some types of programming in scenarios where they could have been relevant;
- analysis of livelihoods takes place in a conceptual framework that looks only at the short term. As a result, food is highlighted at the expense of wider factors such as markets and land access;
- the longer-term impacts of programming may be ignored, even where the interventions are repeated over several years;
- development initiatives remain small-scale, ignoring the wider imperative to reach thousands of households;
- emergency projects have been less influenced by 'participatory' thinking, which treats all people as active agents in their own destinies;
- development support to host communities is not prioritised in an emergency, because resources are limited and there are 'more pressing needs'. Support for self-sufficiency is delayed until people no longer need relief assistance, but if this support was given at the same time as food aid, people might stop needing the relief aid much sooner.

Factors driving the response

The international responses to humanitarian crises reflect a variety of agendas.[45] Apart from security, three other factors influenced the level of humanitarian response in the case studies:

- Media attention was a key factor in the relatively large flows of aid to Goma and Bunia, where the food security situation was generally better than in surrounding rural areas.[46]
- Political considerations have played a role. Development aid was almost inaccessible in Burundi after the 1996 coup. Western governments channel most aid to Uganda through direct budgetary support to the central government. Many agencies are apparently influenced by the picture of Uganda as a 'success story', and have allowed the humanitarian catastrophe in the north to be downplayed.
- Agencies have sometimes preferred to undertake activities which keep everyone happy – communities, local leaders, agency staff, local and national trading elites, local administration and central government – by dealing with the symptoms of a larger problem, often through free hand-outs. The alternative would be to run programmes much more challenging of the status quo, and the elites who have profited from it.

Chapter 5
Conclusions and recommendations

The picture is far from homogenous, and not entirely negative. Individuals take significant risks to deliver assistance to people affected by crises. However, the case studies have pointed to the following weaknesses in the aid effort in the Great Lakes region:

- Many, if not most, food security interventions failed to address the needs of people affected by crises.
- Agencies used the same narrow range of responses in nearly all circumstances, despite the fact that these were not designed for the Great Lakes, and they deal with symptoms not causes. These short-term responses were repeated each year in the region's chronic crises, whether or not they have had any impact, while longer-term efforts to tackle the causes of food insecurity remained too small-scale for the level of need.
- Because of various pressures, organisations were unable to think through the appropriateness of responses. Agencies had often predetermined their responses, and began by asking who to help or how much help to give, rather than what was needed most. Food was given out where it was known to be plentiful, and seeds were given to people who did not need them.
- Seed distributions and nutrition interventions in particular were implemented widely even though they are based on a series of questionable assumptions that remain largely untested.
- Responses focused narrowly on food production, despite the fact that market factors play a large role in determining food security.
- Food for work programmes were seldom appropriate, and the relative appropriateness of food-based versus cash-based interventions has been inadequately examined.
- Responses often did not address the real issues because assessments were not done to determine what these issues were.[47] On a positive note, the cases showed that rapid assessment to inform programming is possible, even in insecure environments.
- In many cases, much information was already available, but was not used. This belies the claim that needs are too urgent to delay.
- Responses were often not cost-effective; alternative responses could sometimes have given the same impact at a fraction of the cost.
- Most actors gave a low priority to learning lessons and finding out the impact of interventions.

This review has been critical of the past decade of food security responses in the Great Lakes. The intention has not been to denigrate the dedicated work of many agencies in delivering assistance in difficult and challenging environments, but to look critically at what needs to be done in order to improve the quality and appropriateness of the assistance delivered. The humanitarian system has relied on a standard set of food security responses with too little analysis of their appropriateness in different circumstances. In particular, there has been too much reliance on food aid, often based on the assumption that, for the aid agency, it is a free resource without assessing its true cost and rigorously assessing food aid's cost effectiveness as compared to other interventions.

There is little that is new or controversial in the recommendations made here, but it is hoped that this study will add urgency to agency and donor attempts to improve responses.

Assessment and analysis

All food security interventions should be based upon assessments of livelihoods. (The only exceptions to this would be immediate responses lasting up to two or three weeks.) A review of previous livelihood studies in the area should be automatic, and if necessary additional field work should be done. These assessments need to be made before deciding what to do. They should include scenario prediction at least for the period of the proposed intervention.

Analysis and programming for food security need to focus on much wider issues than merely food, and need to incorporate economic thinking. Rather than working on subsistence paradigms (as is common now), these assessments, and subsequent analysis, should use frameworks that acknowledge the extent to which people affected by crisis function in a market economy. This will probably lead to a greater use of market and cash interventions, and a reduction in the use of food-based interventions.

A longer-term analytical perspective is needed, even for relatively short-term interventions. The frameworks used for analysing livelihoods in the Great Lakes need to take greater account of conflict and discrimination, particularly ethnic or clan relations, and gender and intra-household issues. These are not easily captured by the kinds of livelihood assessments on which this report is based, and so they have not been properly treated here. However, enough was learned to show that they were potentially key factors affecting many people's food security.[48]

All of this requires people with the right skills and experience. The quality of interventions will depend on the quality of assessments and analysis; this easily turns into an exercise in collecting 'shopping lists'. Agencies need to invest in giving their staff the skills and confidence to reach the level of analysis described above.

Donors should be consistent in their demands for proper analysis before funding interventions, and they should give priority to funding assessments where necessary.

Monitoring and evaluation

Good-quality assessment and analysis should improve the relevance and appropriateness of food security interventions from the outset, but mistakes will sometimes be made and situations can change quickly. Agencies should spend more time, energy and resources on monitoring, evaluation and learning than has hitherto been the norm.

Even short-term emergency programmes should be trying to learn lessons about what works and what was appropriate. More training may be needed in simple tools for rapid and inexpensive impact assessment. Emergency responses can evolve if these lessons are part of a serious investment in long-term learning and institutional memory.

Inter-agency teamwork and coordination

This needs to start from a shared assessment of the actual situation and joint efforts at analysing constraints and possible responses. This means being prepared to accept criticism and advice from other agencies. It also means spending more time and energy disseminating the results of assessments and studies. On a more ambitious level, what is required is a livelihood security information system(s) in the Great Lakes, similar to those that exist in other parts of east Africa and the Horn, with clear links to an agency with a coordination mandate, like OCHA.

Programming ideas

Agencies need a wider range of interventions that can be implemented on a reasonably large scale. In addition to the current responses, other intervention options were presented in Chapter 3 for the seven case studies. These options ranged from facilitating access to land to market interventions, increasing access to labour, asset creation and retention and support to the productive environment. Further investigation is required before implementation of these response options, and more could be identified according to specific contexts.

Although the use of off-the-peg solutions poses problems, the difficulties involved in trying to think up original responses in crisis situations must be accepted. Programming ideas for three or four of the most common scenarios could be developed by an inter-agency team, and could be accompanied by a checklist for practitioners, outlining agreed criteria of appropriateness. More commitment is needed to minimum standards of agency practice.[49]

New implementation modalities could be considered in view of the operational constraints in the Great Lakes. Insecurity has frequently prevented agencies from reaching those most in need of support. Some agencies are experimenting with ‘remote access’ programming, or with ‘war-proof’ projects that support livelihoods without having visible targets for attack. This work needs prioritising.

The evidence base

Agencies need wide-ranging reviews of emergency nutrition interventions (supplementary feeding, nutrition education, demonstration gardens, cooking lessons) and the distribution of seeds and tools. Several initiatives are being launched which aim to review and strengthen the evidence base behind investment in nutrition in development contexts. Similar initiatives are urgently needed for emergency contexts. The Emergency Nutrition Network (supported by CIDA) planned to produce the findings of a review of the published literature on the effectiveness of emergency nutrition and food security interventions. A review of the grey literature is urgently needed. A similar approach should be developed for seeds and tools. This process could be led by the FAO, which was involved in the distribution of seeds and tools in all seven of the case studies.

Cost–benefit and cost-effectiveness analysis

Given that resources are always limited, comparison of cost–benefit calculations for alternative interventions should be carried out. This should reduce the amount of food imported to the Great Lakes region, and lead to greater reliance on local purchase, where food interventions are necessary. Currently, the data from which to make cost-effectiveness comparisons is limited, and simple methods for measuring cost-effectiveness, which can be applied by multiple agencies, should be developed and adopted. Donor agencies such as ECHO and CIDA, with a strong history of emphasising cost-effectiveness, could initiate such a process.

Operationalising the emergency–development contiguum

Life-saving aid and livelihood support often need to be used together, and it is necessary to overcome the structural and organisational constraints within agencies that make this difficult. There is a need to invest more in scaling up developmental-style projects so that they reach many thousands of people.

Advocacy, access and issues of humanitarian law

Food security in the Great Lakes’ conflict regions will never be achieved without a long-term change in attitudes towards international humanitarian law, the basic rights of civilians in conflict, the obligations of governments to provide protection and minimum living conditions for their citizens, and rights of access to humanitarian aid.

Annex 1
The case studies in detail

Bujumbura Rural Province, Burundi (1999–2001)

Assessments conducted

Insecurity prevented comprehensive food security studies from being carried out, and made it difficult even to establish reliable population numbers. Some sites could not be accessed at all. Rapid inter-agency assessments were carried out in 1999. WFP carried out one-day household economy assessments throughout the period 1999–2001.[50] All information was shared between agencies. Agencies attempted a nutrition survey in 1999 despite security constraints, but there were methodological disagreements. Another attempt at a nutrition survey in 2001 encountered security problems, and the fieldwork took over two months to complete. The data was not sufficiently accepted to be used to set policy on nutrition responses.

Livelihoods analysis

Bujumbura Rural is densely populated, with a strong peri-urban influence on the agricultural economy. Bujumbura city provided both a market for higher-value crops and significant non-agricultural work opportunities. Land holdings are small, and during the war livestock had been lost (by looting and sales), income from coffee was lost as gardens were neglected through insecurity and fishing was interrupted. Displacement occurred just before the planting season, and freedom of movement was severely curbed, so most farmers lost the January 2000 harvest. Even by 2000, many could only go two or three times a week to their nearest fields, from which crops were stolen. Possibly a third of households had no harvest at all in June 2000. Distant fields were abandoned, and IDPs tried to buy or rent land closer to camps. People lost access to markets and to work in the city, because of insecurity and soaring transport costs. One assessment found that, even with three people working in one household, the 'poor' (whose numbers had doubled to half the population) earned only $16 per month, half the minimum needed for survival.

Gulu District, northern Uganda (2001–2003)

Assessments conducted

Several assessments have been conducted since 1999.[51] WFP began regular emergency food needs assessments (EFNAs) in 2000. Nutritional and mortality surveys were carried out regularly, though disagreements about findings have reduced their usefulness.[52] WFP/UNICEF also conducted rapid assessments in specific camps (these are unpublished). Child death rates have reached 5.7/10,000 children per day,[53] and under-five mortality (U5M) is 290/1,000, well over twice the national average.[54] HIV rates are over twice the national average at 11.9%.[55] There are no reports of seed needs assessments, though one NGO undertook research which it used to inform programming.[56]

Livelihoods analysis

Due to the conflict, the economy has become progressively non-agricultural and only a quarter of households had even a goat by 2003. Those in employment (mainly the public sector) or in trade are better off, together with the original landowners of the camp area, who farmed 0.5–1 hectares (these farmers constitute around 10% of the population). A middle group (around 20%) farmed 0.2–0.5ha and/or had small enterprises such as bicycle transport, while the poor class, which had to borrow or rent small plots (0.1–0.2 ha), had become the majority (60–70% of the population). The most food-insecure households (5–10% of the population) were those with little able-bodied labour.

Global acute malnutrition has fluctuated between 5% and 15% since 1998, though a rapid assessment found rates of nearly 30% in one camp after the food aid pipeline was ruptured. Surprisingly, malnutrition has been highest in some camps with the greatest access to land.

Kasese District, Uganda (1996–2000)

Assessments conducted

There are no records of livelihood assessments among IDPs in camps or in host communities. One nutrition survey was carried out, focusing on settled villages, but only a small percentage of the sample was displaced. Only one livelihood assessment has been documented.[57] This was a training exercise carried out after IDPs had returned, and looked retrospectively at the household economy of host communities in 1998. There are no agreed registers of IDP populations; estimates of their numbers varied from 45,000 to 280,000.

Livelihoods analysis

Given the lack of assessments, little is known about households' livelihoods in the area. Little can be said about constraints and vulnerabilities: access to land and/or work opportunities would probably have been important, as would availability of household labour.

Northern Kirundo, Northern Burundi (2000–January 2001)

Assessments conducted

A food security assessment was conducted in August 2000.[58] A follow-up (food aid impact evaluation) was made in 2001.[59] Nutrition surveys were carried out in January 1999 (13% GAM) and November 1999 (7.3%). Another nutrition survey was conducted in September 2000 (6.8% GAM).

Livelihoods analysis

Most people did not have access to more than three-quarters of a hectare, because of high population pressure (220/km).[60] The 'very poor' (around 15% of population), had less than half a hectare. The over-use of marginal land, and the inability to use organic matter (because of loss of livestock and because farmers are forced to use these on coffee gardens) to protect soils has caused a decline in yields. As a result of this and lack of land, around half of the population grow only around a third of their own food, mainly sweet potato and cassava, and rely heavily on selling labour. The poorest were often paid in food. Middle-income households (25–35% of the population) and rich ones (10–15%), with much larger fields (3ha of cultivated land), were more self-sufficient in food, and engaged in trade. Farm-gate prices were normally poor. A few traders controlled marketing, and poorer households were forced to sell much of their harvest immediately at low prices, or, heavily discounted, before harvest. In pre-harvest sales, the right to the crop is sold before it matures, at a discount equivalent to borrowing money at interest rates of up to 8,400%.

The loss of livestock from 1993 disrupted the mixed farming systems. Some recovery was evident, with around half of households owning a cow in 2000. However, the other half owned nothing more than a couple of goats. Because of the drought, households in the middle income group lost most of their normal earnings from trade and crop sales in 2000, and relied instead on sales of livestock to earn around $30 a month (around twice the levels of the poor). The proportion of their expenditure spent on food increased by 150% between June 2000 and January 2001. The 'poor' just covered their needs through distress strategies (including the sale of their goats).

Eastern Masisi, North Kivu, DRC (1999–2003)

Assessments conducted

Household economy studies were carried out by SC-UK in 1999 and 2002. WVI and Asrames carried out assessments in 2001 and 2003 respectively.[61] SC-UK also commissioned a livelihood study focusing on land.[62] One agency made an impact assessment of a road building project.[63] Several nutrition surveys were carried out by SC-UK, WVI and MSF-H (in September 2001, May 2002, October 2002, and April, May and October 2003).

Livelihoods analysis

The system of land control means that the 'poor' (40–50% of the population) cultivated just one quarter to half a hectare, supplementing their crops by selling labour. In addition, insecurity of tenure meant that there was no investment in soil conservation and soil fertility. Yields were therefore low, exacerbated by the new cassava mosaic virus. The displacement of many of the large livestock owners made it possible for some people to extend their area of cultivation in 1999 into abandoned pastures. Middle-income households (30–35% of the population in 1999) hired labour to work their fields (usually around two hectares), and engaged in trade. In 2000, the rapid rise in price of the mineral coltan attracted many young people to work in mining, where they remained despite the price fall the following year.[64]

With relative recovery between 1999 and 2002, the number of livestock increased, reaching around 10% of pre-1993 levels by 2003. The middle economic group replaced the poor as the majority by 2002, the poor were able to grow more of their own food (up from 60% to 70%) and work for food became rare.

On top of the constraints to livelihood security listed in Chapter 2, one study[65] also identified the importation of food aid by donors as a factor depressing farm-gate prices. In 2002, the cash income of the poor remained at the 1999 level of $160 per household per year. They had few sources of income locally apart from selling labour or selling parts of their harvest at low prices. They resorted to charcoal-making, seasonal migration to towns, migration to mines, and reducing their spending on health and education. With the introduction of school fees payable in cash (rather than in beer, as previously), fewer poor households sent children to school.[66]

Nutrition surveys found under-five malnutrition rates between 3% and 9% for moderate and severe (marasmus) malnutrition combined, but rates of kwashiorkor were unusually high (3–11%).

Goma town, DRC (February–July 2002)

Assessments conducted

The provincial authorities carried out a needs assessment,[67] though this was not used by agencies – they requested quantities of food that would have been enough to feed the entire population of 400,000 for 18 months. A needs assessment of the displaced was carried out.[68] SC-UK made a household economy assessment within a month of the eruption (SC-UK 2002), which widened attention from a focus on destroyed infrastructure and housing to the overall economic situation. Monitoring and impact assessments were carried out by SC-UK and by the DEC (DEC 2002, 2003).

Livelihoods analysis

Before the crisis, poor households (15–5% of the population) frequently depended on the income from just one person – the smallest-scale trade or women's daily labour. The whole household would only earn $25–50 a month, half of which went on food. Capital enabled people to earn significantly more by expanding trade: with capital of $50–100 (35–40% of the population) and two people working, a household could earn $50–90 a month, the same as a teacher or a male labourer's household. With over $150 (15–25%) a household could earn $100–150 a month, similar to a skilled artisan.

The fall in household incomes following the eruption hit the displaced and non-displaced equally. The urban economy proved to be more resilient than rural ones, with a wider range of economic options, and quicker returns on work.

Bunia suburbs, Ituri District, DRC (2003)

Assessments conducted

A rapid assessment was conducted in July 2003, followed by a household economy study in October 2003.[69] This study excluded the population in the camp by the MONUC barracks as they were receiving much more humanitarian support. OCHA made a survey of the number of displaced in 2003.

Livelihoods analysis

By October 2003, insecurity still restricted access to fields in the southern peri-urban areas; instead, people cultivated small plots of 0.1–0.2ha around their houses in town. Local administrators have expropriated land from the (largely Lendu) population in the south to sell to wealthier (Hema) cattle owners from the north. These two factors meant many people were almost totally dependent on the market for food, at least until garden crops were ready in early 2004.

Finding employment was more difficult for those living in the south (who could not easily reach the commercial centre in the north). Daily contract workers (30–35% of the population) could make $30–90/month, and artisans and small traders (45–65%) $60–120. These latter would have around $100–200 working capital invested. Most households spent just over half of their net income on food. Spending on services and household items was very small, because of humanitarian aid and deliberate economy.

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