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Real-time review of selected food aid programmes implemented in Afghanistan and implications for emergency food security assessments

Groupe URD

Strengthening Emergency Needs Assessment Capacity (SENAC)

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Real-time review of selected food aid programmes implemented in Afghanistan and implications for emergency food security assessments

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This study was prepared under the umbrella of the Strengthening Emergency Needs Assessment Capacity (SENAC) project, which aims to reinforce WFP's capacity to assess humanitarian needs in the food sector during emergencies and the immediate aftermath through accurate and impartial needs assessments.

Views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the view or policies of WFP.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The objective of this research was to review selected food and non-food programmes in Afghanistan to identify information that would be useful and criteria to apply at the assessment stage to inform the design of interventions in emergencies. The research derives from the need to place food aid in the wider context of food security and livelihoods, with a view to adapting responses to the needs of populations affected by crises; it also relates to the recognition that crises are complex and often protracted, requiring emergency responses to integrate medium and long-term concerns. Experience of relief assistance demonstrates that these elements determine the quality of aid.

Methodology

Field work was undertaken in the Kabul, Mazar-e Sharif and Faizabad area offices to cover a range of projects, regions and partner agencies. The review focused on response to floods that were occurring throughout the country rather than on activities of the protracted relief and recovery operation, because emergency responses and assessments were most relevant to the review.

The review entailed analysing the quality of emergency food and non-food responses and identifying how needs assessment could have informed them more effectively to prevent difficulties from occurring, a process analogous to identifying critical points in a quality-assurance process. For this reason, the framework used to analyse collected information was Quality COMPAS, a quality-assurance method designed for humanitarian projects, which also made it possible to maximize synergy between the Strengthening Emergency Needs Assessment Capacity real-time review and a review of WFP Afghanistan's monitoring and evaluation and training of WFP teams in quality assurance, carried out by *Groupe URD* at the request of WFP Afghanistan.

Main Findings

A review of the emergency responses and assessments using 12 quality criteria as defined in Quality COMPAS showed that WFP's strengths lie in its rapid-reaction capacity and its commitment to strengthening government capacity, which contributes to WFP's positive impact beyond individual interventions. Another positive characteristic is the dedication and motivation of WFP teams, which contribute to WFP's effectiveness and have a positive impact on partner institutions by supporting and stimulating action.

The greatest scope for improvement lies in project relevance, particularly ensuring that emergency responses serve people's needs. This can be attributed to the "supply-drive" that characterizes many emergency interventions and affects the breadth of needs assessments; it is reflected in the lack of clarity in the objectives of the response to the floods, which often seemed to be implicit and based on corporate objectives rather than particular situations. Emotional factors such as the urge to respond quickly to suffering, and political factors at a time when the Government's role in disaster management is growing, can also drive certain responses, even when they are not the most appropriate. Weak project relevance can also be related to lack of expertise in WFP and among partner agencies regarding food security and livelihoods. Finally, there is a need to prevent misuses of aid, whether for personal gain or other ends.

Recommendations

The review showed that a range of factors affect the quality of the response, of which needs assessment methodology is only one; others include (i) coordination among agencies, (ii) staff experience and expertise, (iii) time constraints, (iv) logistics, (v) access and security constraints, (vi) political interests, (vii) agency mandates and (viii) available response options. For these reasons, recommendations that apply to Afghanistan are proposed first, followed by general recommendations regarding emergency food-security assessment methodology, project-cycle management and institutional and policy.

Recommendations for Emergency Food Security Assessments in Afghanistan

- Background information on food security and livelihoods such as district profiles should be consolidated to provide rapid assessment teams with information for analysing food-security data in context.
- Early-warning capacity should be developed in the country, particularly on the basis of agro-meteorological data, given that most recurrent shocks are related to climate; this would help to target emergency food security assessments and make them more timely.
- Coordination for disaster management should be improved at the national and provincial levels, particularly between ministries and between ministries and international organizations.
- Capacity-building for rapid assessments for government staff should be pursued, particularly in the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development.
- Simple guidance sheets for emergency assessments, possibly by type of disaster, could be developed on the basis of existing materials and in-country assessment experience.

Recommendations for Emergency Food Security Assessment methodology

Content
- Food needs should be analysed in a holistic framework that includes questions of food availability, access, consumption and utilization to identify bottlenecks and constraints that a response should aim to avoid.
- Food needs should be placed in the context of livelihoods.
- Assessments should include:
    - context analysis;
    - appraisal of local capacity and existing responses; and
    - analysis of constraints and risks.

An example of the types of question that can be raised to cover all these issues during needs assessment is given in Annex V.

Process
- Human resources should be strengthened by ensuring that all programme staff are trained in food security and livelihoods approaches, and that they work together.
- Joint assessments with agencies with complementary expertise should be encouraged whenever possible.
- The decision to carry out an assessment on the basis of secondary information should be more carefully weighed, because as soon as a team is in the field emotional factors and political pressures are more difficult to manage and can bias the response; pressure to provide food aid when it is not the most appropriate response is an example.
- Briefings and debriefings should be encouraged to optimize feedback by assessment teams and generate ideas for responses.

Guidance; the handbook
- It is important to keep things simple and to de-mystify assessments, making guidance accessible to staff who may have only basic notions of food security.
- A quick-reference document is needed to guide emergency assessments.

Recommendations for the project cycle as a whole

It is recommended that programme teams work with:
- a common technical approach such as the "food availability, access, consumption and utilization" model and the livelihoods approach; and
- a common method for managing the quality of projects that integrates all phases, starting with a common definition of project quality; the group work using the Quality COMPAS during training in July is an example.

Recommendations for the institutional level

- WFP's role in needs assessment should be clarified with regard to other stakeholders such as other United Nations agencies and government institutions to identify whose needs-assessment capacity needs to be strengthened.
- Training should be provided in food-security and livelihoods approaches and in assessment methodologies.
- More response options should be available for assessment teams; this requires clear policy decisions with regard to coordination with other agencies and broadening WFP's range of responses.

Figure 1 Relative distribution of vulnerability by province
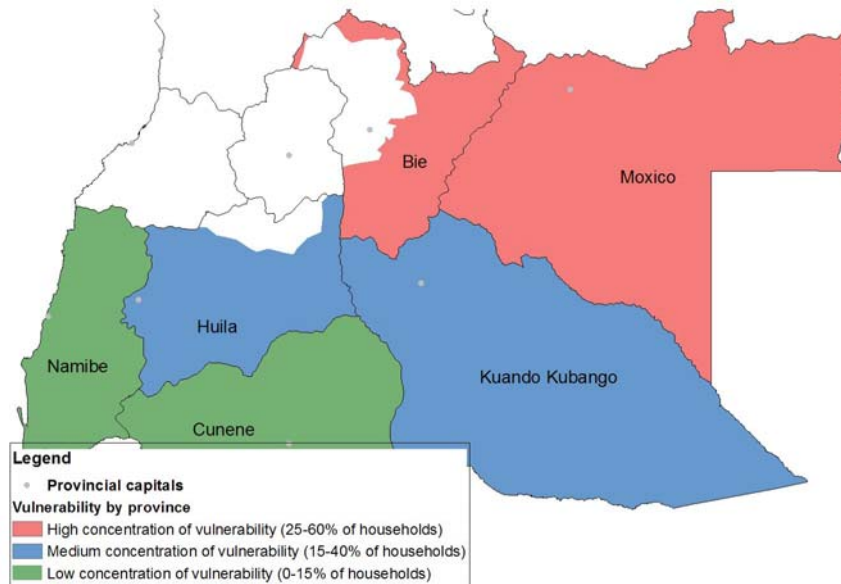
INTRODUCTION: WHY THIS RESEARCH QUESTION?

1. The objective of the research as stated in the terms of reference (TORs) is to review selected food and non-food programmes in Afghanistan to identify information that would be useful and criteria to apply at the assessment stage to inform decisions and the design of interventions in emergencies.

2. It could be asked why WFP should enquire into non-food responses: WFP staff might wonder whether there is a will to minimize WFP's role in responding to emergencies; other organizations might interpret it as a move towards an extension of WFP's mandate to non-food responses, potentially duplicating their efforts. It is an issue that raises concerns.

3. This enquiry is, however, fully in line with WFP's mission statement, which stipulates that "Food aid is **one of the many instruments**[1] that can help to promote food security. The policies governing the use of World Food Programme food aid must be oriented towards the objective of eradicating hunger and poverty. The ultimate objective of food aid should be the elimination of the need for food aid."[2] Underlying these principles is the notion that using food aid appropriately requires an understanding of its role in eradicating hunger and poverty, and of its complementarities with other responses to food insecurity.

4. The research question also arises out of the experience of assisting crisis-affected populations, which has repeatedly demonstrated the need to adapt responses to specific needs. Aid agencies are also giving increased attention to the risk of aid dependency and the potential negative impacts of relief assistance.[3] In the context of food security, this has prompted the shift to holistic "livelihoods" approaches, in which households' subsistence strategies are taken into consideration in understanding household food security (Young *et al*.). This approach leads to consideration of a range of options to address food insecurity.

5. The shift from saving lives to saving livelihoods, and hence the emphasis on food and non-food responses, is related to increasing understanding among the assistance community of crises and the emphasis on linking relief and rehabilitation development (LRRD). Acute emergencies that require immediate relief are rare; in most situations, aid agencies are dealing with protracted emergencies where aid is provided over time. Increasing people's resilience to crises and fostering development even in turbulent times have become central to humanitarian assistance.

6. These issues – adapting responses to needs, doing no harm and enhancing people's resilience – are related to the quality[4] of humanitarian assistance. Experience has shown that the basis of quality interventions is accurate assessment and good linkages between assessment, design and implementation. This review therefore analyses emergency interventions in Afghanistan in response to floods to identify how needs assessment could have informed the response more effectively, whether food or non-food.

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[1] Emphasis added.
[2] WFP mission statement, available at www.wfp.org
[3] For example, Strengthening Emergency Needs Assessment Capacity (SENAC) reviews on the risk of aid dependency and on the impact of food aid on markets.
[4] "The quality of a product or a service is related to all of its properties and characteristics. These will define its capacity to satisfy expressed and implicit needs." (*Groupe URD*: Quality COMPAS.)

7. This real-time review was carried out at the same time as a review of WFP Afghanistan's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system and training for teams from the country office and the Kabul area office on quality assurance, based on *Groupe URD*'s Quality COMPAS – a quality-assurance method designed for humanitarian projects (see Annex IV). The real-time review and the work on M&E had the same objective – improving the quality of WFP responses – and were based on the principle that the overall quality of response depends on the quality of each project-cycle phase, particularly needs assessment. A common approach was therefore used; this report draws on results and ideas from both undertakings.

METHODOLOGY

Methods used

8. To achieve the expected outputs, as stated in the TORs, the mission aimed to cover various regions, interventions and stakeholders to obtain an overview of emergency responses and assessments. Field visits were carried out in:
   - the Kabul area, with a field visit to Kapisa province;
   - the Mazar-e Sharif area, with visits outside the city and to Shortepa district in Jawzjan province; and
   - the Faizabad area, with visits to Faizabad city, Dehan Dara in Argu district and Baharak.

9. The following activities were undertaken:
   - participation in flood assessments in Kapisa province and Shortepa district in Jawzjan province;
   - visits to sites where emergency responses and food-for-work (FFW) flood prevention and mitigation projects had been implemented, including discussions with beneficiaries;
   - visits to other WFP projects such as food-for-training (FFT), school feeding and FFW;
   - meetings with country office and area office staff involved in assessments and response;
   - meetings with partners and other agencies involved in emergency response;
   - review of assessment and monitoring reports; and
   - a literature review.

10. *Groupe URD* also reviewed WFP Afghanistan's M&E system and a training programme for WFP Afghanistan staff on quality assurance using Quality COMPAS, which enabled the group to obtain further information as to how WFP teams function in the field and overall programme management.

Scope and limitations

11. The objective of the mission was ambitious given the scope of WFP's Afghanistan operations and the number of regions in which it operates, the time available – two weeks – and the transport constraints typical of Afghanistan: travel from Kabul to area offices is by air and road travel to project sites generally takes three to four hours one way. In-depth analysis of individual projects over time was therefore impracticable; the information in this report is not intended to be statistically representative of all WFP operations, but to

highlight important issues identified by comparing different regions, projects and stakeholder perspectives.

12. The review was initially intended to focus on "…food and possibly some non-food programmes implemented by WFP as a result of earlier WFP and partners' emergency needs assessments. The programmes will be either on-going or recently completed (e.g. PRRO Afghanistan 10233, April 2003 – March 2005)" (TORs). But the situation in the field led to certain adaptations, which are described below.

Type of crisis: rapid-onset disaster

13. The situation in Afghanistan is currently one of post-conflict or reconstruction. Food insecurity in Afghanistan is largely related to the effects of a 20-year war, which is ongoing in certain areas largely inaccessible to relief agencies, a severe drought in 1999–2002 and large-scale displacement and return. WFP's response has evolved from an emergency operation (EMOP) to the current protracted relief and recovery operation (PRRO) 10233; relief represents a small part of WFP assistance.

14. Severe floods in many areas between May and July 2005 provided an opportunity for real-time review of assessments and responses to a rapid-onset natural disaster, so the mission focused on response to the floods rather than ongoing projects supporting development objectives such as food for education (FFE) and food for tree planting.

Types of programme

15. The team visited FFW and FFT projects and schools, and examined emergency food distributions, completed, ongoing or planned, and disaster-preparedness flood-prevention projects implemented in the spring of 2005; agencies had realized that heavy snow would lead to flooding, though they had underestimated the scale of the flooding.

16. The assessments largely corresponded to "initial investigations" or "very rapid assessments" as described in the *EFSA Handbook*. Some in-depth analyses were planned, but were not carried out during the mission.

17. Reviewing non-food responses was difficult because WFP Afghanistan has a policy of providing food only and excluding such programmes as cash for work.[5] This gap was partly compensated for through interviews with other agencies and during field visits, but it was not possible to review non-food responses as thoroughly as required.

Key stakeholders and partners

18. It is important to note that WFP policy is to strengthen the capacity of the Government of Afghanistan, particularly the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, with the result that WFP increasingly tries to carry out all its activities with or through government partners. An example is the establishment of the Vulnerability Analysis Unit (VAU), which is largely supported by vulnerability analysis and mapping (VAM) in carrying out the National Rural Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) and establishing an early-warning system. A disaster-response unit has also been established in the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, which was a focal point for the flood response and part

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[5] WFP sometimes provides cash as a complement to food rations to cover expenses for non-food items such as staff and construction materials. Non-food inputs are generally provided by another agency or donor.

of the inter-agency coordination mechanism. Most flood assessments, at least the initial investigations, were carried out by or with personnel from local departments of rural rehabilitation and development; in most areas coordination mechanisms were set up between United Nations agencies, ministries and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), so WFP teams rarely carried out assessments in isolation. The mission therefore had discussions with representatives from organizations such as the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), the International Labour Organization (ILO), Medair and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) but could not cover the entire range of stakeholders given the short time spent in each region and the diversity of stakeholders.

A method of analysis based on quality assurance

19. The real-time review entailed two steps:
    i)   analysing the quality of the emergency responses, which entailed defining the quality of the response by selecting quality criteria; and
    ii)   determining whether and how the needs assessment had contributed to the quality of the response; in the language of quality assurance, this is equivalent to identifying "critical points",[6] which are activities or factors that need to be managed to prevent "non-quality" of the final service or product.

20. This type of analysis is illustrated in Box 1.

Box 1: Example of analysis from the quality of the response to the management of critical points

Quality criterion: The project responds to a demonstrated need; two critical points related to this criterion have to be managed in the assessment phase.

- Critical point 1: Difficulties in identifying needs appropriately, notably the tendency to overlook local responses to needs and coping strategies, and the confusion between expressed needs, which are prone to be "shopping lists", and real needs.
Questions that can be raised during the needs assessment to manage the critical point: Which needs are not yet being met? Have you distinguished between real needs and expressed needs?

- Critical point 2: The lack of understanding of the origin of needs, notably confusion between chronic needs and those that have arisen with the crisis.
Questions for the needs assessment: Are people's needs directly linked to the crisis? What problems have caused these needs to emerge?

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21. The analysis was therefore based on Quality COMPAS, a choice that ensured maximum synergy with the second project implemented by *Groupe URD* for WFP Afghanistan, a review of its M&E system and training on quality assurance.

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[6] In quality assurance, a critical point is "any activity or factor which can and must be controlled to reduce or eliminate the risk of one or several hazards from occurring" (*Groupe URD*).

MAIN FINDINGS: LINKING THE QUALITY OF THE RESPONSE TO NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

22. This section sets out observations concerning the achievements and difficulties faced by emergency interventions (see Expected Output 1 in the TORs) and related to the assessment phase. Observations are analysed on the basis of quality criteria and related issues as defined in Quality COMPAS.

Achieving project objectives

WFP's main strength: responsiveness on the ground

23. One of WFP's greatest strengths is the speed of its reaction in emergency situations, both in terms of sending assessment teams and of responding. In Badakshan, the Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development publicly congratulated WFP on its responsiveness and ability to provide assistance on the ground. WFP's responsiveness can be partly attributed to its logistics capacity: WFP's mandate of providing food in emergency situations and its principle of delivery directly to beneficiaries means it has the facilities to deploy rapidly. The commitment and professionalism of WFP teams were major factors.

Box 2: The pattern of emergency flood response in Afghanistan (May–July 2005)

Emergency responses tended to follow the following pattern:
1. Initial assessment is carried out by local representatives, who inform WFP of the situation, sometimes stipulating the number of households in need of food assistance.
2. WFP sends an assessment team, sometimes with other agencies, to verify whether food aid is required and in what quantities.
3. While the assessment team is in the field, food and transport are mobilized for delivery as soon as the assessment team confirms the amount required.
4. Food is taken from stock and sent out to beneficiaries. Distribution is usually carried out with Afghan partners such as local departments of rural rehabilitation and development or the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS), with WFP monitors.
5. Plans are made for in-depth assessment at a later stage, for example when the floods have receded, to assess damage and set up recovery operations. This is apparently not done systematically.

Sometimes an initial shipment of food is sent immediately; WFP teams take this opportunity to make an in-depth assessment to complement initial information.

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24. There is, however, scope for improving the timeliness of interventions and assessments. In one assessment in Kapisa, for example, assessment teams arrived several days after families had been evacuated and housed in tents; the delay was related to the time needed to transfer information from the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development to WFP and to constraints described below.

Management of constraints: security, access and workload

25. The most important constraint faced by WFP Afghanistan is the security situation and associated regulations. Afghanistan is classified as security level III, which means that security clearance is required for all movements outside the main cities. Clearance can take 48 hours, though express clearances can be obtained in a few hours for emergency situations. When international staff travel by road, two vehicles are needed; ensuring that

enough vehicles are available at short notice is sometimes difficult. Overnight stays in the field are prohibited in most regions. In a country where most sites are several hours drive away through rough terrain and where staff must be back by nightfall, time spent in the field is limited, which affects the depth of assessments. In some situations, the security situation and United Nations security rules prevent WFP teams from accessing affected areas, so food is provided on the basis of government or agency reports and distributed by local partners.

26. Another constraint that affects emergency assessments and response is the availability of teams. WFP Afghanistan focuses on implementing PRRO activities, so teams are busy with routine work. Mobilizing trained and experienced staff for an assessment is sometimes difficult. The agreed norm is that assessments should be done by VAM staff and programme assistants; in practice they are also done by food aid monitors (FAMs).[7]

## Measuring achievement: the need for specific objectives

27. WFP is effective in that it delivers food rapidly; but whether it achieves its objectives is a difficult issue, partly because the objectives of emergency food distributions reviewed during the mission were not always explicit or specific to each situation. Was food distributed to save lives, to support coping mechanisms, as a kind of income transfer or as an interim solution until a response is provided?

28. Any EMOP implies a reference to WFP's Strategic Priority 1: Saving lives in crisis situations, or to one of the current PRRO objectives: "to provide emergency humanitarian assistance". But these are corporate and country-level objectives; they need to be made specific to each situation. This is also reflected in the indicators proposed for project M&E, as stated in the results-based management (RBM) results-chain matrix for 2005. The outcomes and related indicators proposed for Strategic Priority 1 are:
    - reduced and/or stabilized prevalence of acute malnutrition among beneficiaries; indicator: prevalence of acute malnutrition among children under 5; and
    - reduced and/or stabilized crude mortality in an identified population; indicator: crude and under-5 mortality rates.

29. In the case of the floods, acute malnutrition or increased mortality related to food insecurity were unlikely because the time frame was too short and households had other means of obtaining food. This is not to argue that food aid was not needed, but to emphasize that these outcomes were not necessarily relevant to the emergency and that the proposed indicators would not necessarily inform the effectiveness of the response. Measuring such outcomes is often difficult in such a time frame.

30. These factors may explain the tendency to focus on measuring outputs – quantities of food distributed and the number of beneficiaries receiving WFP assistance. The lack of clarity in the objectives of emergency interventions and the consequent difficulty in assessing their effectiveness raise further questions about the adequacy of the response in relation to people's needs.

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[7] The task of FAMs is to verify that food is distributed appropriately; they may not be trained in food-security issues.

Responding to demonstrated needs

31. Central to the question of project relevance is the balance between people's needs and the response proposed to meet them. But various factors distort the process of translating needs into a response, as illustrated in Graph 1. The factors in Graph 1, which necessarily affect response and assessment, can explain a number of observations made in Afghanistan.

Graph 1. Balance between needs and the service delivered: a complex encounter
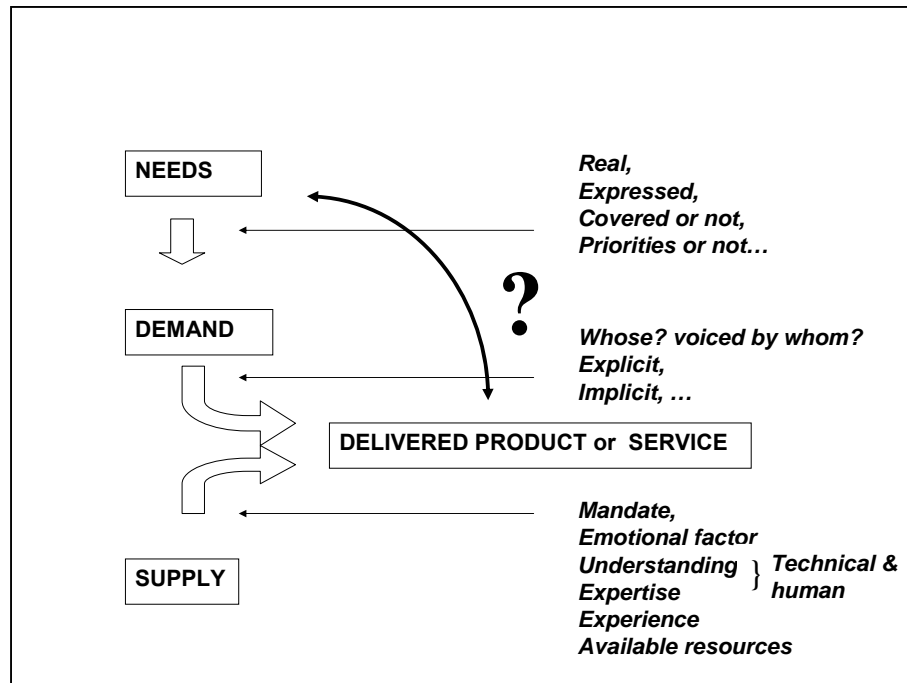
The "supply drive": a limited range of response options

32. The observed WFP interventions in response to the floods were essentially emergency food distributions consisting of a ration of wheat, oil, pulses[8] and iodized salt; a potential alternative was to distribute biscuits, but they were largely reserved for school feeding programmes. In the words of the Head of the food-for-education unit, Emma Togba: "What are we using to address needs? Wheat, oil. But maybe they don't need wheat. What do you pound it with in an emergency when you have lost everything? How do you cook it when you have no utensils? Maybe we should also be able to provide flour, bread, or biscuits."

33. There were few other response options, except when the Faizabad area office participated in an inter-agency response by lending its loader to clear a new length of road between Faizabad and Baharak and monitoring the work. Restoring traffic was a major food-security issue because the blockage was preventing traders from bringing wheat to

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[8] At the time of the mission, a shortage of pulses meant that they were omitted in certain distributions. But it was not a major problem, because distributions were for two weeks or one month and because affected families had access to other food sources and were unlikely to encounter severe protein or micronutrient deficiencies attributable to the unbalanced ration.

Baharak, where wheat prices went up from Afg55 to Afg70[9] per *seer* (7 kg) in two weeks. This non-food response was possible because there was good coordination between donors and aid agencies, facilitated by the coordination mechanisms in the region, experienced WFP staff with good knowledge of the region were present and WFP had a loader available.[10]

34. The supply drive was sometimes further complicated by the use of standard food baskets instead of rations defined for specific situations. This may enable rapid calculations of quantities and mobilization of stocks, but it may fail to address local needs. An assessment mission in Kapisa province, for example, confirmed that 180 families had been evacuated from their flooded homes to tents with limited cooking facilities and were cooking collectively; they had left with nothing and were relying on food bought in the bazaar, where it was plentiful, with whatever cash they had. The mission decided to send wheat, oil, and salt. When it came to calculating the ration, the closest match among the food baskets for PRRO 10233 was the ration for vulnerable rural people, which is designed to complement the resources of poor households for several months rather than meet the emergency needs of households that have lost everything. Just before the trucks were loaded, the assessment team checked how much each household would receive and found the quantities to be insufficient; the situation was rectified by doubling the quantities.

35. In emergency situations, supplies are determined by available stocks: wheat flour, for example, is difficult to stock because it is vulnerable to mould. If assessment teams are to be able consider a range of interventions, ways of increasing the number of available options, including food-response options, must be found.

The "supply effect" on needs assessments

36. The Kapisa assessment also showed that assessments are limited by what the agency can provide. Providing food aid may not have been the most appropriate response: the families may have needed cash to buy food or improved cooking facilities. If alternative responses are to be considered, ways have to be found of supplying what is needed.

37. The absence of other response options therefore affects needs assessments in several ways: (i) assessment teams work according to what they know: WFP is expert in food aid and makes assessments accordingly; and (ii) there is an ethical issue: should other response options be explored during an assessment, potentially raising expectations that probably cannot be met?

The emotional factor: "They need us, they need food."[11]

38. The emotional dimension of emergency relief also complicates the supply drive: assessment teams who witness to acute suffering and loss may be moved to act out of sympathy, which may be natural but may make it difficult to assess objectively the assistance that can be provided. Teams may think "it's better to give something rather than nothing", which for WFP means providing food. A wider range of available response options of which assessment teams are aware would make it easier to manage the emotional factor.

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[9] US$1 = Afg49 at 30 July 2005.

[10] Given the brevity of the mission *Groupe URD* cannot confirm whether similar situations had occurred previously here or in other regions in Afghanistan.

[11] Programme assistant, following the assessment with 180 displaced families in Kapisa

Damage assessment vs. needs assessment

39. Most of the needs assessment carried out in response to the floods consisted essentially of damage assessments, reporting damage such as numbers of flooded *jeribs* (approximately 73.5 cm) of land, damaged houses and displaced families. They did not assess how the damage affected households' vulnerability compared to the pre-flood situation, which response mechanisms they were putting in place or which constraints WFP assistance could alleviate. This approach is common in emergency assessments and arises from the tendency to assume that people have "lost everything" and "need our help", which leads teams to overlook local responses and coping mechanisms.

40. To identify appropriate responses, needs must be seen in the wider context and their origins understood: it is important, for example, to distinguish chronic needs from those that arose prior to the crisis. Some assessment teams did look at these issues, but the tendency to focus on damage led to a narrow perception of needs.

41. Emphasis was placed on the loss of land and crops in absolute terms, but losses relative to normal village production were not specified: in Kapisa, for example, some strips of land next to the river were affected, but the harvest was plentiful elsewhere. Similarly, the fact that it was the harvest period was noted, but there was no use of seasonal calendars to assess the crisis in terms of overall agricultural production; the relative importance of damaged crops compared to other production and income strategies was not explored.

42. Most assessment teams referred to the NRVA results or their experience in the affected areas to estimate food insecurity prior to the floods. The NRVA information used by WFP area offices is mainly wealth group vulnerability estimates based on households' ability to meet the 2,100 kcal/person/day minimum.[12] But the NRVA is not designed to provide village-level or district-level information: it provides national averages or province-level estimates, so NRVA information does not necessarily help teams to understand the situation of affected households. It might be useful to establish district profiles on the basis of NRVA results and complementary information that describe the main livelihood strategies, assets, vulnerability to shocks and vulnerability estimates, but the sampling used may not allow this. Such profiles could provide baseline information for emergency food security assessments (EFSAs) in the case of a shock and for regular programming.

43. In addition to these limitations, it appears that NRVA information was not always used optimally in designing the response: Kapisa was not noted as a highly vulnerable area in the NRVA, so teams were not prompted to enquire into families' other coping mechanisms or income sources. Some programme assistants advocated sending food aid to households that had moved to relatives' houses without checking the socio-economic situation of the host households. This decision was not validated by management.

44. There were positive examples of more subtle analyses of needs, however, for example in Badakshan, where joint assessments and regular coordination meetings enabled agencies to share experience and enhance understanding of needs. Some agencies focused on damaged roads and bridges between Faizabad and Baharak. Other agencies working in more isolated food-insecure areas emphasized that damage to infrastructure was less visible because there had been no bridges to destroy, which led to an exercise with international and government institutions to map out acute needs related to the floods and

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[12] This was calculated through total food requirements that can be met through own production and by purchase.

chronic needs with a view to an integrated response involving community leaders.[13] This was possible (i) because there were relatively few agencies in Badakshan, so people knew each other and worked together easily, (ii) experienced, dedicated Afghan and expatriate staff were available, (iii) recurrent natural disasters had increased agencies' experience and their ability to respond together, (iv) donor representatives were in Faizabad, which made funding and planning easier, and (v) security was good.

Avoiding or reducing the risk of negative impact

45. The mission did not witness negative impacts related to WFP's flood responses. The responses were small-scale and brief, and hence unlikely to create significant negative impacts. The only exception was tension between families that received aid and those that did not.

46. Potential negative impacts have been identified in certain rehabilitation and disaster-prevention projects implemented through FFW, particularly the risk of creating aid dependency, which would limiting the sustainability of interventions. There are reports, for example, of communities stopping maintenance activities they would usually undertake in the expectation of cash or food.

47. Other interventions, particularly non-food, should be considered. The risk of creating dependency through FFW seems less than the risk with cash for work because the value of the food ration is half the daily wage. One of WFP's partners highlighted the importance of mobilizing communities to ensure ownership and maintenance of the outputs;[14] the potential for this should be assessed early on. Community members should be involved in the assessment and design of disaster-prevention and rehabilitation projects (Grünewald and Dufour, 2003). Such community mobilization could also lead to exploration of alternative responses that rely less on external resources. These efforts should feed into longer-term efforts to build the Government's capacity to establish and maintain large-scale infrastructures that communities cannot manage.

48. The training session on quality assurance concluded that greater attention to potential negative impacts should be given in each project phase, particularly assessment.

Aiming for positive impacts beyond the intervention

49. The expression "beyond the intervention" captures the idea that the impact of a project can operate on several levels:
- beyond its technical objectives, for example as an expression of solidarity;
- over time by sustaining and strengthening peoples' resilience to crises; and
- on other stakeholders, for example people or agencies not targeted by the project who benefit indirectly.

A strong sense of purpose: solidarity and an inspiring drive for action

50. The mission was greatly impressed by energy and motivation of the WFP teams, which contributed to the quality of WFP interventions in terms of both rapid reaction and relationships with communities, cooperating partners (CPs) and government partners. WFP's mandate and supplies can limit its field of action, but its staff used their resources to stimulate the humanitarian community; WFP was a member of all flood response

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[13] Alex Klaits (USAID), Mark Campbell (Medair); personal communications.
[14] Eng. Kayoum, Association for Social Development (ASD); personal communication.

coordination mechanisms for example. Through the PRRO, WFP was a driving force in education, reforestation through the Greening Afghanistan Initiative (GAIN), women's affairs, rural development and disaster management with the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, thereby stimulating partner agencies mandated to deal with these issues.

51. Such positive energy is important in emergency situations. Following the Faizabad floods, tarpaulins, blankets and water containers were distributed to affected households; it was not the perfect solution, but people could see that aid agencies were mobilized, which is a reminder of the importance of gestures of solidarity and that something is better than nothing. But if a sub-optimal response is provided as a temporary measure, the fact must be made explicit.

Effective capacity-building efforts with the Afghan Government

52. WFP is strongly committed to strengthening the Government's capacity, particularly that of the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development. The WFP Head of Programme, for example, managed training for ministry and regional staff on project management, identification, preparations and appraisal and M&E, which included rapid needs assessment methods for emergencies and individual and focus group interview techniques. Emphasis was placed on community involvement in identifying needs, problems and interventions.

53. An indicator of the Government's growing capacity is its lead in many disaster-response activities: for example, the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development evacuated households by helicopter and was the first in the field to assess flood damage. During the flood response, WFP liaised at the provincial level and carried out joint assessments; distributions were made jointly with the ministry, often with the participation of ARCS. This may raise political questions, but it is a necessary contribution to capacity development in Afghan institutions.

54. Experience of the 2005 floods reveals a tendency for government institutions to request food aid in most disaster-affected areas even when it is not justified,[15] which suggests that capacity-building should focus on non-food responses, particularly because assistance to Afghanistan, including food aid, is likely decrease in the medium-term to long-term, and the Government will probably not have the level of food resources currently available in WFP.

Strengthening resilience to crises and disaster-preparedness/prevention

55. WFP's Strategic Priority 2 is to protect livelihoods in crisis situations and enhance resilience to shocks. This is the rationale of most FFW projects, which are used for rehabilitation and disaster-preparedness. Several were carried out during the spring in preparation for the floods: for example a retaining wall beside the Amou Daria in Shortepa district in Jawzjan province was built by the NGO Association for Social Development (ASD) and the floodway outside Mazar-e Sharif was repaired by FSRO. But the flooding was so severe that the impact of some of these projects was limited: the retaining wall in Shortepa, for example, mitigated the destruction of crops and houses in a nearby village but was quickly washed away.

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[15] For an example, see assessment report from Vornail village in Baharak district, Badakshan, August 2004.

56. The limited impact of flood-mitigation activities may be related to weaknesses in the assessment: the level of flooding could have been anticipated from the heavy snowfalls, sandbags were used instead of more durable materials, the wall was too small and resources were not mobilized to build a bigger one. The experience of another agency is analogous: it had designed large-scale flood-prevention works, but was turned down by donors on the grounds of expense.

57. The focus on rehabilitation and prevention is evident in several assessment reports: assessment teams make recommendations as to participation by affected households in FFW projects for rehabilitation. Assessment reports in Badakshan emphasize the importance of preventing erosion and of reforestation to limit flooding and mudflows, which can be done through GAIN.

Respecting WFP's mandate and principles

58. Ensuring that a project is consistent with WFP's mandate and principles is fundamental in encouraging field workers, CPs and local authorities to accept it and support the activities.

59. WFP's mission statement and Strategic Priorities are stated clearly in project documents, which facilitates application in the field. However, there are cases where WFP assistance was reported to be misused or diverted from its purpose.

60. In several area offices, cases of internal and external corruption were reported. Villagers stated that "a foreigner" should be present at food distributions to ensure that food reached those who needed it most. WFP Afghanistan has mobilized teams to curtail these problems through tighter monitoring and internal controls, but it is not easy if access to the field by international staff is limited by insecurity.

61. Political issues also result in diversions or sub-optimal use of food aid, particularly now that aid is increasingly provided through government institutions. In its quest to strengthen its legitimacy in the provinces, the Government needs to implement visible responses and should be able to call on WFP even when food aid is not appropriate. In other cases, local representatives such as governors or election candidates attempt to be seen as the aid providers: in Baharak district of Badakshan, for example, a man was said to have distributed wheat and oil to flood-affected households with no mention of WFP or a government agency, even though the food probably came from WFP. Such rumours, which are common, show how assistance can be used for ends other than those intended. To limit this, WFP emphasises direct communication with communities, and as standard practice food is not distributed during election periods. But it is often difficult to deny rumours and control communications.

62. These challenges highlight the need to be aware of local politics in areas of intervention and to assess them during initial assessments. This is difficult, given time and access constraints, but it is essential because in emergency situations food tends to be distributed through local leaders (see Nahrin, 2002; Grünewald and Dufour, 2002).

Respecting populations: communication and community involvement

63. A project that fails to show respect for the population is unlikely to provide an effective response to people's needs and, indeed, is likely to have a negative effect in the long term. Conversely, ensuring that a project respects the population promotes local ownership and sustainable impact.

64. Communication with beneficiaries regarding the food they are entitled to is an important component of WFP operations. Yet confusion as to who is distributing for whom and reports of conflict between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries reflect a lack of explanation to communities and indicate that improvements in communication between WFP, its partners, government authorities and communities should be improved as soon as possible, for example during initial encounters. It is essential to explain what WFP is and what it can and cannot do, for example.

65. Similarly, consultation and community involvement are central aspects of WFP activities. Direct consultation by WFP teams is often limited, however; it is mostly done by CPs and hence depends on the quality of their interaction with the community. Community involvement is often limited to delegating management of distribution and selection of beneficiaries to community leaders (see Grünewald and Dufour, 2002), so there is scope for improvement in all project phases, which would lead to more precise needs assessment and more diverse responses, particularly non-food responses.

66. Improving the quality of consultation and community involvement would involve strengthening the participation skills of WFP and partner teams, and requires a sound understanding of the political and social context.

Being flexible

67. A difficulty faced by the flood response in some areas was that the level of flooding increased between the assessment and response, affecting more families and leading beneficiaries to redistribute food amongst themselves, which sometimes involved tensions and resulted in inadequate rations. When the flooding ended, the needs of displaced households shifted from relief to assistance with rebuilding houses and finding income to replace replacing the lost harvest, which emphasizes the need to monitor situations as they evolve and requirements change.

68. Participants in the quality-assurance training highlighted the need to strengthen project flexibility by monitoring the evolution of needs. Some progress has been made: some projects were adapted during implementation, for example in Shortepa district where the ASD switched its FFW project from constructing retaining walls to clearing irrigation canals; unfortunately, part of this work was destroyed by the floods after completion.

69. Anticipating changes, for example by making several scenarios during assessments, could improve WFP's capacity to react rapidly and manage emergency logistics more flexibly. Exceptional snowfall in the winter had made severe flooding predictable, so needs assessments could have prepared different scenarios to enable agencies to plan their responses. Predicting needs requires an effective early-warning system based on agricultural and meteorological data, given that most shocks in Afghanistan are weather-related.

Integrating the project into the institutional environment: coordination

70. WFP's activities are is integrated into wider capacity-building efforts and national development initiatives such as United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs), United Nations joint programmes and the National Development Framework. WFP is a member of the flood response and other coordination mechanisms, and is sometimes a driving force in them.

71. Coordination is a central aspect of food and non-food responses. WFP's current policy is to distribute food only with non-food responses provided by others, which highlights the need for coordination in assessments and responses and the value of joint assessments. During the assessment in Kapisa province, for example, displaced households living in tents identified their priority need as drinking water; WFP immediately informed United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) staff, who were particularly grateful because a UNICEF assessment team was going to a nearby area the next day – but when they arrived, they found that drinking water was being provided by another agency. More effective coordination upstream and a joint assessment could have optimized the resources and expertise of each agency, avoiding wasted time and duplicated visits.

72. It is difficult for WFP teams to raise questions about needs they are unlikely to be able to meet and that may be better addressed by agencies with expertise in other fields, particularly NGOs with long-standing operations or experience of working with certain communities. In Badakshan, coordination added value to needs analysis by bringing together donors, United Nations agencies and NGOs to carry out joint assessments. Coordination mechanisms were less effective in other regions, however, which reduced the quality of responses. These experiences show that WFP should strengthen the capacity of teams assessing food and non-food responses, but this cannot match the value of joint assessments.

73. Given that the value of joint assessments is recognized, it has to be asked why they are so seldom done. Various factors constrain collaboration in assessments: (i) different agencies work with different ministries: for example, WFP works with the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, UNICEF with the Ministry of Public Health; coordination between ministries is often poor; (iii) agencies have different activities, agendas and regular programmes; (iv) the number of agencies and departments makes it difficult for individuals remain aware of activities; and (v) logistics and security-clearance procedures make it difficult to organize missions, especially when several agencies are involved.

74. Coordination is effective when staff seek collaboration with other agencies: in the example above, the head of the Kabul area office called UNICEF, but another individual may not have done so. Inter-agency collaboration is strongly determined by personal ties between individuals.[16] Initiating joint assessments is positive in terms of immediate impact on the quality of the information and fosters future collaboration by enabling individuals to discuss ideas and design joint activities.

Having the resources and expertise to carry out the project.
75. WFP acts as an operational agency and provides resources for projects implemented by other agencies, so it is important to determine which organizations have the expertise to carry out effective assessments.

From WFP expertise to Partners' expertise
76. WFP's role in emergency assessment in Afghanistan is likely to continue to decrease as government institutions take a stronger lead. This suggests that the focus should be on strengthening the expertise of the Government or other partners in food security and

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[16] Socializing outside the work environment strongly supports inter-agency collaboration.

livelihoods rather than that of WFP teams, for example in determining whether food aid is appropriate in given circumstances. The training programme for the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development and the WFP team's daily support for partners are examples of efforts in this context; it is essential that they be pursued.

77. It is important, however, to understand the capacities of partners. The common assumption that partner or government capacity is low is used to explain most of the difficulties faced by WFP. Poor capacity is definitely a constraint, but it should not lead WFP to under-estimate capacity or overlook the value of partners' experience, particularly with regard to non-food responses. CP staff who can communicate in local languages will have a fuller understanding of the communities they work with, but they may not be able to fill in WFP reporting forms in English in ways that include this understanding; and WFP forms change, often before partners have a chance to understand them. It is recommended that forms should be developed at the field level, enabling assessment officers and monitors to comment on design and relevance, rather by consultants in the country office or at Headquarters. Such a bottom-up approach could conflict, however, with attempts to standardize forms to facilitate country-level and international reporting, for example through the results-based management toolkit being piloted in Afghanistan.

From needs assessment methods to livelihoods and participatory techniques

78. An appropriate food security assessment calls for particular skills, which many WFP field staff currently lack: some have extensive experience and understanding of food issues in Afghanistan, but most are unaware of the scope of food security or of the "livelihoods" concept and are therefore unable to place food aid in a wider context and design potential non-food responses. FAMs are a case in point: the current monitoring system focuses largely on outputs such as numbers of beneficiaries and food received rather than on outcomes.[17] VAM staff are trained to identify needs but not necessarily to relate them to programme issues. Programme assistants often have the greatest expertise, because they deal with various project-cycle phases. WFP Afghanistan is trying to break down the barriers between VAM personnel, programme officers and FAMs (Fries, 2003), which will require all programme staff to have a common understanding of wider food security and livelihoods issues, which is currently not the case.

79. Good participatory techniques and communication skills are essential, particularly to provide qualitative information that supports the interpretation of quantitative information; assessment reports must leave space for such information, and assessment teams must be encouraged to collect it. There is a need for training in participatory techniques for WFP its and partners. WFP field staff and Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development personnel were trained in participatory methods in April 2003 and August 2002 by *Groupe URD*. Participants highlighted constraints in applying these techniques, however – the fact that most field work is done by CPs, not WFP staff, and the use of standard reporting formats and project designs that limit the possibility of integrating communities' inputs – and stressed the need for more participatory techniques in WFP's internal management to enable more bottom-up approaches. A potential problem is the risk of tension between bottom-up and participatory approaches and the implementation of corporate approaches based on common objectives, indicators and intervention types.

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[17] Dufour, 2005.

RECOMMENDATIONS

80. Asking how needs assessment can inform food and non-food responses more effectively reflects a will to move away from supply-driven approaches, which tend to limit the relevance of responses, by considering a wider range of interventions. The analysis of projects in the Main Findings section demonstrates that WFP can improve the relevance of its interventions.

81. Although the method of assessment is a factor in the quality of emergency responses, the review findings show that other factors are also significant, as illustrated in Figure 1, and need to be taken into account when considering how assessments can be improved.

Figure 1: Factors affecting the quality of emergency responses, including assessments

Recommendations for Emergency Needs Assessment in Afghanistan

Consolidating background food-security information at the district level

82. One of the main references for WFP assessment teams and other agencies is NRVA data, which provide national estimates for key indicators but no district-level information on how the indicators show patterns of vulnerability.

83. Existing information collected over the years, including NRVA results, could be collated into "district profiles" describing agro-ecological systems, livelihood strategies, market access, availability of education and health services, typical shocks and seasonal food patterns, and including maps and seasonal calendars. Such background information could
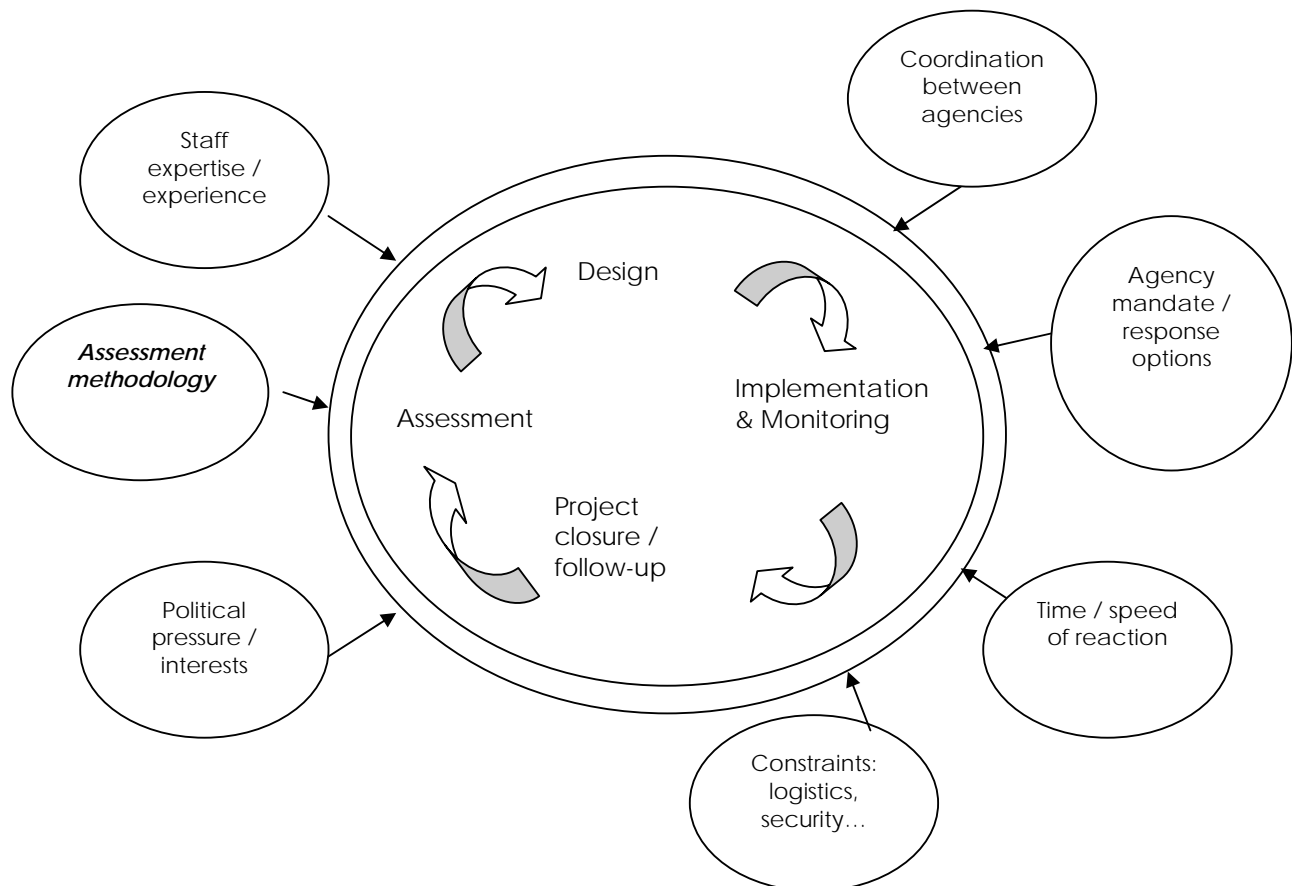
enhance the capacity of emergency assessment teams to interpret data in terms of the wider context, would support programming decisions and could highlight opportunities for locally developed responses.

Developing Early-Warning Capacity

84. By the time EFSAs have been carried out, an emergency has usually developed, which means that agencies have to react to events rather than anticipate them and develop flexible intervention strategies. Afghanistan suffers regular shocks, which apart from war and earthquakes are slow-onset and predictable; extreme weather events are likely continue, which emphasizes the need for an effective early-warning system. Efforts are ongoing to develop such as system in Afghanistan to complement NRVA.

85. NRVA provides extensive data on livelihood strategies and vulnerability indicators, although the planned annual assessments proved too costly and labour-consuming. In any case, experience in the 2003 and 2005 NRVAs showed that variables do not change rapidly over time. An update may be necessary in case of shock, however, as in 2004 when a reported drought led to do rapid updates in the provinces affected that were instrumental in mobilizing resources for the response.

86. Given Afghanistan's vulnerability to climatic shocks, agro-meteorological data will be fundamental in an Afghan early-warning system. Links will need to be strengthened between data-collecting units in the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry, which is supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the VAU in the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, which is supported by WFP VAM. NRVA data on shocks could be used to identify indicators that could enhance food-security assessments. These measures could enable more effective targeting in the early stages of a disaster.

Strengthening coordination for disaster management at the national level

87. Coordination among agencies is constrained by issues such as time, lack of communication and the number of stakeholders – for example UNAMA, WFP, UNICEF, the United Nations Development Project (UNDP), United Nations Operations (UNOPS), the International Office of Migration (IOM), the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) and Coalition Forces – and by confusion as to which ministry should act as focal point for disasters: for example, the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development was the focal point for floods in 2004 but not in 2005 (UNAMA report, 2005). The situation is made more difficult because institutional organization varies from one province to another.

88. Improving coordination at the government level and defining effective mechanisms for collaboration among government institutions and international agencies should clearly be a priority. How this should be done is outside the scope of this report, but it is addressed in the proceedings of a "2005 Flood Disaster Response: Lessons Learnt" workshop held by UNAMA in June 2005.

Pursuing efforts for capacity-building in rapid assessments

89. Capacity-building is central to WFP's activities in Afghanistan. An impressive example is NRVA, in which hundreds of Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development staff – men and women – were trained to collect food-security data. These efforts must be

continued; in particular, provincial and district teams could be trained in rapid-assessment methods in emergencies.

Preparing quick guidance sheets for Emergency Assessments in Afghanistan

90. When preparing emergency assessments, the head of the Kabul area office found that no guidelines existed for rapid assessments; the May 2005 *EFSA Handbook*, for example, did not provide simple, rapid guidance. Flood assessment questionnaires obtained from the Lao People's Democratic Republic had to be adapted, with the help of the VAM section.

91. Quick-guidance sheets for rapid assessments could be developed on the basis of existing data-collection and analysis materials such as NRVA modules or the 2004 update methodology. Guidance sheets could be put together for the various recurrent disasters in Afghanistan and become common tools for staff from different agencies and ministries, which would encourage a holistic view of needs and enhance coordination.

Recommendations for EFSA methodology

Recommendations for the content of EFSA

Understanding food needs: identifying bottlenecks and constraints

92. One of the most important elements in the review is the need for assessment teams to understand the process whereby households meet their nutritional requirements. The steps in the process are outlined in the *EFSA Handbook*, chapter 3:

- food availability – "the amount of food that is physically present in a country or area through all forms of domestic production, commercial imports and food aid";
- food access – "a household's ability to regularly acquire adequate amounts of food through a combination of their own stock and home production, purchases, barter, gifts, borrowing or food aid"; and
- food utilization – (i) households' use of the food to which they have access and (ii) individuals' ability to absorb nutrients, or the conversion efficiency of food by the body".

93. It is proposed that the last step be divided into two separate steps: (i) food consumption and (ii) food utilization, which can affect individuals' nutritional status in different ways (see Box 3). Analysis of people's nutrition-related needs according to this framework can indicate a more diverse range of interventions than food responses.

> **Box 3**: **Understanding nutritional needs in Kapisa province**
>
> 180 families evacuated as a result of flooding were staying near the bazaar in tents provided by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development and IOM. Their food-related needs are analysed below, using the EFSA analysis framework.
>
> **Food availability** in the area was not a problem: it was harvest time, markets were well supplied and the village was not far from roads. Bringing in food from external sources was not a priority need.
>
> **Food access**. Displaced families were buying wheat from the bazaar with money they had saved from the floods. They may have been receiving assistance from relatives or obtaining cash through daily labour. It is likely that extra income such as cash or vouchers to buy bread could help families to overcome the shock, particularly as related to the loss of their harvest.
>
> **Food consumption**. The families had left with very few belongings and were cooking communally. If they had received wheat, it is unclear how they would have milled it; it is possible that there were mills

nearby, but this was not explored by the assessment mission. It is thus unclear how the families would have used the food: they might have sold it to buy bread or easily prepared foods.

Food utilization. Lack of drinking water combined with heat caused dehydration and diarrhoea in several individuals, particularly children. Factors such as these minimize proper utilization of food by the body. Improving households' sanitary conditions was therefore essential to secure their nutrition situation. This was noticed by WFP assessment teams but addressed by other agencies such as UNICEF.

Placing food needs in the wider context of livelihoods

94. It follows that it is important to place nutrition-related needs in the context of people's livelihoods (see *EFSA Handbook*, chapter 3). Knowing peoples' other sources of income is essential to understanding food access. Local customs and beliefs will determine how people use and share food. Sanitation and access to health services will have an impact on food utilization.

95. Simple tools that can help to place food needs in the wider context are maps and seasonal calendars, preferably made with the help of focus groups, that provide a visual reference for a range of livelihood issues.

From needs assessment to "diagnosis"

96. There is a tendency for emergency assessments to focus on needs only. But needs are the result of the difference between the negative impacts of a crisis and local coping strategies, which are rarely taken into consideration; indeed, agencies often work as if they were operating in a vacuum.[18] The situation is compounded by the fact that affected households know what to ask for when an assessment team arrives, given their experience of the aid system; no households say they do not need food. This highlights the importance of triangulating information, which can be done, for example, by interviewing people who are affected and also people who are unaffected, whose views may provide interesting perspectives on the situation.

97. Designing a good response requires understanding of issues other than needs, as illustrated above, which means that diagnosis should also entail:

- a context analysis – for example, type of crisis, pre-crisis situation and political situation;
- a capacity appraisal covering local capacity and existing responses, including a stakeholder analysis; and
- a constraints and risks analysis, identifying constraints that could affect potential responses.

98. An example of questions for a holistic diagnosis including needs assessments and the issues listed above is provided in Annex 5; these are the questions from the Quality COMPAS assessment phase. Each question is related to one of the quality criteria used to define the quality of assistance (see Box 1).

Recommendations for the EFSA process

Having the right human resources

99. The quality of assessment is largely determined by the experience and skills of the assessors. Programme assistants, who have the most experience of programmes, are likely to identify information that is important for operations, such as partners, constraints and

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[18] Neun and Fitzherbert (2003) suggest that remittances and other local coping strategies have tended to be underestimated in food-security assessments, even though they were essential to people's resilience during the drought in Afghanistan.

types of intervention. VAM staff are trained to look at vulnerability in a wider context, particularly after training on NRVA, which includes a wider range of factors than the previous VAM methodology. Combining different types of expertise can strengthen the assessment team. It is also essential to strengthen the understanding of livelihoods among all programme staff, including FAMs, given that they are all likely to participate in assessments, and among CPs and government personnel.

Aiming for joint assessments

100. It will take time to expand understanding of vulnerability among WFP staff and increase their awareness of other types of response. As far as possible, joint assessments with agencies covering different fields of expertise are recommended. Ensuring that they are done may require clarification mechanisms for coordination at top management levels and integration of the mechanisms into each agency's disaster-response process, which would require information to be shared with all staff, notably at the area-office level, so that each person knows who they will work with and how. Collaboration with other agencies in disaster assessments could be included in staff TORs so that it is not left to individual initiative.

The importance of a preliminary phase

101. It is often not made clear that assessments are preceded by a preliminary phase in which the decision is made whether to send an assessment team; this phase is often overlooked because the decision is taken rapidly. But careful consideration before making the decision could help to prevent or manage some of the difficulties described in the Main Findings section. For example:

- Reducing pressures to provide assistance when it is not warranted. Once in the field, the drive to respond is strong, even if the most appropriate aid cannot be provided, for reasons that may be ethical, personal or political. There is potential for secondary information to be used in greater depth to assess in advance whether food aid is likely to be needed without sending a team to the field.
- Optimizing synergies with other agencies. Many ad-hoc assessment missions were carried out by different agencies, sometimes on successive days. Taking more time to plan joint assessments would save resources and maximize the depth of assessment; it could delay an assessment mission by a day, but in most cases assessment teams arrived in the field several days after the acute phase of the disaster.

The importance of briefing and debriefing

102. Assessment teams often learn more in the field than they report, and may not be aware of the significance of some of the elements they observe. These facts emphasize (i) the need for experienced staff to brief assessment teams before they go to the field and to debrief them when they return to compensate for lack of expertise and (ii) the need to share information. Brainstorming as a group can generate many ideas; participants in the Quality COMPAS training recommended that this technique be used for assessment and monitoring visits. Staff should be trained in facilitation skills as well as livelihood methods to maximize the effectiveness of debriefings. Records should be kept of such debriefings; the content of the discussions could be integrated into assessment reports.

Recommendations for EFSA guidance; the *EFSA Handbook*

Keeping it simple

103. The *EFSA Handbook*, which is the outcome of a huge consultation exercise involving experts from the field on food security in crisis situations, may be seen as the "state of the

art" in food-security assessments. But the challenge is to make it accessible to field staff: for example, it contains so much information and so many graphs and frameworks that it is difficult to know where to start.

104. Making guidance accessible to field staff requires an awareness of the situation in the field: the Afghanistan review shows that in many cases the starting point is a very basic understanding of what food needs entail. Simpler guidance material is recommended, or guidance adapted to different readers that could accompany users and trainees through an incremental learning process.

105. Needs assessment needs to be de-mystfied. Staff can learn a great deal through observation in the field; guidance that is too elaborate can be intimidating and suggest that assessments should only be done by experts.

106. A balance has to be struck between providing enough information to enable teams to improve their needs assessment and maintaining simplicity. Guidance should not overwhelm common sense and should make the most of people's knowledge of the local context.

The need for quick reference
107. Simple two-page guidance sheets could be provided for teams to refer to in emergency assessments; they should be worded so as to invite teams to make flexible use of them and to be aware of the range of needs rather than focus on specific questions that may lead them to overlook essential information. The guidance could be an annex to the *EFSA Handbook*, with references to specific chapters for further guidance.

Recommendations for the Project Cycle as a whole
108. It is essential to ensure that assessments feed into the response design. Assessment information tends to be under-used or not used at all in designing responses, especially when they are largely determined by agency supplies and standard operating procedures. Rectifying this entails exploring a wider range of response options; the links between assessment, design and implementation can be strengthened by providing teams with a common analytical framework.[19]

109. At the technical level, this common framework can be the "food availability, access, consumption and utilization" model or the livelihoods approach. All programme staff should be familiar with these concepts.

110. In terms of project-cycle management, group work during training on quality assurance showed that using a comprehensive set of quality criteria to guide action throughout the project cycle can strengthen coherence – which is what Quality COMPAS sets out to do by repeatedly addressing issues related to each quality criterion throughout the project cycle. Teams at the Kabul area office were interested in this approach and shared it with colleagues and partners.[20]

Recommendations at the institutional level

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[19] Dufour, 2005.
[20] The most appropriate strategy for further training and dissemination of the method is currently being explored.

Clarifying WFP's role in needs assessment with regard to other stakeholders

111. The review showed how WFP assessments interact with other assessment initiatives and emphasized the value of joint assessments. In many situations, needs assessment are carried out by CPs and WFP assessments consist largely in assessing project proposals in terms of feasibility and conformity with PRRO objectives.

112. In Afghanistan, WFP teams' direct responsibility for EFSAs will be increasingly limited as the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development and other government institutions build their capacity. WFP teams may be responsible for small ad hoc assessments or verification missions, but these are likely to be a minority.

113. Strengthening emergency needs assessment capacity in WFP will therefore require specification of whose capacity needs to be strengthened in and outside WFP and the process by which strengthening will be achieved.

Training needs

114. Training in assessment methodologies will be important, but adequate training in food security and livelihoods appears to be a prerequisite. Deciding who should be trained will depend on the approach to the point raised in the previous paragraph. Training in participatory methods should also be provided to support community involvement from the first stages of a response and to enhance the quality of information collected.

Making room for bottom-up approaches

115. The question of non-food responses is related to the issue of adapting responses to local circumstances, which highlights the importance of participatory methods in rapid assessment. But the inherent tension between bottom-up approaches and standard corporate procedures, implementation methods and monitoring tools is echoed by WFP staff in the field. If WFP is committed to adapting responses to local circumstances and participatory approaches, corporate procedures should be developed to allow for locally defined approaches.

Clarifying WFP's position on non-food responses

116. The review showed the difficulty of exploring different response options when WFP can only provide a certain type of response. Expectations are easily raised in the field, and there is a risk of being perceived to make commitments that other agencies would have to fulfil.

117. To increase the range of response strategies, action is needed in two areas: (i) development of holistic assessment methodologies; and (ii) development of a diverse range of response options. Broadening the range of response options involves strengthening coordination among agencies and exploring other response options that WFP may be in a position to deliver, such as cash-based assistance or food vouchers. These issues are sensitive, because some institutional and organizational barriers need to be overcome and the responsibility of different actors will change (Harvey, 2003).

118. WFP must clarify its intentions with regard to non-food responses: will it engage in responses than do not involve food aid, or will it leave these in the hands of sister agencies? The decision will determine the extent to which WFP assessment teams should explore non-food responses and whether emphasis should be placed instead on inter-

agency collaboration, which will in turn affect the type of guidance provided for WFP assessment teams. If clear policy decisions are not taken regarding responses, any progress made in assessment is likely to have little impact on humanitarian responses.

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ANNEX I: ITINERARY AND PEOPLE MET

Date	Place	Activity	People met
Sunday 26 June	Kabul	Arrival in Kabul	
Monday 27	Kabul	Preparation of mission in Mazar-e Sharif and Faizabad Preparation of flood assessment mission to Kapisa	Sungval Tunsiri, acting Head, Mazar-e Sharif, Els Kocken, Sayed Abdullah
Tuesday 28	Kapisa province	Participation in floods assessment in Pul-e Saadi	Zubaida, Fawad DRRD for Kapisa Group discussion with evacuated women
Wednesday 29	Kabul	Meeting with Scott Ronchini, VAM coordinator Document review	
Sunday 3 July	Mazar-e Sharif	Flight to Mazar-e Sharif Meeting with management team Meeting with programme team for presentation of the mission purpose	Sungval, Emma, Erik All programme staff
Monday 4	Mazar-e Sharif	Site visit to FFW flood mitigation project (FSRO) Meetings with FSRO and ASD	Gorbandi (WFP) FFW beneficiaries, villagers Engineer Kayoum ASD, Head of FSRO
Tuesday 5	Shortepa district	Site visit to flood affected villages in Shortepa district, Jawzjan province Visit to flood mitigation projects (ASD)	Eng. Kayoum, Villagers Governor of Shortepa UNAMA assessment team
Wednesday 6	Mazar-e Sharif	Meetings with: - Department of Rural Rehabilitation and Development - Action Aid - IOM - Emma Togba, Head of Programme - Giti (FFE) - P. Sparrow (UNAMA) and R. Graves (CAFÉ) Document review	Two members of disaster assessment team Hamid, team leader Martin, Head of IOM Mazar-e Sharif
Thursday 7	Mazar-e Sharif	Debriefing with Sungval, Erik and Emma Flight to Kabul	
Saturday 9	Kabul	Document review	
Sunday 10	Faizabad	Flight to Faizabad Participation in staff meeting Meeting with Abdul Ahmad (VAM) Discussion with Khalida	

Monday 11	Argu district	Visit to School built through FFW with FFE and nursery project	Simona, Manijeh
Tuesday 12	Argu district	Visit to Dehan Dara bridge and road construction through FFW, and flood-affected areas	
Wednesday 13	Baharak	Trip to Baharak with Afghanaid (previous WFP country programme) and flood-affected area	Head of Afghanaid Baharak office. Students doing in-depth assessment of livelihoods in Baharak
Thursday 14	Baharak	Visit to homes, interviews with women	
Saturday 16	Kabul	Flight back to Kabul	
Sunday 17– Thursday 21	Kabul	Preparation and delivery of three-day training for country office and Kabul area office on quality assurance using Quality COMPAS	
Thursday 28	Kabul	Debriefing on quality-assurance training and real-time review on needs assessment	Daniel Molla, Seikouba Ahmed, Zakaria, Latif, Safi, Paula, Véronique de Geoffroy, Hugues Maury.

ANNEX II: PROGRAMMES VISITED

Name of programme	Collaborating partner	Location	Number of beneficiaries	mt distributed	Duration
Kabul area office					
Emergency food distribution	MRRD	Kapisa			
Emergency food distribution		Parwan			
Mazar-e Sharif Area Office					
Rehabilitation of flood passage (FFW) Contribution of a retaining wall	FSRO	Nahr-i-Shahi district	1,860 families	600	Three months, April–June 2005
Construction of retaining wall from sandbags (FFW)	ASD	Shortepa district	2,781 families	448.44	Three months, April–June 2005
Emergency food distribution	ARCS	Shortepa district	590 families	32.93	June–July 2005
Faizabad Area Office					
Emergency food distribution		Baharak district			
Building of Dehan Dara road,	BANA	Dehan Dara, Argu district			March –Aug 2005
Food-for-training project for women Badakshan Environmental Education Centre School	Department of Women's Affairs	Faizabad city			

ANNEX III: LIST OF REVIEWED DOCUMENTS

Assessment reports
- WFP/MRRD Joint Flood Emergency Assessment in Kabul, Logar and Wardak Provinces, 26 May 2005 to 8 June 2005.
- Resource requirements/intervention approach/next steps for the last flood response. Based on the joint MRRD-WFP assessment, 26 May to 8 June 2005.
- Mission Report Flood Response, 26–27 June 2005. Parwan district.
- Mission Report to Shiber District, Bamyan province, 19–20 June 2005.
- Report on Flood-Affected Areas in Faizabad, Badakshan province.
- Report on Flood-Affected Villages in Shohada and Jurm districts, Badakshan province, 18 July 2004.
- Flood affection report in Farkhar and Worsaj district, Takhar province, 25–28 June.
- Emergency Assessment Report of Effects affection of Heavy Snowfall in Sanglich and neighbouring villages in Zebak district, October 13
- Report on Flood- and Landslide-Affected Villages – Vornail and Dara e Rast – in Baharak and Faizabad districts, 1–3 August 2004.

Project proposals and reviews
- FSRO proposal for digging and cleaning of Ali Chupan Drain.
- Project assessment report, 27 March 2005: FFW – cleaning of flood passage – IP: FSRO.
- Summary sheet: Food aid project proposal for the use of WFP area offices, Mazar-e Sharif; project: FFW cleaning of flood passage.
- Minutes of project review meeting, 2 April 2005, WFP Mazar-e Sharif area office.
- Minutes of 11th meeting of the Mazar-e Sharif area office project-approval committee (PAC).
- Minutes of 15th meeting of the Mazar-e Sharif area office (PAC), 1 May 2005.
- Project summary sheet: Emergency Response to Flood-Affected families in Maimana.
- Proposal for FFW in Shortapa district by ASD.
- Project proposal desk review: IP – ASD/FFW; project: excavation of canal, removing soil from both sides of canal and making wall from sandbags.

Monitoring reports
- Project monitoring report: FFW implemented by FSRO in Nahri Shahi district of Balkh Province, 27 April 2005.
- Cooperating Partners' Monthly Report: FSRO for Ali Chupan floodway reconstruction.
- Project monitoring report, Shortepa district, Balkh province: FFW and FRV implemented by ASD, 22–23 May 2005.

Other documents
- PRRO/2005 Narrative Report for Kabul area office, excluding BSO.
- Mazar-e Sharif area office: Workplan, 2005.

ANNEX IV: Brief Presentation of Quality COMPAS

For some time now, humanitarian actors have shared the belief that improving humanitarian practice is both a necessity and an obligation. Given the complexity of crises and the contexts in which humanitarian assistance is provided, developing a dedicated project-management method is essential.

Objectives of Quality COMPAS

Quality COMPAS is a quality method for (i) piloting projects on the basis of quality-assurance principals and evaluation and (ii) improving the quality of services provided through team learning and improved practices.

A Quality-Reference System for Project Piloting and Evaluation: the Compass Rose

Quality COMPAS is built round a single quality-reference system composed of 12 criteria that define the quality of a humanitarian project. Affected populations and their environment are at the heart of the system.
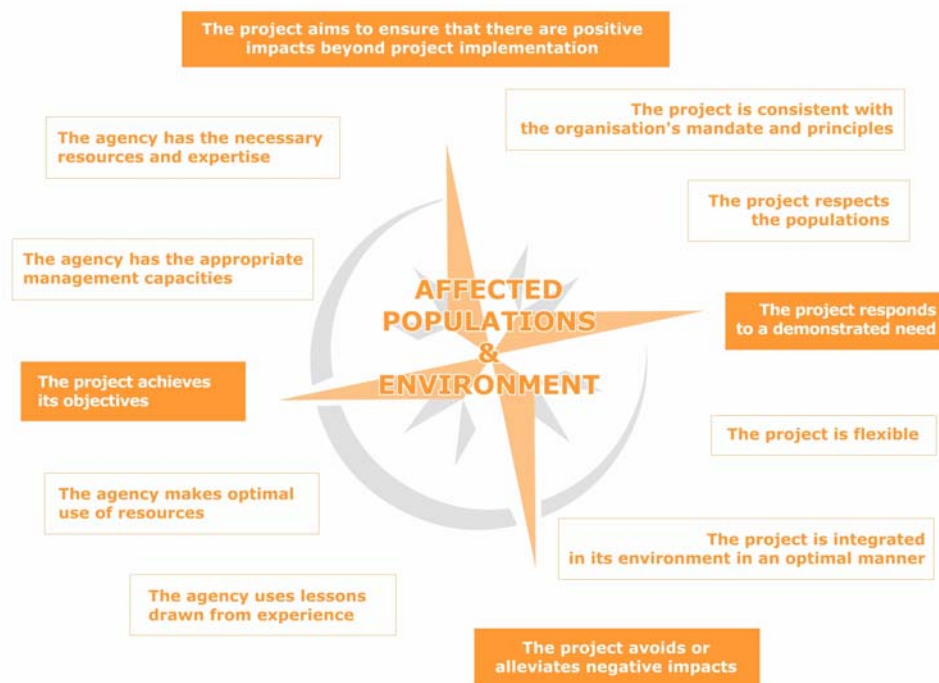
Project Management

For the purpose of piloting humanitarian assistance and quality assurance, 12 quality criteria are broken down into questions to be asked at each critical point in the project cycle to focus the attention of the humanitarian the actor. A checklist of these questions is supplied for each phase in the project cycle. Advice sheets presenting lessons learned and advice, and toolboxes are provided to help the actor find answers in terms of context, population, organization and type of project. Mechanisms for documenting important decisions are proposed to consolidate the piloting process, create a project memory and facilitate teamwork.

Evaluation

For the evaluation of humanitarian assistance and its quality, the 12 quality criteria are broken down into evaluation questions and indicators. The purposes of project evaluation are to (i) take stock of the situation, gauge progress in relation to objectives and quality criteria,

(ii) draw lessons from experience and (iii) provide accountability for affected populations and donors. An evaluation guide is provided to enable actors to carry out real-time evaluations, evaluations at project completion and impact assessments. The evaluation guide describes the tools and methods to be used.

Quality COMPAS Support Material
- The Quality COMPAS CD-ROM and user manual, which is regularly updated.
- A website that can be modified to build on aid workers' experience and update Quality COMPAS.
- Training for field workers, programme and project managers and internal and external evaluators.

Development Process of Quality COMPAS
Quality COMPAS is the result operational research from 1999 to 2003 led by *Groupe URD* and supported by its NGO partners. The project focused on: (i) an overview of quality-management processes in humanitarian organizations: (ii) a review of quality-management approaches in other sectors such as the International Standards Organizations (ISO) and hospital accreditation; and (iii) analysis of programme quality in the field, focusing on different types of emergency situation in Afghanistan, Central America and the Gulf of Guinea, different stakeholders such as affected populations, local and international NGOs, other humanitarian organizations and donors, and food and economic security, health care, nutrition, living conditions and protection.

Quality COMPAS was developed in three stages: (i) identification of critical points in the project cycle; (ii) creation of the quality-reference system using data collected in the field; and (iii) design of the piloting and evaluation method using a questioning process, the quality-assurance approach and the principle of continuous quality improvement.

Annex V: Quality COMPAS questions for the assessment phase

DIAGNOSIS

During the diagnosis phase, agencies collect all the necessary information for a) deciding whether to design a project, or not, and b) designing it.

The diagnosis phase is the second phase in the project cycle. It involves carrying out research and analysing the results. This enables agencies to make well-grounded decisions regarding potential interventions and ensure that project design meets the relevant quality criteria.

Steps and corresponding key questions

(Diagnosis)

Preparing the diagnosis phase

Mobilising resources for the diagnosis phase:
- (01-I1) What financial and logistical resources are necessary and available for diagnosis?
- (02-I3) How much time do you estimate is needed for a 'quality' diagnosis?

Defining the methods to be used during the diagnosis phase:
- (03-H2) How can you exchange information with other humanitarian agencies in order to avoid doubling up on data collecting exercises?
- (04-L3) What lessons can you learn from previous, or present, experience of providing aid in this context?
- (05-J3) What information is essential and relevant to carry out a rapid and accurate analysis of the context, the crisis and its impact? (i.e. quality, quantity, data collection and processing techniques, concept of optimal ignorance)
- (06-F2) How are people's opinions, suggestions and concerns taken into account during the diagnosis?
- (07-F4) How do you ensure that the diagnosis does not raise false expectations?

Composing the team that will carry out the diagnosis:
- (08-I2) What skills should the team carrying out the diagnosis have to enable them to fully understand the situation and people's needs?
- (09-J2) If you are carrying out an exploratory mission in an area where your agency already has operations underway, how do you deal with the possibility of conflicting interests? (i.e. expertise, communication, motivation, different working methods, etc.)
- (10-E1) What action can you take to ensure that your agency's mandate and principles are clearly defined and have been fully understood by the team carrying out the diagnosis?
- (11-F1) How do you to ensure that the team carrying out the diagnosis has a thorough understanding of the key cultural and historical aspects, prior to initial contact with the population?

Steps and corresponding key questions

(Diagnosis)

Context and population analysis, needs assessment

Crisis analysis:
- (12-D2) What type of crisis is it (sudden-onset, protracted, recurring, predictable, etc.)? What coping strategies have people developed and would supporting these coping strategies have a positive impact?
- (13-D4) Is the crisis situation one of recurring natural disaster or protracted political instability? Is the level of vulnerability likely to get worse or persist?
- (14-G1) What are your hypotheses for the way the crisis may develop?

Context analysis:
- (15-C3) Do you have sufficient knowledge about the social and political context to ensure that your intervention does not have negative impacts?
- (16-C2) Do you have sufficient knowledge about the local economy and livelihoods to ensure that your intervention does not have negative impacts?
- (17-F3) Have you identified the cultural, social and religious characteristics that must be taken into account if the project is to respect the population?
- (18-C1) Do you have sufficient knowledge about the local environment to ensure that your intervention does not have negative impacts?

Needs assessment:
- (19-A1) Which needs are not yet being met? Have you distinguished between 'real' needs and 'expressed' needs?
- (20-A2) Are people's needs directly linked to the crisis? What problems have caused these needs to emerge?

Risks and constraints analysis

- (21-B2) Has a thorough situation analysis been carried out in order to identify the constraints that may affect your intervention?
- (22-J4) How do you correctly identify the management requirements that you will need to fulfil in order to comply with the legal and tax obligations specific to the context?
- (23-J6) Have you assessed the security situation that your team will have to face?
- (24-J5) What risks (security and operational) could affect the equipment that has been mobilised for your project?
- (25-C4) Do you have sufficient knowledge about the security situation to ensure that your intervention does not place people at risk?

Steps and corresponding key questions
(Diagnosis)

Stakeholders analysis

- (26-E2) What other actors are present and what political and legal responsibilities do they have? Can you identify any needs that have been generated as a result of the violation of fundamental rights? What are the most important legal texts relating to these rights?
- (27-H1) Who are the various actors that are present? What activities are they carrying out? What position have they taken on this crisis?
- (28-E3) Do people's needs correspond to your agency's mandate? What are they? Are other agencies better placed to respond to a specific need? What is your agency's position on this crisis?
- (29-E4) Which actors are likely to try to manipulate or exert pressure on your intervention? Should certain partnerships (e.g. for funding) be avoided?
- (30-H3) Who could you set up a partnership, or some other type of alliance, with?
- (31-H2) How are relief efforts coordinated in the current context?

Analysing available resources

- (32-I1) Which resources - local and/or international - could be mobilised for a potential project?
- (33-D5) How can you support, use or strengthen local capacities, techniques and/or resources in order to ensure that your project is sustainable and/or to strengthen its impact?

Finalisation and record keeping

- (34-J1) How do you make the decision to go ahead and design a project? Who makes this decision or participates in the decision-making process?
- (35-L1) What records do you keep from your initial diagnosis? What records do you keep about your decision to implement a project or not?

ACRONYMS USED IN THE DOCUMENT

ARCS	Afghan Red Crescent Society
ASD	Association for Social Development
CFW	cash for work
CP	collaborating partner
EFSA	emergency food security assessment
EMOP	emergency operation
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FAM	food aid monitor
FFE	food for education
FFT	food for training
FFW	food for work
GAIN	Greening Afghanistan Initiative
Groupe URD	*Groupe Urgence, Réhabilitation Développement*
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Office of Migration
ISAF	International Security Assistance Forces
ISO	International Standards Organization
LRRD	Linking Relief Rehabilitation and Development
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
NGO	non-governmental organization
NRVA	National Rural Vulnerability Assessment
PAC	project approval committee
PRRO	protracted relief and recovery operation
PRT	provincial reconstruction team
Quality COMPAS	Quality Criteria and Tools for the Management and Piloting of Humanitarian Assistance
RBM	results-based management
SENAC	Strengthening Emergency Needs Assessment Capacity
TOR	terms of reference
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Project
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOPS	United Nations Operations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAM	vulnerability assessment and mapping
VAU	Vulnerability Assessment Unit