



...: **emergency** needs assessment branch

Synthesis of real-time reviews of selected food aid programmes in Afghanistan, Colombia and Laos

Groupe URD

**Strengthening Emergency Needs
Assessment Capacity (SENAC)**

March 2006

Synthesis of real-time reviews of selected food aid programmes in Afghanistan, Colombia and Laos

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March 2006

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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.

United Nations World Food Programme

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This document was produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union.

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Foreword

Throughout this review, it has been necessary to distinguish between needs assessment processes conducted at ‘programme level’ and at ‘project level’. In the case of WFP operations, the authors use the term ‘programme’ to refer to the Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (PRRO). Needs assessments at this level are conducted to inform country-level strategy and hence PRRO design. In turn, each PRRO is typically comprised of numerous ‘projects’ (or schemes), and at this level needs assessments are more localized (e.g. village or district).

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Executive Summary

I Introduction

The overall objective of the synthesis report is to derive lessons from three real-time field reviews that were conducted by Groupe URD in Afghanistan, Colombia and Lao PDR, and to make recommendations for WFP regarding the conduct of EFSA's and the linkages between assessments and decision-making on programmes and projects.

Groupe URD conducted field missions in Afghanistan (July 2005), Colombia (November 2005) and Lao PDR (February 2006). WFP HQ's comments on a draft report were integrated before submitting the final document.

The research team encountered a certain number of constraints during this study, in particular during the field missions, and this inevitably had an impact on the wealth of information collected. The three case studies are so distinct that it is extremely difficult to draw overall conclusions about the linkages between assessments and WFP operations.

II Summary of WFP operations

Country	Context	WFP operations	
		Total number of beneficiaries	Name of operations
Afghanistan	Country undergoing reconstruction following 20-year war	9,243,000	PRRO - AFGHANISTAN 10233.0 Food Assistance to Re-establish Livelihoods and Households Food Security in Afghanistan (1 April 2003/31 March 2005)
Colombia	Highly volatile, unpredictable and widespread conflict. Widespread internal displacement	998,000	PRRO - COLOMBIA 10366.0 Assistance to Persons Displaced by the Violence in Colombia (1 April 2005/31 March 2007)
Laos	One of the poorest countries worldwide (GDP of US\$320). Chronic food insecurity	217,000	PRRO - LAO PDR 10319.0 Recovery Assistance to the Disaster Prone and Vulnerable Food Insecure Communities in the Lao PDR (1 April 2004/31 March 2006)

III Main findings

What is an EFSA?

An emergency food security assessment (EFSA) can take many forms and may be triggered by a number of different factors. In some cases, an EFSA takes the form of an in-depth assessment and is proactive, forming part of a long-term strategy or a continuous monitoring-and-evaluation process carried out for ongoing programmes. In other cases, the needs

assessment may be more reactive, for example, an initial investigation or rapid assessment may be launched following the onset of a new crisis or emergency.

When is an EFSA carried out?

Initial investigations and rapid assessments in response to sudden-onset emergencies are generally conducted in a timely manner and facilitate decision-making so that the relief response is mobilized in time. However, two of the three case studies illustrate that the timeliness of in-depth assessments often does not meet requirements.

Who conducts the EFSA?

Coordination efforts with national governments have proved successful and WFP should continue to promote this close collaboration, as it is fundamental for building local capacity and developing a long-term outlook in contexts of protracted crisis. Taking into account the various constraints, it is essential that opportunities for conducting joint needs assessments be explored further if WFP is to broaden its operational approach and continue to develop a more comprehensive analysis of food security issues.

The case studies illustrate the importance of ensuring that teams participating in the information collecting process (IPs, government and WFP staff) have the necessary expertise, because the quality of information collected depends on reliable survey and consultation methods, and the quality of interaction with the community.

Considering the strong motivation shown by WFP teams to improve their understanding of the concepts required for conducting needs assessments, it is regrettable that capacity-building exercises are limited and that there is a tendency to outsource this type of expertise.

What is an EFSA used for?

The three case studies reveal that conducting a needs assessment prior to designing a PRRO is not yet institutionalized, even though it is essential. Although data is successfully disaggregated during the needs assessment to reflect the diversity of social and economic factors, the same degree of detail is rarely preserved in the design of the PRRO programme, which is de-motivating for needs assessment teams.

How is an EFSA carried out?

At project level, in-country tools and methods could be improved in order to ensure a wider geographical coverage and a more subtle micro-level analysis.

The tools that are available for monitoring vulnerability are comparatively more relevant (SIMVA, NRVA and District Vulnerability Update), however they are not always used or they are used inappropriately (especially at household level).

The Colombia case study presents an example of a highly effective methodology comprised of a range of tools for collecting a good balance of qualitative and quantitative information, although the lapse of time between the start of the data collection process and the implementation of project activities needs to be addressed. There were no indications that the data collection methodology was as advanced in Laos and Afghanistan.

Procedures for analysing data and subsequent decision-making vary widely from one case study to another but are often based on informal initiatives (apart from Colombia where sharing the results of the data collection is an essential part of the process).

IV Recommendations

Improving the emergency needs assessment process

<p>Clarifying EFSA terminology</p>	<p>Review EFSA terminology to ensure that objectives and consequently needs assessment methodologies are coherent within the scope of the assessment in terms of time and geographical focus.</p> <p>Ensure that needs assessment methodology adopts this revised terminology so that field staff know which circumstances should trigger an EFSA and how it should be conducted. Comprehensive analyses and re-assessments should follow the same rules.</p> <p>Ensure that these distinctions are clearly defined in the revised version of the EFSA Handbook and in all guidance provided to WFP staff and partners.</p>
<p>Clarifying EFSA procedures at project level</p>	<p>Ensure that the distinction between food security assessments (which should inform targeting decisions), and feasibility studies is clearly defined both in the revised version of the EFSA Handbook and in the guidance provided to WFP staff and partners.</p> <p>Ensure that sufficient guidance is provided to WFP staff and partners on the objectives and methods for conducting food security assessments and feasibility studies in order to limit confusion.</p>
<p>Timeliness of the EFSA</p>	<p>Clarify the different circumstances that should trigger a needs assessment and determine assessment modalities and timescale.</p>
<p>Triggering a needs assessment</p>	<p>Ensure that the following four parameters which are key to the success of the operation are developed either in-country or supplied by other WFP offices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a situation analysis; • a proper hazard, risk, vulnerability and capacity analysis; • a pre-established list of key criteria, indicators and cut-off points; • the necessary human and practical resources to undertake these tasks in a timely manner.
<p>Who conducts the EFSA?</p>	<p>Ensure that needs assessment teams are well balanced, in terms of managerial and technical staff, gender, external experts and internal WFP staff and partners.</p> <p>Establish a system that enables needs assessments teams operating in different regions or covering different intervention sectors to share their observations and findings (lateral learning).</p> <p>Ensure that a proper After Action Review takes place after each EFSA, so that lessons can be learned at the end of the process (out learning).</p> <p>Develop training modules for WFP staff and partners in order to make food security and needs assessment concepts more operational.</p>

Multidisciplinary assessments and inter-agency coordination	<p>Take full advantage of coordination arrangements that exist for carrying out joint food security assessments (e.g. CFSAM, WFP/ICRC, WFP/UNHCR, and where appropriate local authorities and donors).</p> <p>Promote the implementation of multi-agency assessments and thus develop a wider perspective, moving from food security assessments to needs assessments and diagnosis.</p> <p>Reinforce the involvement of WFP in the initial data collection exercises carried out by local authorities.</p> <p>Provide more training in needs assessment methods to improve the quality of the information that is gathered (in terms of reliability and validity) so as to inform EFSA issues.</p>
The EFSA as a support for programming	<p>Ensure that all the information required for programme design is properly recorded during the EFSA process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • situation analysis • disaster impact • need assessment • constraints analysis • local capacity appraisal <p>Develop tools to guide choices and decision-making at strategic and practical levels during the programme design process.</p>

Improving the emergency needs assessments methodology

Typology (social, ethnic and socio-economic characteristics)	<p>The EFSA method should ensure that regional and local differences are clearly spelled out so that they can be taken into account during design, as well as during implementation in the field. This implies that the following domains be explored as part of the EFSA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • agro-ecological diversity (zoning); • socio-economic heterogeneity (typologies); • ethnic differences (anthropological mapping); and • gender disaggregation (gender sensitivity).
Geographical coverage	<p>It is essential at this stage to reconcile programmatic requirements (generally based on administrative divisions) where different IPs — including the national government — work with the analytical requirements (which may more logically follow other types of geographical division).</p> <p>Ensure that information generated by an EFSA is used in a way that is consistent with the sampling frame.</p>
Accounting for seasonality and chronicity	<p>Ensure that field staff's understanding of the crisis is anchored in time by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) referring to the local agricultural calendar (e.g. When did the crisis occur in relation to the harvest? etc.) 2) studying previous recurring crises (e.g. Has this region been affected by this type of crisis before? If so, how often does it occur? What damage have past crises caused? etc.).

Food Security framework	Ensure that the food security analysis is carried out from a systems analysis standpoint, placing the concept of food security in a broader livelihood context and taking into account the local context and traditions, the type of crisis and other variables rather than looking at the population's needs alone.
Moving from needs assessment to a fuller diagnosis of the situation	<p>Ensure that an assessment comprises of a full diagnosis of the situation (of which needs assessment is one component). The report should therefore be organized in the following manner:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. Situation assessment (including local politics, local socio-economic issues, etc.) II. Damage Assessment III. Needs Assessment IV. Capacities Assessment V. Constraints Assessment VI. Conclusions and perspectives (including risks/exposure to shocks) VII. Programmatic Recommendation
Collecting and analysing data	<p>Ensure that a matrix for analysing data, and questionnaires and forms for collecting data are designed simultaneously (cf. examples in the Colombia Case Study Report).</p> <p>Ensure that the data collected does indeed inform the targeting criteria.</p> <p>Encourage the identification of targeting criteria based on both quantitative and qualitative information.</p> <p>Disseminate and encourage the use of the EFSA Handbook which provides guidance on how to vary data collection methods, including focus groups, key informants and household interviews.</p> <p>Develop the use of participatory approaches (while ensuring that usage is not restricted to 'village assemblies').</p> <p>Ensure that EFSAs collect information according to the specific objective of the assessment and combine different types of information (qualitative, quantitative) so that comprehensive information is collected and triangulation can be carried out.</p> <p>Ensure that the data collected enables the team to analyse the following five aspects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context; • Food security strategies and outcomes; • Damage assessment, while ensuring that damage assessment is not restricted to the food gap alone (i.e. taking into account all types of damage due to the crisis); • Capacities (coping strategies, assets, etc.) and risk factors (exposure to shocks); and • Perspectives (based on the impact of the crisis and vulnerability resulting from the existing capacities and risk exposure).

<p>Improving vulnerability monitoring</p>	<p>Invest in electronic technology that facilitates the transfer of handwritten information (questionnaires completed in the field) to an electronic database (e.g. Digital Writing System that converts handwritten analogue information into digital data).</p> <p>Invest in an IT system that allows each IP to record its own vulnerability monitoring data allowing IPs to transfer their data to WFP in a common format.</p> <p>Reinforce the link between the vulnerability monitoring process and the EFSA in order to better identify vulnerabilities within each region (whereas the role of the EFSA is to provide an overview of the situation).</p> <p>Ensure that regional offices have the necessary resources and expertise for the whole of the data collection process (from preparation, to fieldwork, data processing, analysis and report writing).</p>
<p>Making the EFSA handbook easier to use</p>	<p>Promote the use of the EFSA Handbook by providing training and guidance on in-field application.</p> <p>Design and circulate a light, user-friendly guidance with a summary of the basic fundamental information that staff require in the field.</p> <p>Incorporate the notion of programme (PPRO) and project/scheme (at field level) into the EFSA Handbook.</p> <p>Include an index at the back of the EFSA Handbook for easy reference.</p>
<p>Expertise</p>	<p>Build the capacity of the needs assessment team by increasing training in the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • systems analysis (livelihoods) approach • food security • needs assessment methods and procedures <p>Ensure that staff are capable of building the notions of time and space into their analysis, in particular for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mapping exercises • Collating, analysing and effectively reporting information

1 Introduction

1.1 Terms of Reference

The objective of the synthesis report is to derive lessons from the three real-time field reviews that were conducted by Groupe URD in Afghanistan, Colombia and Lao PDR, and to make recommendations for WFP regarding:

- 1) The conduct of EFSAs: establishing partnership (with government, NGOs and donors), collecting and analysing the data (with communities and partners), and communicating the results to decision-makers both within WFP (e.g. country directors) and outside WFP (e.g. donors, governments);
- 2) The linkages between assessments and decision-making on programmes and projects.

1.2 Methodology

1.2.1 Methods used

Groupe URD conducted field missions in Afghanistan (July 2005), Colombia (November 2005) and Lao PDR (February 2006). In each country, the research team met with key stakeholders and collected information on the EFSA process and methodology. Field visits were also carried out and meetings were held with *ad hoc* groups of beneficiaries.

In February 2006, Groupe URD organized a one-day workshop gathering all team members who had participated in the case studies, with a view to sharing findings and formulating recommendations.

A draft report was subsequently submitted to WFP Headquarters for approval. WFP HQ's comments were integrated in the report before dissemination of the final draft.

1.2.2 Constraints and limitations

The research team encountered a certain number of constraints during this study, in particular during the field missions, and this inevitably had an impact on the wealth of information collected. The objectives of each case study were ambitious given the scope of WFP operations, the time available for the field missions and constraints on movements resulting from poor road infrastructure and restrictive security regulations (especially in Afghanistan and Colombia). The constraints specific to each case study are detailed below.

In Afghanistan, relief represents a small part of WFP assistance. WFP response has evolved from an emergency operation (EMOP) to the current protracted relief and recovery operation (PRRO) 10233. However, 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. The Afghanistan case study therefore focuses on these 'initial' investigations or 'rapid' assessments, rather than an 'in-depth' EFSA¹ which is sometimes used to inform decisions for country-level programming (as in the Colombia case study). Finally, WFP Afghanistan has a policy of providing food only and excluding such programmes as cash-for-work, and it was not possible to review non-food responses as thoroughly as required.

¹ Definitions of these concepts can be found in Section 1.3, Chapter 1, WFP *Emergency Food Security Assessments Handbook*, First Edition

Colombia is characterised by its strong cultural, ethnic and social diversity, as well as by having a wide range of geographical contexts. With over 2,500 projects and 1,700 implementing partners (IPs), the scope of WFP operations is particularly vast. Given the limited time available for the field mission, it was not possible for the research team to cover all the aspects in detail. In addition to the highly complex nature of the crisis (widespread presence of armed groups coupled with the phenomenon of drop-by-drop displacement), the research team arrived at a time when procedures and organizational levels were under review and when monitoring and evaluation systems (data collection documents, such as the ‘focalization sheet’) were in the process of being revised.

In Laos, many key WFP staff have taken up their positions relatively recently and few reports were available at WFP Laos documenting interventions over the previous years. This made it difficult for the research team to gain insight into how WFP programmes have evolved over time and reconstitute a history of these operations. This complication was compounded by the fact that the last needs assessment took place in 2001 (joint FAO/WFP Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission) and WFP staff who participated in this exercise were no longer present in Laos. A baseline survey, which was conducted in 2005, provided data on the food security and vulnerability situation, but its scope and objectives were distinct from those of an EFSA. Also, the team conducting the baseline survey visited only a few villages covered within the PRRO framework (the bulk of data collection exercise was performed in villages within the development project framework). This explains the scarcity of information on certain aspects of the process, such as procedures for initiating an EFSA, coordination, writing of terms of reference, etc.

Finally, the research team would also like to highlight certain constraints that have affected the preparation of the synthesis report itself. The three case studies are so distinct that it is extremely difficult to draw overall conclusions about the linkages between assessments and WFP operations. Additionally, the terms of reference were amended over the duration of the three case studies (May 2005–April 2006) and this has made the task of drawing comparisons even more complicated. Finally, the time allowed for each of the field missions was comparatively short, and in all three countries it has been difficult to collect sufficient information to develop a true representation of WFP operations.

2 Summary of WFP operations

Country	Context	Type of crisis	Date of Groupe URD field mission	WFP Operations							
				Total number of beneficiaries	Total food cost (US\$)	Name of operation (during Groupe URD mission)	In-depth EFSA carried out prior to PRRO?	Is this PRRO a follow-on from an EMOP or a PRRO?	Number of projects/schemes	Type of projects/schemes	Partners
Afghanistan	Country undergoing reconstruction following 20-year war Access is difficult in many regions Large-scale displacement & return Severe flooding in many areas May–July 2005	Post-conflict Reconstruction Drought Flooding	July 2005	9,243,000	158,448,979	PRRO - AFGHANISTAN 10233.0 Food Assistance to Re-establish Livelihoods and Households Food Security in Afghanistan (1 April 2003/31 March 2005)	No, but national VAM assessments (based on agriculture and income aggregates); FAO/WFP crop assessments carried out in 2000, 2001 & 2002; Rapid Emergency Food Needs Assessment in 2002	Follow-up from EMOP 10155.0		FFW FFT FFE	Government Cooperating partners
Colombia	Highly volatile, unpredictable and widespread conflict Widespread internal displacement Multiple actors, including left-wing guerrilla and right-wing paramilitaries Considerable North American presence Highly diverse context	Protracted crisis 40-year armed conflict	Nov. 2005	998,000	24,716,248	PRRO - COLOMBIA 10366.0 Assistance to Persons Displaced by the Violence in Colombia (1 April 2005/31 March 2007)	Yes	PRRO 10366.0 is a follow-on from PRRO 10158.0 (due to finish in December 2005 but terminated ahead of schedule after a number of surveys and NA were carried out)	2,500 projects	FFW FFT School feeding	Direct partners and PRRO co-signatories: ICBF and Acción Social (Gvt), Roughly 1,700 implementing partners (IP) with different capacities and mandates

Laos	<p>One of the poorest countries worldwide (GDP of US\$320)</p> <p>Chronic food insecurity</p> <p>Communist government</p> <p>Rural population</p> <p>Low density population rate</p> <p>Chronic food insecurity</p> <p>Unexploded ordinance</p> <p>Contamination in some areas</p>	Flood and Drought	Feb. 2006	217,000	1,605,045	<p>PRRO - LAO PDR 10319.0</p> <p>Recovery Assistance to the Disaster Prone and Vulnerable Food Insecure Communities in the Lao PDR (1 April 2004/31 March 2006)</p>	No, but evaluation of EMOP 6311 carried out in 2003	Yes, EMOP 6311	Roughly 200 schemes were approved in 2005	FFA FFW	Government National, Provincial and district authorities
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3 Main findings

This section presents a summary of the main findings from the three case studies. Some of the lessons learned are common to all three case studies. Others are worth highlighting precisely because observations made in one context bear little resemblance to those made in either of the other contexts.

3.1 What is an EFSA?

The terminology that is used in the WFP *Emergency Food Security Assessments Handbook* to define the different types of assessments does not correspond with the reality in the field. This results in a certain degree of confusion over the scope and purpose of a food security assessment, and over the methods that should be used for conducting an assessment. Admittedly the EFSA Handbook is a recent publication (June 2005) and as WFP staff progressively adopt its guidance in the field, some of this incoherence should be resolved. However, for the sake of clarity, it is necessary to identify exactly what is understood by the term ‘emergency food security assessment’ in the three contexts under evaluation and in WFP Headquarters.

At present, EFSA often refers to an overall assessment of food needs. The scope of the EFSA is linked to the scale of the emergency. For example, in Colombia where the protracted crisis is widespread, the EFSA was conducted at country level and the results were used to inform programming decisions and to define WFP country strategy for the next 36 months; the results of the joint needs assessment conducted in 2004–05, together with specific pre-appraisal missions and an in-depth internal consultation formed the basis for the design of PRRO 10366.0. In this case, the EFSA is a thorough assessment carried out over a certain length of time. Conversely, in Afghanistan and Laos, the assessments were carried out in response to localized sudden-onset emergencies (flooding). In this case, WFP field staff and/or partners undertake “initial investigations” or “rapid assessments” which correspond to Phase 1 and Phase 2 respectively in the EFSA Handbook. These assessments are often short in duration and are conducted on a local scale. They may result in an immediate response EMOP or allocations may be made available from in-country resources (i.e. covered by contingency planning within PRRO framework).

Needs assessments procedures vary dramatically from one case study to another (see diagrams 1, 2, 3 & 4). The different types of food security assessments that were examined in each country can be summarized as follows.

- Afghanistan: Initial investigations or rapid assessments conducted at a local level (corresponding to Phase 1 and Phase 2 in the EFSA Handbook).
- Colombia: 1) An in-depth EFSA conducted at country level in preparation for the PRRO design. 2) “Focalization sheet” which has a specific approach for relief components.
- Laos: The “Potential rice deficit assessment questionnaire” is used for selecting villages where FFW projects are to be implemented but there is an absence of an in-depth EFSA at country-level.

An EFSA can take many forms and may be triggered by a number of different factors. In some cases, an EFSA takes the form of an in-depth assessment and is proactive, forming part of a long-term strategy or of a continuous monitoring-and-evaluation process carried out on ongoing programmes. In other cases, the needs assessment may be more reactive, for example, an initial investigation or rapid assessment may be launched following the onset of a new crisis or emergency such as a flood or earthquake etc.

Diagram 1: Current Terminology in EFSA handbook

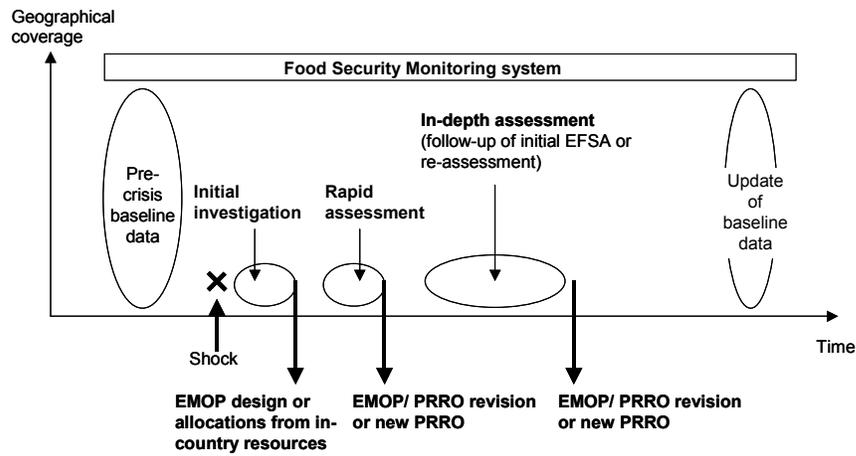


Diagram 2: Terminology used in Afghanistan

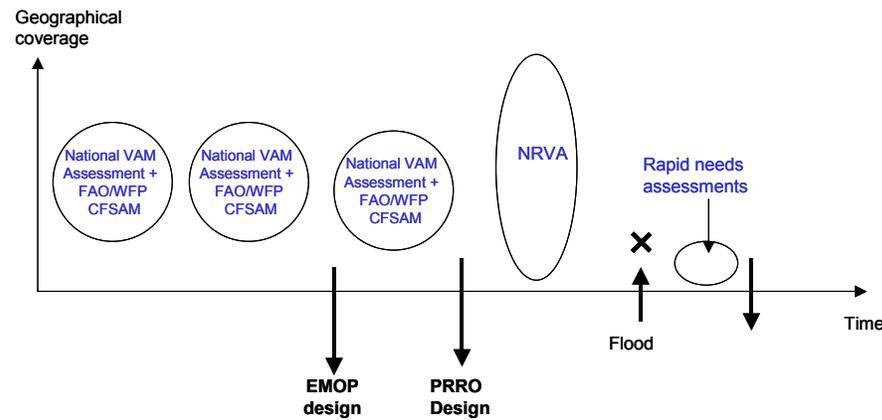


Diagram 3: Terminology used in Colombia

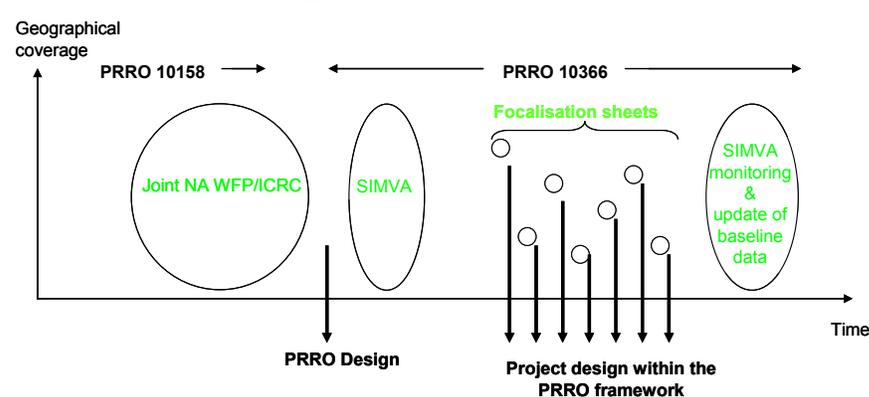
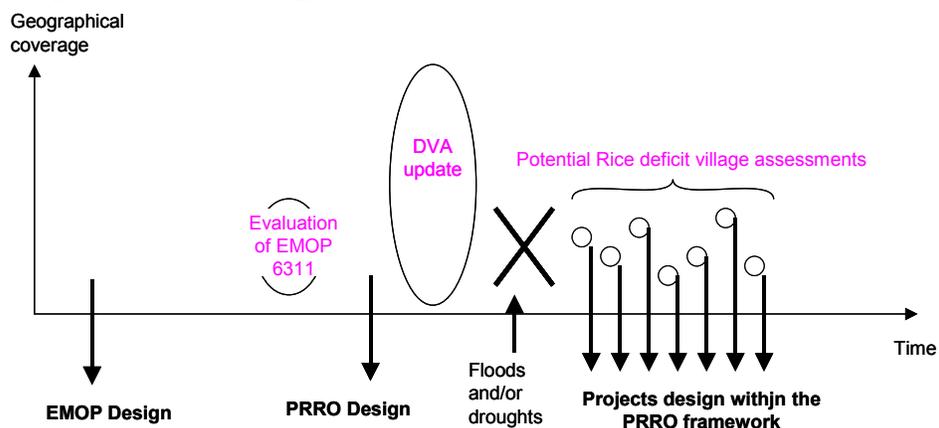


Diagram 4: Terminology used in Laos



3.2 When is an EFSA carried out?

In general, EFSA's are carried out in a timely manner in order to provide relief assistance in emergency situations. Despite the significant diversity in the procedures that were observed in the different case studies, the same conclusions can be drawn regarding WFP's capacity to react in new emergency situations such as an unexpected drought or flood in Lao PDR or Afghanistan, or a new influx of IDPs settling in a non-assisted area in Colombia. When conducting initial investigations or rapid assessments, WFP shows good reactivity with a rapid presence in the field for assessing needs. WFP's capacity to organize the necessary material and human resources for carrying out an EFSA is commendable, although the same is not always true for the methodology used during the assessment.

One of the main reasons for WFP's capacity to carry out initial investigations or rapid assessments in a timely manner is the alert process that is systematically set up with the national authorities (Natural Disaster Management Team in Laos), decentralized regional offices with a regional tripartite committee (WFP, ICBF, Acción Social in Colombia), and MRRD Disaster Response unit, supported by WFP in Afghanistan, which generate the necessary information at the right time.

This rapid reaction capacity is also facilitated because the PRROs in question have been designed with contingency planning for this type of unexpected crisis and flexibility in terms of managerial decision-making, mobilization and delivery of necessary assistance.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for an in-depth assessment which in theory should be carried out prior to designing the PRRO. As previously mentioned, the sample of needs assessments that was evaluated was so diverse that this aspect was not covered sufficiently. In Afghanistan and Laos, in-depth assessments were not carried out prior to the design and implementation of the current PRROs.

Initial investigations and rapid assessments in response to sudden-onset emergencies are generally conducted in a timely manner and facilitate decision-making so that the relief response is mobilized in time. However, two of the three case studies illustrate that the timeliness of in-depth assessments often does not meet requirements.

3.3 Who conducts the EFSA?

In all three contexts, WFP rarely carries out assessments in isolation and often works in close collaboration with its partners. Although this in itself is positive (capacity-building for partners, triangulation of methods and observations), it also means that the quality of the needs assessment process is dependent on partners' expertise.

3.3.1 Coordination between WFP and partners

Overall, there are good levels of coordination between WFP and government in needs assessments. In each context, a department or national institution was set up as a focal point for sudden-onset crises, either under government control or as a joint initiative (government + WFP + other aid agencies). It is responsible for centralizing the necessary information and mobilizing the subsequent emergency response.

- Laos. The government-run Disaster Management Office operates an alert process. Along with all United Nations agencies, WFP is a member of the United Nations Disaster Management Team (UNDMT). They are responsible for coordinating interventions implemented by the United Nations system, the Government (National Disaster Management Office, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare), bilateral donors and NGOs in response to natural disasters. WFP provides the secretariat services for the UNDMT and indeed has the leadership for 2006. For this, the WFP works in close partnership with the National Management Disaster Office of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare.
- Colombia. At country level, the PRRO was signed by a tripartite group comprised of WFP, ICBF and Acción Social. Relief components are managed in close collaboration with Acción Social, who is also involved in the alert system. Coordination with the ICRC is facilitated by the fact that each partner's responsibilities vis-à-vis the different beneficiaries are clearly defined. This collaboration was further consolidated during a joint WFP/ICRC needs assessment. At project level, a needs assessment is carried out when: a) it is specifically requested by an IP, b) as a result of a field visit or monitoring, or c) when other United Nations agencies or partners provide information on the likelihood of food insecurity.
- Afghanistan. The vulnerability analysis unit (VAU) of the Ministry of Rehabilitation and Rural Development carries out the national rural vulnerability assessment (NRVA) and has set up an early-warning system, with support from the WFP VAM unit. A disaster-response unit has also been established within the Ministry of Rehabilitation and Rural Development. Needs assessments that are carried out at a local level are carried out by/with personnel from local departments of rural rehabilitation and development.

Coordination efforts with national governments have proved successful and WFP should continue to promote this close collaboration, as it is without doubt fundamental for building local capacity and developing a long-term outlook in contexts of protracted crises.

3.3.2 Joint assessments

Needs assessments are rarely integrated into multi-agency dynamics, except in Colombia. Each country has developed a certain degree of inter-agency mechanisms but this type of initiative deserves greater attention.

The country which is most advanced in this aspect is Colombia where WFP carried out a joint needs assessment with the ICRC in 2004 and 2005. The needs assessment process was clearly defined and both partners were involved in its various stages: defining the terms of reference, monitoring and sharing/disseminating information. The joint needs assessment was carried out in three phases over the 2004–2005 period.

Both stakeholders contributed to the assessment in terms of staff, budget, materials and logistics. In Colombia, three elements have facilitated and indeed highlighted the benefits of this kind of exercise:

- a close and solid working relationship between WFP and ICRC, and a clear legal framework which defines each stakeholder’s responsibilities in providing relief for IDPs;
- a common strategic objective (i.e. to better understand the situation of crisis-affected people, and to give guidance to the government and their own staff on how to improve emergency responses); and
- the willingness of both teams to allocate time, and human and material resources to this exercise, and to include it as a key project for each partner.

This experience has proved relatively successful in Colombia but it remains to be seen to what extent it is possible to reproduce this scenario in contexts where WFP works exclusively with one partner (i.e. the Government in Laos), and to ensure that programming decisions are not overly influenced by political agendas.

Other examples of this type of cooperation do exist but joint or multi-party assessments are far from being the general rule. Country offices seem to lack the necessary procedures to set up and implement this type of agreement, or simply do not have the capacity to put them into practice. For example, a joint FAO/WFP assessment, namely the CFSAM, was conducted in Laos in 2001 but yet this type of collaboration has not been pursued. The Country Director of WFP Laos mentioned the difficulties that they had encountered in collaborating with an organization such as FAO, with its more cumbersome management structure and a decision-making process that is nonetheless highly dependent on Government. In comparison, WFP enjoys a certain degree of flexibility in its decision-making. Similarly in some areas of Afghanistan (e.g. Badakshan), coordination mechanisms bring together donors, United Nations agencies and NGOs to carry out joint assessments, but the same cannot be said for other regions.

Furthermore, in both Colombia and Afghanistan, WFP is fully involved in coordination mechanisms. At local level, there is a good level of informal and formal dialogue and collaboration between United Nations agencies and other aid agencies. Even where few formal procedures exist, the necessary logistics for joint missions are often facilitated by constructive dialogue and exchange between individuals. WFP deserves recognition for its constructive role in supporting and often initiating this type of exercise.

Taking into account the various constraints, it is essential that opportunities for conducting joint needs assessments be explored further if WFP is to broaden its operational approach and continue to develop a more comprehensive analysis of food security issues.

3.3.3 Needs assessment teams

Needs assessment teams tend to be composed of WFP staff and their counterparts from partner organizations from various different levels: field staff and managerial staff, staff responsible for conducting initial investigations and those responsible for validating results. Similarly, in joint needs assessments (e.g. Colombia, Laos), management staff were involved in the needs assessment process and a mixed team mainly composed of consultants (from WFP HQ, or independent consultants such as Econometría S.A. in Colombia) carried out the actual data collection work.

- Colombia. Management staff are fully involved in the needs assessment process at country level (writing of terms of reference and monitoring of the needs assessment process) but operational activities (research, data collection) are sub-contracted out.
- Laos. The assessment team responsible for the CFSAM (2001) was headed by a staff member from FAO Rome and included two FAO staff (a consultant and a TCDC expert) and one WFP staff (WFP assessment officer).
- Afghanistan: The National Rural Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) methodology was designed through a large consultation with Ministries, United Nations agencies, and NGOs. Data collection teams were largely composed of surveyors trained from the Ministry of Rehabilitation and Rural Development, with support of VAM officers. Rapid emergency assessments carried out following the floods were either conducted by staff from the Department of Rural Rehabilitation and/or WFP staff (either VAM, Food Aid monitors or programme staff, depending on who was available at short notice).

At project level (when the PRRO already exists), WFP partners (government or the IP) play a key role in the needs assessment process as they are responsible for collecting and analysing data which is then validated by or with WFP field staff and other project IPs.

- Colombia: IPs carry out the necessary needs assessments, then condense and transmit the information to WFP in the form of a focalization sheet and annexes.
- Afghanistan: IPs conduct needs assessments and develop project proposals which are reviewed in the Project Review Committee. If the needs assessment and project design are inadequate, WFP programme officers make necessary recommendations to the IPs.
- Laos: The Government provides the initial data on crisis-affected populations via the Cooperation and Planning Committee. Based on these primary data, WFP field monitors carry out needs assessment in the pre-selected villages.

The case study examples illustrate the importance of ensuring that teams participating in the information collecting process (IPs, government, WFP staff) have the necessary expertise, given that the quality of information depends on survey and consultation methods and the quality of interaction with the community.

3.3.4 Expertise

In general, the three case studies reveal wide variations in the level of staff expertise and the number of staff available to conduct the EFSA. Additionally, high staff turnover has a negative impact on the quality of needs assessments, as expertise accumulated over time is lost.

In Colombia, the majority of WFP staff have the necessary expertise with a solid background in a relevant technical sector (nutrition, agronomics, etc.) and are trained in needs assessment

methodology. However, time and human resources are limited and needs assessments are often outsourced. WFP staff participate in monitoring activities and are fully informed of the results and analysis stemming from this research. At project level, WFP staff have the necessary technical expertise but are rarely involved in the process of collecting primary data (it is important to take into account that in the interest of effectiveness and to ensure a maximum coverage, WFP Colombia works with over 1,700 IPs and manages more than 2,500 projects). IPs gather the information in collaboration with WFP and data is recorded using WFP tools (e.g. focalization sheet). However this information is not always detailed enough, in particular regarding local capacities and specific issues necessary for carrying out a thorough feasibility study, especially for FFW and FFT projects.

However, in Laos and Afghanistan it appears that WFP field staff do not always possess the necessary expertise in food security concepts and needs assessment methodology. In Afghanistan, VAM staff, programme assistants and food aid monitors (FAM) are all called upon to conduct needs assessments, and yet many do not have an adequate grounding in conducting needs assessment, livelihood analysis, and the use of participatory techniques.

In Laos, there appears to be an excessive number of external missions compared with capacity-building exercises (i.e. training) for WFP staff. Surveys, evaluation and assessments are frequently outsourced to external consultants (e.g. CFSAM, EMOP evaluation, Baseline Survey) and training modules are often only provided to management staff. Thus, basic yet essential concepts often fail to filter down to field-level staff who, it could be argued, require them most.

Considering the strong motivation shown by WFP teams to improve their understanding of the concepts required for conducting needs assessments, it is regrettable that capacity-building exercises are limited and that there is a tendency to outsource this type of expertise. The composition of needs assessment teams is a delicate issue and it is just as important to find the right balance between internal and external staff (in the interest of triangulation of data), as between management staff and staff from related sectors.

3.3.5 Gender concern

Although the gender issue does not seem to be a cause for concern in Colombia — team composition is highly equitable at all levels including field activities, implementation of monitoring-and-evaluation systems and decision-making — the same cannot always be said for the other case studies.

In Afghanistan, cultural constraints that weigh on women (working outside the home and travel is problematic) and a low level of qualification means that it is extremely challenging to have gender-balanced teams. It is therefore quite remarkable that the NRVA 2003 succeeded in collecting information through women's household interviews and women's focus groups using teams of women surveyors in most parts of the country. However, emergency assessments following the floods were largely carried out by men (from MRRD and WFP), again reflecting the constraints on women regarding employment and travel (few women are able to travel without a male member of family). Continued efforts are needed to strengthen attention to gender in both Government and WFP teams.

In Laos, WFP field monitors as well as district officers from the Government, who are the people in charge of carrying out the village assessment, are men and field visits revealed that women do not speak easily and freely to a male audience. It is regrettable that teams working

in the field are not composed of both men and women. This would be beneficial in information gathering, because as men and women have different responsibilities within the household, it is important to gather both viewpoints. Furthermore, WFP makes a significant effort to take into account gender issues in its “scheme selection process” (decisions about the work to implement within the FFW modalities), and dual gender teams would enhance this process.

3.4 What is the purpose of an EFSA?

3.4.1 Using the EFSA to design a PRRO

Out of the three case studies, Colombia was the only country in which an EFSA was planned and used for making programming decisions for the current PRRO. The EFSA effectively formed the basis for discussions between the WFP country team, the Regional Office and WFP HQ, and is frequently quoted throughout the PRRO document.

Moreover, this joint EFSA was also used by the other partners involved in the process, in particular ICRC. The Colombian Government, in particular the ICBF and Acción Social programmes were kept fully informed about the EFSA process and its results are available on the internet. This EFSA proved extremely useful for providing the Government with information on the food security situation throughout the country.

Apart from Colombia, the information that is used for programming the PRROs does not originate from formal EFSA (i.e. a joint needs assessment + further pre-appraisal missions and documents). In Laos, the PRRO was designed to follow-on from the previous EMOP, and indeed the PRRO was designed on the basis of recommendations drawn from the EMOP Evaluation. No more details on the programming process, or on the methods used for sharing and disseminating evaluation results with other stakeholders are known. However it can only be assumed that the evaluation was communicated to WFP’s Government counterpart.

In Afghanistan, no in-depth EFSA was carried out prior to the 2003–2005 PRRO but it was designed on the basis of national VAM assessments, using agriculture and income aggregates, FAO/WFP crop assessments, and localized rapid assessments in drought-affected areas. Other sources of information were also used (e.g. nutritional surveys, education statistics, etc.), especially since the PRRO includes support to a number of other sectors (education, tuberculosis programmes in hospitals, etc.). Furthermore, the results of the National Rural Vulnerability Assessment carried out in July 2003 informed PRRO implementation. This said, the NRVA was of limited use for more localized planning and targeting (especially at district level), since the sampling was designed to provide national and provincial averages.

The three case studies reveal that the requirement for conducting a needs assessment prior to designing a PRRO is not yet institutionalized even though it is essential. Failing to conduct an in-depth assessment beforehand may significantly compromise the appropriateness of the response within the PRRO framework.

3.4.2 Linkages between EFSA data analysis and PRRO design

The Colombia case study shows that the EFSA succeeded in collecting relevant qualitative and quantitative data to inform the food security situation, in particular at local level. However, it seems that some of the wealth of the EFSA analysis was lost in the PRRO design

process, in particular the diversity of needs, resources, regional characteristics and population groups.

In the transition from EFSA findings to PRRO design, data appears to have been condensed at two levels. First, even within the EFSA report, the bulk of the document contains highly specific details, yet the analysis of findings and subsequent recommendations have not retained the same level of diversity. It appears that the terms of reference for Needs Assessments often fail to give specific enough instructions. Second, during the drafting of the PRRO document, the data was summarized so that it would fit into the boxes provided in the PRRO format. This means that the regional specificities that are detailed in the EFSA report were subsequently 'diluted' and have become generalizations in the final PRRO document.

Although data is successfully disaggregated during the needs assessment to reflect the diversity of social and economic factors, the same degree of detail is rarely preserved in the design of the PRRO programme. This is de-motivating for needs assessment teams.

3.4.3 Use of an EFSA in programming relief assistance

There is however more evidence of EFSA being used to inform relief interventions in the case of a sudden-onset emergency (often localized). However, there is a tendency for both the EFSA and projects to be supply-driven, or donor-driven, as opposed to needs-driven, which is due to a number of factors. These include emotional factors such as the need to respond swiftly to suffering, and political factors. Similarly, EFSA as they are currently being conducted, especially in Afghanistan and Laos, focus more on damage assessment as opposed to needs assessment, and on food aid assessment as opposed to food and vulnerability assessment, without necessarily taking into account the wider perspective (e.g. livelihoods, vulnerability prior to the crisis). Therefore it is not altogether surprising that the needs assessment process resulted in the distribution of food aid for households affected by flooding. It did however function effectively to allow WFP staff to mobilize the necessary supplies and organize the logistics for food distributions within a short-time.

There is a tendency to conduct emergency *damage* assessments as opposed to *food security* assessments, and this results in a supply-driven response as opposed to a needs-based response.

3.5 How is an EFSA carried out?

Although the EFSA guidance is extremely thorough and the EFSA Handbook an excellent technical manual, its application in the field varies significantly depending on the case study under consideration.

3.5.1 Data collection to inform programme design

Out of the three case studies, the data collection process developed in Colombia represents a good example of a well-designed methodology. The joint needs assessment was conducted in two phases, including a desk review and analysis phase which succeeded in respecting regional characteristics (in terms of food security issues and the design of questionnaires).

A wide variety of tools and methods were employed including:

- Tools: Sub-contracted studies (for specific analysis and data collection activities), periodical monitoring of the context, Sistema de Identificación y de Monitoreo de la Vulnerabilidad Alimentaria (SIMVA) to identify vulnerability and define baseline data, and joint needs assessments;
- Methods: desk review and analysis, primary qualitative and quantitative data collection through questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, etc.

The needs assessment teams used these tools on a representative sample of regions and population groups, selected usually by means of mixed stratified/statistical techniques, and later adapted according to local constraints. This process is always accompanied by other activities, such as a pre-appraisal mission, in order to refine the selection criteria and quantities within the programme.

In fact the process is highly commendable. However, there is a time issue that needs to be addressed. The initial phase of the data collection process commenced in July/August 2004, fieldwork was carried out in August/September 2004, and the EFSA report was finalized in December 2004. Furthermore, the PRRO which officially commenced in April 2005 was still the subject on ongoing negotiation between the WFP country office and WFP HQ well into

June 2005. Thus, twelve months elapsed from the beginning of the data collection process to the finalization of the resulting PRRO.

The Colombia case study presents an example of a highly effective methodology comprised of a range of tools for collecting a good balance of qualitative and quantitative information, although the lapse of time between the start of the data collection process and the implementation of project activities needs to be addressed.

3.5.2 Data collection to inform project design

At project level, the data collection methods that are used for planning schemes or projects within a pre-established PRRO framework are based on questionnaires that have been developed specifically for each context. In Laos, the “potential rice deficit assessment questionnaire” is used for 1) collecting data in the villages and 2) selecting potential villages for FFW schemes, and as its name suggests it is limited to analysing the rice deficit rather than looking at a wider perspective. In the villages, the relevant questions are addressed to the community as a whole and there are no distinctions made at household level. The community is considered to be a single entity.

In Colombia, the “focalization” sheet filled in by IPs provides very little information on the actual vulnerability and food security situation. Programming decisions are based on this document alone (and on the ‘project profile’ if it is available), along with the annexes that are sometimes attached.

In general these questionnaires are fairly restrictive tools, focusing on highly selective quantitative data collected at the community level. The questionnaires alone cannot be considered a valid tool for identifying and targeting highly vulnerable crisis-affected or chronically food-insecure populations.

In Colombia, WFP staff sometimes conduct additional field visits in order to complete the information provided by the IP, in order to inform decision-making or to triangulate data. At this point, it is important to point out that WFP staff are unable to visit all projects, due to the extensive number of projects and IPs, but also due to local constraints (access, budget, human resources, etc.). If extra field visits are not undertaken, activities in this phase are condensed into analysing the results of the data collection process.

There is evidence in all case studies of the constraints affecting geographical coverage. Where security problems or poor infrastructure limit access to remote areas, there is a risk that people who most require assistance are overlooked in the data collection activities and response.

Furthermore, certain factors with little or no bearing on the degree of vulnerability may influence the village selection process. In Laos, certain villages may be omitted somewhat arbitrarily from the village selection process because access problems mean that it is too costly or too difficult for field staff to implement and monitor schemes.

Another observation that is common to all three case studies to varying degrees is the issue of scale. Questionnaires using statistics based on national averages have their shortcomings when applied at a regional level.

At project level, in-country tools and methods could be improved in order to ensure wider geographical coverage and a more subtle micro-level analysis.

3.5.3 Tools for monitoring population vulnerability

As already mentioned, vulnerability assessments are well established in every case-study country. In Afghanistan, the NRVA is designed to monitor vulnerability at provincial or national levels, but does not monitor vulnerability at the district or household level. Work is being done to identify sentinel indicators which would trigger more in-depth vulnerability assessments when and where they are needed. In Laos, the same applies to the District Vulnerability Update.

In Colombia, the situation is noticeably different. The SIMVA is a relevant tool, using questionnaires and occasionally focus group modalities. Not only was it designed by WFP Colombia (with support from ODAN), but it is used by both WFP country offices and PRRO partners (i.e. ICBF and IPs) who have received training. However, despite the strong motivation of the team at local and national levels for a more widespread application, this tool is not being used optimally because of insufficient human and material resources. The data gathering and analysis processes are time consuming, and there is often a significant delay before the SIMVA questionnaires are fully processed and analysed. Furthermore, the cumulative number of questionnaires (focalization sheet, SIMVA) covering the same group of projects asking the same information (i.e. the focalization sheet was largely inspired by the SIMVA questionnaire) can result in repetition and fatigue both for the implementing partner and respondents alike.

3.5.4 Data analysis

In general, the research teams found little evidence of analytical frameworks being used or of discussions on the results of data analysis, and we can thus assume that few procedures and/or recording processes are set up for this purpose. In Laos, the research team identified little information about the discussions that took place following the EMOP evaluation for programming the PRRO, and how and by whom the PRRO was designed. The difficulty encountered by the Groupe URD team in reconstituting the history and the processes behind WFP operations with a relatively new managerial staff in WFP Vientiane merely confirms this postulate.

Conversely, at project level, the procedures that exist for disseminating data are clearly defined, for example, the WFP field monitor prepares a summary presented in a Microsoft Excel sheet and this document is sent to WFP Vientiane, the Programme Officer and Programme Assistant for approval.

Similarly, in Colombia the results of the needs assessment were published on completion of each phase and this procedure was backed up with regular exchange between the various stakeholders. A national workshop was held with the ICBF and Acción Social in order to reach a consensus on the recommendations to be made for the PRRO.

In Afghanistan, rapid assessments reports drafted following the floods were often limited to a description of the damage with estimated numbers of affected families. If food aid was recommended, there was little explanation for the rationale behind this decision (though examples were found where WFP staff would explain why food aid was not needed). The

quality of the analysis depended largely on who carried out the assessment (VAM staff, FAM, or programme officers).

The NRVA data analysis was quite different: the data analysis was a shared and consultative process involving different Ministries and agencies, though mostly carried out by the MRRD VAU and WFP VAM unit. The assessment was designed using a livelihoods approach, covering various aspects of vulnerability (access to markets, employment, sanitation, health, food consumption). This said, the sampling made it difficult to have an integrated analysis of the indicators; the data gave national estimates and geographic patterns for a wide range of indicators, but cannot show how different factors (e.g. access to markets, education level, type of job, etc.) create a certain pattern of vulnerability. Also, the scale and scope of the data collection meant that the results were only available several months after data collection.

Procedures for analysing data and decision-making vary widely from one case study to another and are not always based on formal initiatives. However in Colombia, sharing the results of the data collection process was an essential part of the process, and in Afghanistan, regular vulnerability assessments were well planned, from the design to the sharing of results. Emergency assessments following rapid-onset and localized disasters were less formal.

3.5.5 Writing and dissemination of the report

In Afghanistan, the dissemination of NRVA results has been extensive, encompassing a wide distribution of the report and internet access for all NRVA related materials. The involvement of many stakeholders in the design and analysis of the study led to a high awareness of the exercise. This said, the report is dense and the analysis complex, making access potentially difficult for non-specialized staff. The challenge is that making results more accessible often entails simplifying the data leading to inadequate interpretation (i.e. a district being considered food-secure, when in some areas people are very vulnerable or vice versa).

With regards to the emergency floods assessments, the dissemination and sharing of results depended on the coordination mechanisms in place. In areas where agency coordination is well established (e.g. Badakshan), inter-agency meetings provide a forum for sharing results. In other regions, results tend to remain within WFP, and/or shared with MRRD only (in some instances, WFP assessments were supposed to verify whether demands for food aid from MRRD were justified).

In Laos, going back in time, we identified a certain number of comments on how the CFSAM report (2001) was written and what difficulties were encountered. The central idea behind this document was to highlight the lack of precision in the CFSAM team's responsibilities for writing the final report. It was not clear who was responsible for writing different sections and editing the report, and this resulted in a certain degree of confusion and subsequent delays.

Similarly, in Colombia, the report writing process following the joint assessment was the subject of much discussion at country level, and subsequently between WFP country office, the Regional Office (Panama) and WFP HQ.

4 Recommendations

4.1 Improving the emergency needs assessment process

4.1.1 Clarifying EFSA terminology

It is necessary to clarify exactly what is meant and understood by the different terms used in the EFSA Handbook.

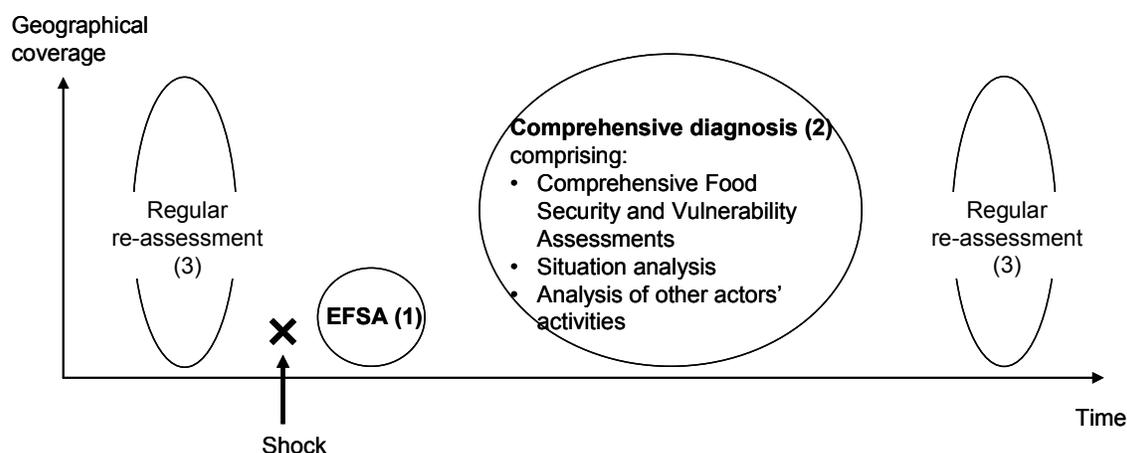


Diagram 5: Reviewing terminology for different types of assessment

In reality, an *emergency* food security assessment (1) should by definition refer to a brief assessment carried out in the event of an emergency or natural disaster. Needless to say, the data collected during such an assessment is not appropriate for informing country-level programming decisions. Admittedly, in Afghanistan, Colombia and Laos, food security is a chronic countrywide problem and it is therefore necessary to conduct food security assessments at a country level. However, this exercise should not be named an emergency food security assessment but rather another term such as a comprehensive diagnosis (2). Additionally, needs assessments should also be carried out periodically at local and national levels, hence the need for complementary exercises, which are in essence “re-assessments” or “rolling needs assessments” (3).

- ▶ Review EFSA terminology to ensure that objectives and consequently needs assessment methodologies are coherent with the scope of the assessment in terms of time and geographical focus.
- ▶ Ensure that needs assessment methodology adopts this revised terminology so that field staff know which circumstances should trigger an EFSA and how it should be conducted. Comprehensive analysis and re-assessments should follow the same rules.
- ▶ Ensure that these distinctions are clearly defined in the revised version of the EFSA Handbook and in all guidance provided to WFP staff and partners.

4.1.2 Clarifying EFSA procedures at project level

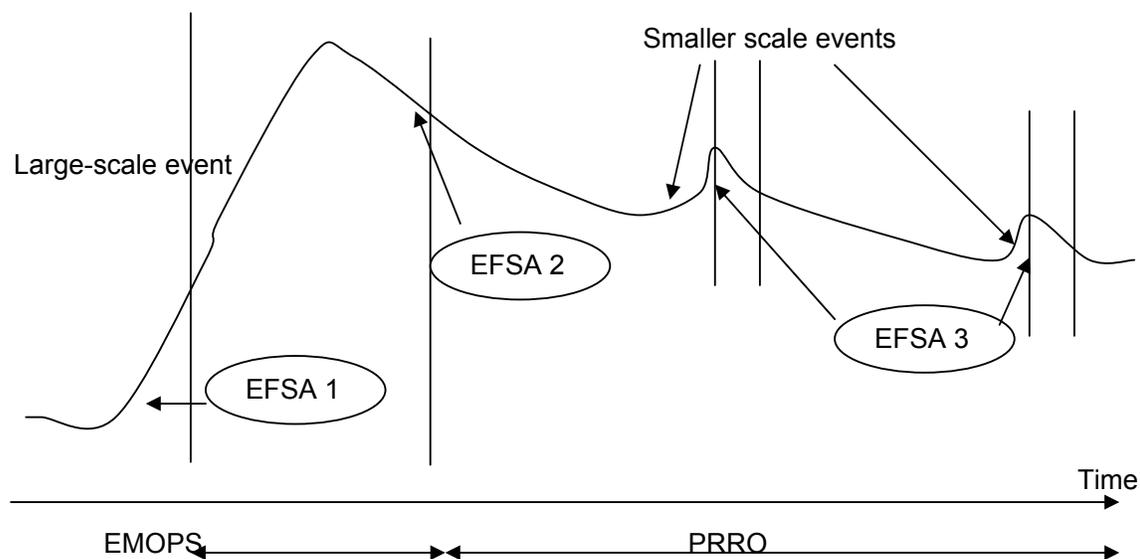
There is a need to clarify the objectives and terminology used for different types of needs assessments at project level. The case studies have revealed a certain degree of confusion between needs assessment exercises that should be used to inform the project design and implementation phases, and feasibility studies that are currently used for project design and targeting. In fact, it is necessary to carry out both types of analysis and they should complement each other, as their objectives are distinct.

- ▶ Ensure that the distinction between a food security assessment (which should inform targeting decisions) and a feasibility study is clearly defined both in the revised version of the EFSA Handbook and in the guidance provided to WFP staff and partners.
- ▶ Ensure that sufficient guidance is provided to WFP staff and partners on the objectives and methods for conducting food security assessments and feasibility studies in order to limit confusion.

4.1.3 Timeliness of the EFSA

The diagram below illustrates the timing of EFSA in an ideal situation.

Diagram 6: Timeliness of EFSA



EFSA 1: Initial, rapid EFSA, or in-depth EFSA (depending on the scale of the shock and programming requirements) should trigger the first type of response (i.e. either no response, an EMOP or a PRRO). If the crisis and the needs are of significant scale and call for urgent action, an EMOP is the preferred option. For situations of chronic or recurring food insecurity, PRRO is a better tool.

EFSA 2: “Re-assessment” could result in either the termination of the programme, a second EMOP or a transitional phase leading to a PRRO. It possesses a dual nature of being both an impact assessment of the first operation and a needs assessment for subsequent interventions.

EFSA 3: Generally, **initial or rapid** is the mechanism that could trigger a rapid and localized operation within the PRRO quick response capacity.

- ▶ Clarify the different circumstances that should trigger a needs assessment and determine assessment modalities and timescale.

4.1.4 Triggering a needs assessment

An EFSA can be triggered by an identified slow-onset phenomenon (deterioration of the food security situation or growing poverty in a given country or area). Traditional early warning signals related to this type of situation are triggered and in consequence WFP raises its level of alertness by launching an EFSA. The VAM can in many instances indicate areas where levels of food-insecurity call for further investigation. WFP country offices should establish in advance cut-off points that immediately trigger certain responses: either sending an EFSA team to analyse the situation and recommend a course of action, or an immediate food aid operation. In addition, a desk review on EFSA trigger factors was conducted recently by WFP/ODAN under the “Strengthening Emergency Needs Assessment Capacity” (SENAC) project and provides suggestions on indicators that can be used to launch an EFSA in slow-onset crisis situations².

An EFSA can also be triggered by an easily identified event which is reported either by national or local authorities or by other means (the media, NGOs). In this case, the WFP country office or WFP HQ can decide on the proper EFSA mechanism to be activated.

- ▶ Ensure that the following four parameters which are key to the success of the operation are developed either in-country or supplied by other WFP offices:
 - a situation analysis (VAM, food-economy mapping, agro-ecological zoning or other);
 - a proper hazard, risk, vulnerability and capacity analysis in order to clearly identify the parameters to be monitored;
 - a pre-established list of key criteria, indicators and cut-off points in order to support effective decision-making; and
 - the necessary human and practical resources to undertake these tasks in a timely manner.

4.1.5 Who conducts the EFSA?

Given the importance of the needs assessment phase, it is worthwhile reiterating the fact that one of the factors that determine the quality of the information collected is the composition of the needs assessment team and staff expertise. WFP has made known its commitment to taking gender issues on board, and it is therefore essential that needs assessment teams are composed of men and women so that the viewpoints of women affected by crisis can be truly represented in the assessment results.

- ▶ Ensure that needs assessment teams are well balanced in terms of managerial and technical staff, gender, external experts and internal WFP staff and partners. This will bring a wealth of experience into the process (learning).

² S. Devereux, Z. Tiba “Identification of factors that trigger emergency needs assessments in slow-onset crises”, WFP/ODAN, SENAC, December 2005 (<http://www.wfp.org/odan>).

- ▶ Establish a system that enables needs assessments teams operating in different regions or covering different intervention sectors to share their observations and findings (lateral learning).
- ▶ Ensure that a proper After Action Review takes place after each EFSA, so that lessons can be learned at the end of the process (out learning).
- ▶ Develop training modules for WFP staff and/or partners in order to make food-security and needs-assessment concepts more operational.

4.1.6 Multi-disciplinary assessments and inter-agency coordination

Food insecurity is the result of a multi-factor complex causality chain and thus a multi-disciplinary approach is required. In the United Nations system, this multi-disciplinary approach is often better tackled by means of proper collaboration with different institutions within the host government (Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Health, etc.) and through inter-agency arrangements.

- ▶ Take full advantage of coordination arrangements that exist for carrying out joint food security assessments (e.g. CFSAM, WFP/ICRC, WFP/UNHCR, and where appropriate local authorities and donors).
- ▶ Promote the implementation of multi-agency assessments and thus develop a wider perspective, moving from food security assessments to needs assessments and diagnosis.
- ▶ Reinforce the involvement of WFP in the initial data collection exercises carried out by local authorities.
- ▶ Provide more training in needs assessment methods to improve the quality of the information gathered (in terms of reliability and validity) to inform EFSA issues.

4.1.7 The EFSA as a support for programming

If the needs assessment has successfully captured the nuances of the social and cultural characteristics of the crisis-affected population, it is important that the emergency response does not lose any of this diversity. However, this may require making a trade-off between what is nice to know and what is necessary to know, especially in emergency situations.

- ▶ Ensure that all the information required for programme design is properly recorded during the EFSA process:
 - situation analysis
 - disaster impact
 - need assessment
 - constraints analysis
 - local capacity appraisal

Only then can an operation and its sub-programmes be designed in an optimal manner.

All too often standard blueprints are used for programme design as opposed to tailor-made approaches.

- ▶ Develop tools to guide choices and decision-making at strategic and practical levels during the programme design process.

4.2 Improving the emergency needs assessments methodology

There is a need to make the EFSA guidance more operational, as a toolbox.

4.2.1 Typology (social, ethnic and socio-economic characteristics)

Food insecure areas are often very heterogeneous. This heterogeneity can either be seen as a problem or an asset, yet it has to be disaggregated and understood if meaningful operations are to be designed.

The EFSA method should ensure that regional and local differences are clearly spelled out so that they can be taken into account during design and implementation of the needs assessment in the field. This implies that the following domains be explored as part of the EFSA:

- agro-ecological diversity (zoning)
- socio-economic heterogeneity (typologies)
- ethnic differences (anthropological mapping)
- gender disaggregation (gender sensitivity)

4.2.2 Geographical coverage

In most situations, VAM maps are made using typical Geographical Information Systems (GIS) in which administrative maps have been incorporated after digitalization. The delineation of the food security units on the map thus follow these administrative boundaries. They may be relevant for logistics, but often does not reflect the reality in terms of diagnosis and mapping. In fact, the logistical aspect is essential given that recommendations should eventually translate into some kind of intervention on the ground. The debate is ongoing within ODAN and VAM *inter alia* on what the best level of geographical disaggregation is for analytical and programming purposes. There are pros and cons of the various possible zoning (e.g. livelihood, agro-ecological, administrative) and as yet, no final decision has been made. It is essential at this stage to reconcile programmatic requirements (generally based on administrative divisions) where different IPs—including the national government—work with the analytical requirements (which may be more logically follow other types of geographical division).

Ensure that information generated by EFSAs is used in a way that is consistent with the sampling frame. This entails being extremely careful when extrapolating results collected in a specific area to a wider area (which can include different types of population), and when using national or regional averages for local analyses. Quantitative estimates must be reinterpreted locally using complementary qualitative information.

4.2.3 Accounting for seasonality and chronicity

Food security, as well as periods for project implementations, are often very affected by seasonal factors.

- ▶ Ensure that field staff's understanding of the crisis is anchored in time by:

- 1) referring to seasonal livelihoods patterns, such as agricultural calendars, seasonal job patterns, variations in market access. The impact of the crisis may differ significantly depending on when it happens (e.g. before, during or after the harvest).
- 2) studying previous recurring crises (e.g. Has this region been affected by this type of crisis before? If so, how often does it occur? What damage have past crises caused? etc.).

4.2.4 Food security framework

- ▶ Ensure that the food security analysis is carried out from a systems analysis standpoint, placing the concept of food security in a broader livelihood context and taking into account the local context and traditions, the type of crisis, etc. rather than looking at the population's needs alone.
- ▶ At present, the concepts of food consumption and food utilization are dealt with as one category in the EFSA Handbook (page 59) with the disadvantage that, in practice, either one aspect or the other tends to be overlooked.

Analyse the food security situation in *four* steps (cf. Afghanistan Case Study Report, Box 3, page 26):

- Food availability;
- Food access;
- Food consumption (i.e. household's use of the food to which they have access); and
- Food utilization (i.e. individuals' ability to absorb nutrients, or the conversion efficiency of food by the body).

4.2.5 Moving from needs assessment to a fuller diagnosis of the situation

In order to improve understanding of the relation of cause and effect, ensure that assessments comprise a full diagnosis of the situation (of which needs assessment is one component). The report should therefore be organized in the following manner:

- I. Situation assessment (including local politics, local socio-economic issues, etc.)
- II. Damage Assessment
- III. Needs Assessment
- IV. Capacities Assessment
- V. Constraints Assessment
- VI. Conclusions and perspectives (including risks/exposure to shocks)
- VII. Programmatic Recommendation

4.2.6 Collecting and analysing data

- ▶ Ensure that a matrix for analysing data, and questionnaires and forms for collecting data are designed simultaneously (cf. examples in the Colombia Case Study Report).
- ▶ Ensure that the data collected does indeed inform the targeting criteria.
- ▶ Encourage the identification of targeting criteria based on both quantitative and qualitative information.

- ▶ Disseminate and encourage the use of the EFSA Handbook which provides guidance on how to vary data collection methods, including focus groups, key informants and household interviews.
- ▶ Develop the use of participatory approaches (while ensuring that usage is not restricted to ‘village assemblies’).
- ▶ Ensure that EFSA collect information according to the specific objective of the assessment and combine different types of information (qualitative, quantitative) so that comprehensive information is collected and triangulation can be carried out.
- ▶ Ensure that the data collected enables the team to analyse the following five aspects:
 - Context;
 - Food security strategies and outcomes;
 - Damage assessment (while ensuring that damage assessment is not restricted to the food gap alone (i.e. taking into account all types of damage due to the crisis);
 - Capacities (coping strategies, assets, etc.) and risk factors (exposure to shocks); and
 - Perspectives (based on the impact of the crisis and vulnerability resulting from the existing capacities and risk exposure).

4.2.7 Improving vulnerability monitoring

It is possible to envisage investing in new but relatively inexpensive technology that should facilitate data processing and data analysis processes and hence relieve WFP staff and implementing partners of some of their workload.

- ▶ Invest in electronic technology that facilitates the transfer of handwritten information (questionnaires completed in the field) to an electronic database (e.g. Digital Writing System that converts handwritten analogue information into digital data).
- ▶ Invest in an IT system that allows each IP to record its own vulnerability monitoring data allowing IPs to transfer their data to WFP in a common format.
- ▶ Reinforce the link between the vulnerability monitoring process and the EFSA in order to better identify vulnerabilities within each region (whereas the role of the EFSA is to provide an overview of the situation).
- ▶ Ensure that regional offices have the necessary resources and expertise for the whole of the data collection process (from preparation, to fieldwork, data processing, analysis and report writing).

4.2.8 Making the EFSA handbook easier to use

- ▶ Promote the use of the EFSA Handbook by providing training and guidance on in-field application.
- ▶ Design and circulate a light, user-friendly guidebook with a summary of the basic fundamental information that staff require in the field. It should build on work that has already commenced in the form of “Technical Guidance Sheets” (TGS), which provide a

“compact” set of information and recommendations on specific assessment aspects. As such, TGS should be developed for other key areas of the Handbook.

- ▶ Incorporate the notion of programme (PPRO) and project/scheme (at field level) into the EFSA Handbook.
- ▶ Include an index at the back of the EFSA Handbook for easy reference.

4.2.9 Expertise

All three case studies highlighted the fact that WFP’s greatest asset is its staff, despite existing gaps in their knowledge.

- ▶ Build the capacity of the needs assessment team by increasing training in the following topics: systems analysis (livelihoods) approach, food security, needs assessment methods and procedures.
- ▶ Ensure that staff are capable of building the notions of time and space into their analysis, in particular for:
 - Mapping exercises
 - Collating, analysing and effectively reporting information

Acronyms

EFSA	Emergency food security assessment
EMOP	Emergency operation
FAM	Food aid monitors
FFW	Food for work
FFA	Food for activities
FFT	Food for training
ICBF	Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar
IDP	Internally displaced persons
IP	Implementing partner
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NRVA	National rural vulnerability assessment
PRRO	Protracted relief and recovery operation
SIMVA	Sistema de Identificación y de Monitoreo de la Vulnerabilidad Alimentaria
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WFP	World Food Programme
VAM	Vulnerability analysis and mapping
VAU	Vulnerability analysis unit