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Hand-over in Namibia: from food aid to social protection for orphans and vulnerable children

Baton Osmani

1. Introduction

The Government of Namibia and WFP ran a joint two-year food support programme for approximately 90,000 orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) in northern Namibia. The programme ran from April 2006 to April 2008 and was the second phase of WFP food assistance targeting OVCs in northern Namibia. The first phase, also implemented in cooperation with the government, was an emergency operation (EMOP) from mid-2004 to mid-2005 in response to the severe drought that affected Namibia in 2003. The primary intention of the second phase of food assistance was to help strengthen support for OVCs in Namibia by providing them with food assistance and facilitating their inclusion in the government-led Child Welfare Grant (CWG) system. During the programme, the overall number of OVCs receiving CWG in programme areas increased by more than 40,000.

This chapter gives an overview of the context that led to the OVC programme, its design, operational implementation, achievements and lessons learned.

2. Context, design and implementation

2.1 High HIV/AIDS prevalence resulting in rapid increase of OVCs

Although classified as a lower middle-income country, Namibia has one of the highest Gini coefficients in the world, at 74.3,¹ revealing the high income disparities existing in the country. Despite progress towards reaching United

Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), previous gains in achieving MDGs 4 and 5 have declined: the under-5 mortality rate has increased from 62 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2000, to 69 in 2006/2007; and the maternal mortality rate has doubled since 1992, from 225 per 100,000 live births, to 449 in 2006/2007.²

With the world's fifth highest HIV/AIDS rate, of 17.8 percent,³ Namibia has been hit hard by the HIV/AIDS triple effect, and the epidemic is the main driver of a rapid increase in the number of OVCs. Its Human Poverty Index value of 17.1 ranks Namibia as 128th among the countries for which the index has been calculated.⁴

Food availability at the national level is adequate, but access to food at the household level remains a concern, with 29 percent of children under 5 years of age stunted –chronically malnourished⁵– meaning that almost one in three Namibian children under 5 is not getting adequate nutrition and care to ensure proper growth and development. This situation is compounded by recurring natural disasters such as droughts, locusts and floods, mainly affecting northern rural parts of the country, where more than half of the population of 1.9 million people live, heavily reliant on rain-fed subsistence agriculture and social protection.

It was against this background that the joint government/WFP programme was developed, targeting 90,000 OVCs in the six administrative regions of northern Namibia.

2.2 Forming a partnership: a joint WFP/government programme

The Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, the government body cooperating with WFP on this programme, is charged with ensuring the legal care and protection of children in Namibia. Under its leadership, a collaborative process involving various stakeholders resulted in a National Plan of Action for OVCs for the period 2006 to 2010, supplementing the national OVC policy. In this national plan of action, activities were designed to provide temporary food assistance to needy families caring for OVCs and to review and facilitate the uptake of CWG by the neediest OVCs.

The Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare took over CWG implementation from the Ministry of Health and Social Services in 2004, when 18,800 OVCs were receiving this benefit nationally. By the beginning of the programme, national coverage had already expanded significantly to 45,340, under the auspices of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, but it was clear that many more OVCs were still not benefiting from CWG.

The initial emergency phase of WFP's food assistance to OVCs, which concluded in mid-2005, was carried out in partnership with the Emergency Management Unit of the Office of the Prime Minister. Given the Ministry of

Gender Equality and Child Welfare's central roles in ensuring the well-being of OVCs in Namibia and as the custodian of the CWG system, it was appropriate for WFP to form a partnership with the Ministry for the second phase of OVC food assistance. This was launched by a Letter of Understanding signed in April 2006.

The Ministry and WFP identified implementing partners for regional programme delivery through a broad consultative process in late 2005. Consultation and advice were sought from the regional council of each region where the project was to be implemented, and agencies' profiles were taken into account. Catholic Aids Action (CAA) was selected as the implementing partner in Oshana, Omusati and Kavango regions; the Namibia Red Cross Society (NRCS) for Caprivi and Ohangwena regions; and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) Aids Action for Oshikoto region. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare formalized implementing partners' involvement in the programme and at the field level. In early 2006, a national management committee (NMC), comprising the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, WFP and NGO implementing partners, chaired by the ministry and with WFP as secretariat, was established to provide policy guidance and oversight at the national level. Similar regional management committees (RMCs) were established in the regions, chaired by the regional councils. The RMCs provided vital operational guidance and coordination at the regional/constituency level, enhancing the delivery of assistance to beneficiaries.

The second phase of the OVC food support programme in Namibia had the primary objective of contributing to the government's initiative to strengthen and absorb all OVCs into the national social safety net system. The food package was designed to meet the basic food needs of food-insecure OVCs, while accelerating their inclusion in the government's CWG scheme.

This OVC food support programme was an integral part of the national action plan for OVCs, and was fully aligned with national OVC policy and the government's development framework, Vision 2030. The programme was also integrated into the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for Namibia and aligned with both WFP's Strategic Objectives (SOs) on hunger and the MDGs.

2.3 Implementation involving many actors

Based on stakeholder consultations in October 2005, three main activities or entry points were identified for delivering food assistance to OVCs. The programme's main activity, *OVC support*, provided individual rations to food-insecure OVCs pending their inclusion in CWG. As this ration was likely to be shared with other household members, OVC food support would contribute towards family resources, thereby freeing up income to pay for other needs, such

as education and health, and easing the household burden of supporting OVCs.

Supplementary feeding was planned as part of integrated health and nutrition services for malnourished children under the age of 5. Unfortunately, discussions on the modalities for carrying out this activity were inconclusive, and it was not implemented. Small-scale *micro-projects* were implemented to promote food security with outcomes focusing on OVCs, such as home/school gardening and Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools.

Food procurement and logistics

In line with WFP policies, the local and regional procurement of commodities was prioritized whenever possible. During the programme, 16,403 mt of food was distributed, of which 14,736 mt of maize meal was procured locally from Namibian suppliers. Regional procurement was the option of choice for the other three commodities in the food basket – pulses, vegetable oil and corn-soya blend (CSB) – mainly owing to lack of availability in local markets and regional price competitiveness. A total of 969 mt of CSB and 337 mt of pulses came from South African suppliers. Only 208 mt of vegetable oil was sourced from international markets, and 154 mt of canned meat was received internationally as an in-kind donation.

Logistics for the operation were shared by WFP, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare and implementing partners, according to a clearly defined division of responsibilities. Given the vast geographical area covered by the programme, with more than 750 food distribution points, the establishment of a functional logistics system capable of responding to the monthly cycle of food deliveries can be considered a significant operational achievement.

The Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare provided a regional warehouse for each of the six regions, namely in Ondangwa, Outapi, Rundu, Katima Mulilo, Omafo and Onulaye, each staffed with a ministry and an WFP storekeeper. Food commodities procured through the WFP procurement system were transported to the regional warehouses by WFP-contracted transporters. Food releases were made daily from the regional warehouses, following monthly distribution plans prepared for each region and agreed by the ministry, WFP and implementing partners at the regional level. Transportation from the regional warehouses to the final distribution points was contracted by the ministry, with WFP reimbursing 50 percent of the costs.

The reliability of privately contracted transporters was variable, and government-supplied trucks often had to fill in when arrangements with private transporters failed. At the final distribution points, food was distributed to the OVCs' care givers by the implementing partners, using calibrated measures and beneficiary distribution lists that were updated monthly. Over the course of the

operation, only 11.916 mt of food was lost or damaged, representing less than 0.01 percent of the total distributed, which is well within acceptable limits for an operation of this size.

Beneficiary targeting

Guidelines on setting beneficiary selection criteria emphasized the importance of local community involvement and included a simple checklist to facilitate the OVC registration process; the guidelines were translated into six local languages. Both WFP and implementing partner staff were trained in administering the checklist, and a basic coding system was designed to protect the integrity of the process. The criteria used to assess vulnerability focused on food security aspects of the OVC's household, as well as eligibility for CWG, which was critical to the success of the programme's exit strategy. A simple point-scoring method was applied to ensure that OVCs with the highest vulnerability scores regarding food insecurity were enrolled in the programme, until regional quotas, which were established using macro-level data, were reached.

Beneficiary registration lasted from April until the end of December 2006, with a total of 90,824 OVCs enrolled into the food support programme, representing 94 percent of the target. Table 22.1 gives an overview of regional targets and actual registration.

Table 22.1 Actual OVC registrations versus targets, by region			
Partner	Region	Target	Actual registration
NRCS	Caprivi	6 522	6 947
NRCS	Ohangwena	22 505	18 882
CAA	Omusati	20 754	20 814
CAA	Oshana	13 367	13 159
CAA	Kavango	18 393	18 438
ELCIN	Oshikoto	14 459	12 584
Total		96 000	90 824

A community and household surveillance (CHS) system, designed by WFP and partners to monitor food assistance programmes, indicated that programme targeting could have been improved to reduce the inclusion of "non-needy" beneficiaries. The need to review the assumption that all orphans are vulnerable

was also highlighted, as the characteristics of OVCs were found to be inextricably linked to poverty and household food insecurity rather than simply orphanhood.

Food distribution

Food distributions began on 24 April 2006, the day the project was officially launched, and increased steadily over the remainder of the year as registration progressed. Monthly distribution plans were prepared and agreed at RMC meetings. At the national level, WFP balanced food supply with the monthly distribution plans, to avoid unnecessary accumulation of food stocks at the regional level.

The NMC developed announcements for local radio and distribution points, informing the beneficiaries about distribution schedules and the importance of applying for CWG, as well as the eligibility criteria and procedure for doing so. Implementing partners identified up to five volunteers for each constituency, who were given food rations as an incentive to facilitate food distributions. The planned daily ration for each OVC consisted of 360 g of maize meal, 50 g of pulses, 20 g of vegetable oil and 100 g of CSB.

Lack of donor funding led to a major pipeline break in December 2006, which brought the distributions to a complete halt in January 2007, threatening the programme's viability. Fortunately, donors responded to this crisis, and new contributions allowed distributions to resume in February 2007. However, contributions were insufficient to procure the full food basket, and only maize meal, comprising 68 percent of the ration, was distributed from this point on, with the exception of one contribution of 154 mt of canned meat, which was used to substitute pulses for four months. The distribution of maize meal ensured the

Table 22.2 Total food distributions, by commodity type and region (mt)

Region	Maize meal	Pulses	Canned meat	Vegetable oil	CSB	Total
Caprivi	1 199	39	14	34	81	1 366
Ohangwena	2 068	34	30	15	96	2 243
Omusati	2 480	61	24	30	195	2 791
Oshana	3 402	54	34	42	218	3 750
Kavango	3 643	87	32	52	174	3 988
Oshikoto	1 945	61	20	34	205	2 265
Total	17 736	337	154	208	969	16 403

programme's operational integrity, albeit with a reduced ration, enabling the continuation of social mobilization around food distribution points, which was critical to OVCs' uptake of CWG. In total, 16,403 mt of food was distributed to more than 90,000 OVCs in the two years of the programme. Table 22.2 shows the quantities of food distributed by commodity type and region.

3. The hand-over: social mobilization and transfer to CWG

In June 2006, a team of local consultants was commissioned to review the mechanisms associated with the CWG system and to help identify potential bottlenecks that could hinder the systematic absorption into CWG of OVCs receiving food assistance.

The review provided several key recommendations such as the recruitment of Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare staff at the constituency level tasked with facilitating the transfer of OVCs to the CWG system and the widening of eligibility criteria for CWG. The Ministry recruited more than 100 volunteers, who were assigned to the 58 programme constituencies – larger constituencies received two volunteers each. The number of OVCs per care giver eligible to apply was increased from three to six, and the value of the OVC household income threshold for qualifying for CWG was increased from N\$600 to N\$1,000. Such measures increased the number of OVCs eligible to apply for CWG, and heightened community awareness of the importance of this process.

On completion of beneficiary registration in December 2006, the implementing partners' lists of food beneficiaries were computerized and the OVC data entered into a database. A local software company designed a computer program enabling the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare and WFP to carry out monthly cross-checks between the ministry database of OVCs receiving CWG and the programme's food distribution lists. This was valuable in identifying OVCs who had started to receive CWG and removing them from food assistance. The database system had the flexibility to reinstate names that were erroneously removed when field verification confirmed this was the case. Names could also be removed manually if field evidence showed a child to be in receipt of both food assistance and CWG.

The social mobilization campaign was essential for explaining to food recipients the importance of applying for CWG, so that all eligible OVCs could be transferred from food assistance to CWG within the programme's life time. To assist beneficiaries facing difficulties in obtaining the copies of documentation needed to support their CWG applications, mobile photocopiers were deployed to the field in remote locations. More than 100,000 grant application forms were printed and distributed to OVC care givers at food distribution points, using the

programme's logistics structures. Two stakeholder workshops were carried out in February and September 2007 to facilitate transfers from food assistance to CWG and to troubleshoot any associated operational issues that were impeding this important process. Throughout 2007 and the beginning of 2008, maintaining regular food distributions was absolutely essential to the success of the social mobilization taking place around food distribution points.

According to the project design, transfers to CWG were expected to take-off in the second quarter of 2007, with 20,000 OVCs being removed from food lists and included in CWG every quarter until March 2008. However, by the end of the programme only 25,082 OVCs had been removed from food lists; a significant number, but considerably fewer than planned. Of these, 13,945 OVCs were positively identified as having been transferred from food aid to CWG, while 4,922 removals were to eliminate duplicate OVC names from beneficiary lists. A further 6,215 OVCs reached 18 years of age during the programme, so were no longer eligible for the transfer to CWG.

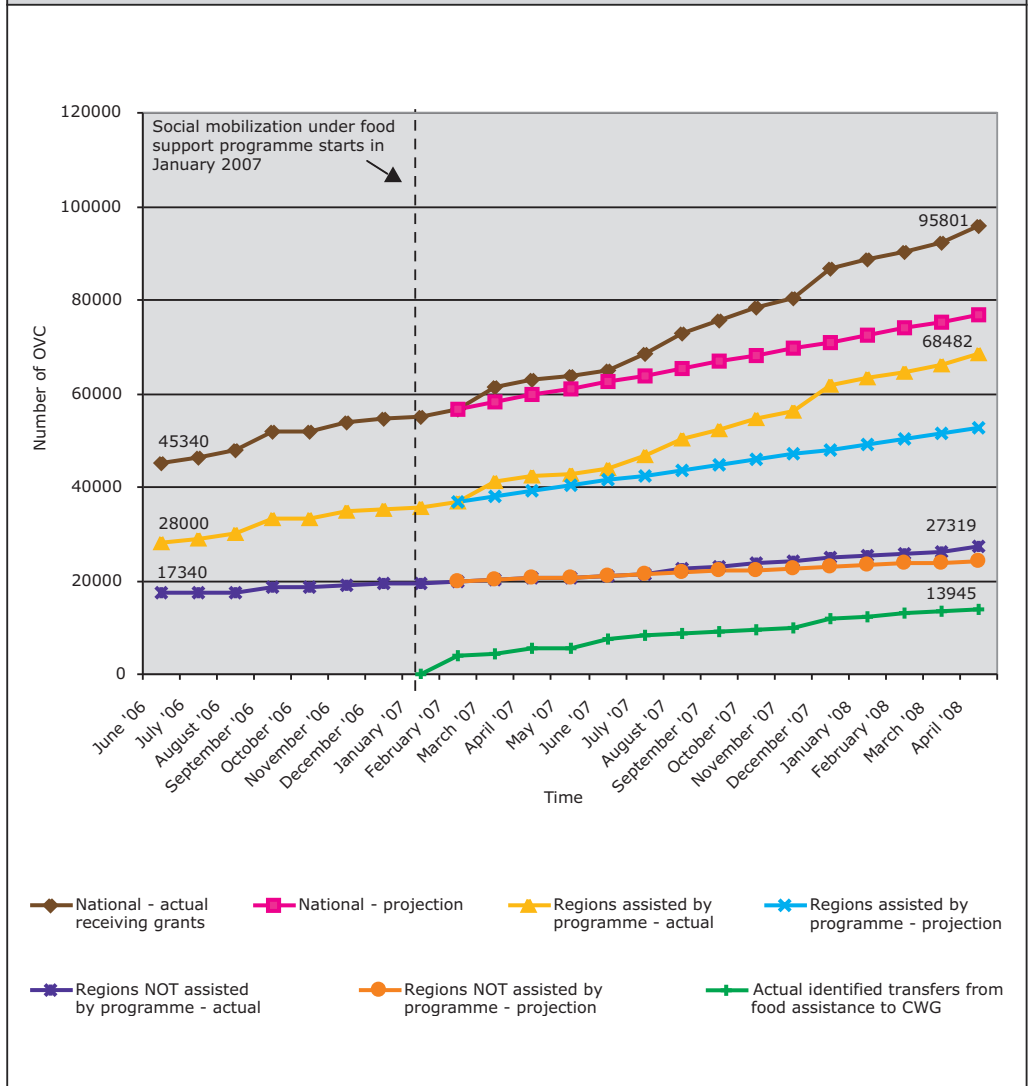
Inconsistencies between the food lists and the CWG lists was a critical issues, with major differences in the spelling and presentation of OVCs' names, dates of birth and care giver details. It is estimated that in addition to the 13,945 positively identified OVCs who transferred from food assistance to CWG, a further 11,000 food beneficiaries took up CWG but were not removed from the food lists owing to data inconsistencies and the complexity of cross-referencing names with the computer software.

As shown in Figure 22.1, the numbers of children receiving CWG in the six programme regions increased at a significantly higher rate than it did in the regions not receiving food assistance. Over the two years of the second phase of OVC food support, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare increased CWG coverage in the six programme regions from just 28,000 in April 2006 to 68,482 at the end of April 2008, an increase of more than 40,000 children. This success may be largely attributed to the catalytic effect of the food assistance and social mobilization, which can reasonably be estimated to have resulted in the uptake of at least 16,000 more OVCs into the CWG system than would otherwise have been the case.

Another issue identified was the cases where OVC care givers were not aware that a biological parent was already receiving CWG on behalf of a child, meaning that some OVCs were not benefiting from the CWG issued in their names. At an estimated 45 percent of programme beneficiaries,⁶ far more food-insecure OVCs than originally expected were not eligible for transfer to CWG, because they were not orphans or because their care givers were unable to produce the documentation required to qualify for grants. A major ongoing challenge is the identification of a suitable mechanism for supporting the many very food-

insecure OVCs who currently do not qualify for CWG or do not have the necessary documentation to apply. The absence of documentation is often compounded by absent or unknown parents.

Figure 22.1 Impact of OVC food support programme on uptake of CWG



Source: OVC Food Support Programme

4. Challenges and lessons learned for future programmes

4.1 The programme as a potential model for other countries

At the end of 2006, an external evaluation of the Southern Africa regional protracted relief and recovery operation (PRRO 10310.0) took place across the seven countries of implementation, including Namibia.

The evaluation identified the programme approach in Namibia as “a potential model – for other countries both within and outside the region – for Social Protection Programmes aimed at meeting chronic food and nutrition emergencies related to the HIV epidemic”. The evaluation also noted that the programme “has the potential to provide important regional lessons and guidance”. Positive aspects of the programme included: strong partnerships among the government, WFP and NGO implementing partners; capacity building in social protection; a pragmatic exit strategy; and good practices such as community-based targeting, a social welfare service approach and a staged transfer from food to cash support.

However, the evaluation also identified challenges arising from the limited number of NGOs in Namibia with experience of food aid and the capacity to act as implementing partners, which meant that implementing partners were sometimes overstretched. In addition, failure to convince donors of the merits of the programme approach resulted in chronic underfunding, which had a negative impact on implementation.

4.2 Weak donor support

Donor support for a food aid intervention in a lower middle-income country such as Namibia was weak, despite the programme’s innovative approach and the relative cost-efficiency of delivering food aid as a safety net in Namibia. A study carried out for WFP in 2006 and examining the potential for using vouchers to deliver assistance to vulnerable groups found the alpha value⁷ of delivering in-kind food for the OVC food support programme to be quite favourable under the market conditions prevailing at that time.

Funding shortfalls had negative impacts on programme implementation, almost forcing premature closure of the programme in January 2007, when a complete pipeline break suspended distributions. However, by reducing the ration to maize meal, operational integrity was maintained, allowing critical social mobilization at food distributions to continue uninterrupted. This allowed OVCs’ uptake of CWG – one of the programme’s primary objectives – to proceed as planned, although the nutrition impact will undoubtedly have been compromised as a result of the partial ration cuts.

4.3 Challenges remain, but hand-over was successful

The exit strategy, a key element of the programme, linked food assistance with the established national safety net of CWG administered by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare. Beneficiary selection criteria for the programme were designed to include food-insecure OVCs eligible to apply for CWG. This paved the way for OVCs registered into the programme to move from food assistance to CWG. Social mobilization around food distribution points, and an information campaign sensitizing care givers to the importance of applying for CWG were critical activities designed to help increase the number of CWG applications from within the food beneficiary group.

The Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare/WFP OVC food support programme had a significant and positive impact on OVCs' uptake of CWG. This represents a valuable strengthening and expansion of an important government social safety net designed to protect one of the most vulnerable groups in society – OVCs. During the two years of the programme, the number of OVCs receiving CWG in programme areas increased by more than 40,000, which is significantly more than could otherwise have been expected given the rate of increase prior to the programme. CHS also indicated that food support was an appropriate intervention for helping to expand CWG coverage and acting as a temporary safety net, because household food consumption was improved in chronically food-insecure beneficiary households during the programme. However, the increase in CWG coverage was significantly lower than the programme planning targets, highlighting a number of other issues.

The lower than expected uptake of CWG can be largely attributed to two main factors. First, many eligible children or care givers lacked the documentation needed to apply for CWG. The second round of the WFP CHS estimated that many programme beneficiaries fell into this category. Clearly, a concerted effort is needed to improve the population's access to basic documentation, so that those in need can obtain the services and safety nets available from the government.

Second, during the transfer of OVCs from food assistance to CWG it became apparent that as many as 45 percent of programme beneficiaries were not eligible for CWG because they were not orphans. Although this situation resulted from weaknesses in the initial registration of beneficiaries into the programme, it highlights the very important issue of chronic food insecurity and undernourishment among vulnerable children who are not necessarily orphans. The second round of the CHS noted that many children who were not included in the programme would also benefit from social safety net support. This is reflected in preliminary findings from the 2006 Demographic and Health Survey, which show child malnutrition to be a major threat in Namibia, where

30 percent of children under 5 do not receive adequate nutrition and care to ensure proper growth and development.

The high level of engagement in the programme by regional- and local-level stakeholders undoubtedly contributed to its achievements and can largely be attributed to the process of consulting stakeholders from the outset, and involving regional councils in the programme design and selection of implementing partners.

4.4 Concluding remarks

Despite the important achievements of this second phase of OVC food support in catalysing the expansion of CWG coverage and mitigating the impact of hunger for many OVCs, there remain significant challenges in finding longer-term solutions for the many children who still remain at serious risk owing to their exposure to poverty and chronic hunger. Food assistance can continue to play an important and relevant role in the development of essential safety nets in Namibia, particularly for vulnerable groups such as OVCs. However, the future role of food assistance needs to be defined in the context of a comprehensive review of national safety nets, a possible multisectoral approach and appropriate funding models.

In the era of high food prices that threaten to plunge many millions more people worldwide into poverty and chronic malnutrition, the need to build and strengthen safety nets has a new sense of urgency, which demands the attention of all stakeholders.

¹ A Gini coefficient of 0 represents absolute equality, and one of 100 absolute inequality (UNDP, *Human Development Report 2007/2008*).

² Namibia Demographic and Health Survey, 2006/2007.

³ Prevalence in pregnant women, *Report on the 2008 National Sentinel Survey*, Ministry of Health and Social Services, Namibia.

⁴ UNDP *Human Development Report 2007*.

⁵ Namibia Demographic and Health Survey, 2006/2007.

⁶ Namibia Community Household Survey, Round 2, WFP/Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, December 2007.

⁷ The alpha value compares the cost of delivering in-kind food assistance with the equivalent value on local markets: *Namibia Food Voucher Pilot Project – A Feasibility Study*, John Magistro, November 2007.