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**Matching Food Security Analysis to Context: the experience of the  
Somalia Food Security Assessment Unit**

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## Executive Summary

This case study reviews the experience of the Somalia Food Security Assessment Unit (FSAU) in operating a food security information system in the context of a complex emergency. In particular, it explores the *linkages* between some *specific features of the protracted emergency context in Somalia* and selected *conceptual and operational aspects of food security information work*. Six characteristics of the Somalia context are reviewed:

- a) the prolonged absence of a central government;
- b) the dispersed nature of the conflict;
- c) the high degree of agro-ecological, economic and socio-cultural diversity within the country;
- d) the central role of remittances in food security in Somalia;
- e) the degradation of common property resources; and
- f) the existence of a well-established external assistance community network.

The paper further examines the *implications of these context characteristics* for the set-up and operations of *FSAU field monitoring component*, for collaboration with *decision-makers* and for meeting the *diverse information needs* of different audiences. It also analyses the scope for linking *food security and nutrition analysis* and explores the role of *conflict analysis* and of *gender* in food security analysis. Background information on the food security situation in Somalia and an overview of some key features of the FSAU set the framework for this analysis.

The *prolonged absence of a central government* and the *dispersed nature of conflict* have been determinant factors in the set-up and operations of the *FSAU field monitoring component*. The lack of indigenous data collection capacity has prompted the FSAU to establish a comprehensive field monitoring structure consisting of 22 professionals. While these initially kept a low profile, reporting on a set of indicators to the Unit's head office in Nairobi, they have increasingly assumed the role of local food security information focal points. Under conditions of continued insecurity and absence of government structures, the operational cost for this field component to the FSAU remains high. Innovative approaches for the institutionalization of information work and for building local capacity under these constraints need to be devised.

Somalia's *geographic diversity* in terms of people's livelihood systems, security and stability, governance and socio-economic development means that food security information must cover a *wide range* of aspects, from quantifying and qualifying *relief needs* to helping plan *longer-term programmes* that address the underlying causes of food insecurity. The FSAU has developed a rudimentary *conceptual framework on the adaptation of food security information work* to varied requirements ranging from meeting short-term relief information needs to supporting rehabilitation and development policies and programmes. As non-emergency information needs expand, partnerships and networks will become increasingly important, requiring a change in the Unit's operational priorities from primary data collection towards data and information co-ordination. Conceptual guidance on adaptations needed for food security information work to cover short-term information needs as well as emerging and diversifying information needs for longer-term food security planning is imperative beyond the Somalia setting and should therefore be further developed.

The *role of remittances*, the *sustainability of the resource base* for *long-term food security*, and macro-economic shocks, such as the *livestock ban*, are critical contextual factors likely to increase in relevance as the FSAU moves towards *covering a broader user spectrum*. While remittances play a key role in the short-term coping capacity of some vulnerable livelihood groups, they should also be factored as potential investments into rehabilitation and developing programming. The degradation of natural resources, for example as

triggered by charcoal burning for export to the Gulf States, can become a threat to long-term food security. Therefore, as the FSAU is increasingly being called upon to support longer-term programmes as well as to inform short-term responses, ways to better integrate remittance flows, ecological threats, macro-economic shocks and other factors affecting long-term food security into food security analysis need to be identified.

The existence of a highly formalised and well-organized and co-ordinated *external assistance community* under the Somalia Aid Co-ordination Body (SACB) umbrella has a strong bearing on the work of the FSAU. In the various committees of this body the FSAU finds its main audience, which is a rationale for maintaining a Nairobi base with strong analytical and communication capacities. The presence of the SACB is also instrumental in the adoption of the *forum approach*, whereby those involved in the provision of information and those implementing assistance programmes create a joint platform aimed at deepening food security analysis, discussing findings and outlining various intervention options. Whether the forum approach can be replicated in other complex emergency settings is likely to depend on the willingness of donors to invest in the co-ordination of the assistance community.

The dynamic and diverse nature of instability and conflict has implications for the modalities of integrating conflict analysis and food security analysis. While *conflict analysis needs to be an integral part of food security analysis* in complex emergency contexts, mechanisms which feed conflict analysis by expert partners (e. g. the UNCU) into food security analysis appear to be preferable to those which would require FSAU field monitors to get directly involved. FSAU field monitors' core tasks could be compromised and security risks may increase when openly carrying out conflict analysis. Encompassing conflict analysis not only entails assessing the implications of conflict for food security, but also for early warning of conflict. In the case of the latter, closer partnerships between food security early warning and conflict early warning systems can be built, both at national and international levels.

Given its involvement in both *food security* and *nutrition work*, the FSAU is in a good position to further *integrate* these, both conceptually and operationally. At the conceptual level, the use of nutrition information in the definition of household food economy profiles may be useful. Vice-versa, HEA-informed nutrition analysis will be in a better position to separate food-related from health-related causes of malnutrition and therefore arrive at a more comprehensive analysis of food insecurity. At the operational level, producing a joint information product, rather than separate "Food Security Reports" and "Nutrition Updates", could sharpen the focus on users and their food and nutrition security responses. Integration at this level, however, would require agreement among the donors of the two FSAU sub-components.

The gender dimension of food security information is still largely overlooked, ranging from the gender imbalance in the composition of the monitoring team to the need for gender disaggregated data collection and a gender-focused analytical framework. The lack of gender sensitivity in food security information work in emergencies is so widespread that a consultancy aimed at exploring ways to "engender" the work of the unit in terms of data collection and analysis could benefit not only the work of the Somalia Unit, but the work of food security information systems in other emergency contexts as well.

## 1. Introduction

This case study highlights selected specific characteristics and contextual features of the protracted emergency in Somalia and analyses their relevance for food security assessment work, focusing on the experience of the Somalia Food Security Assessment Unit (FSAU). Further, the paper identifies innovative approaches developed by the Unit and points to the challenges being faced in addressing certain dynamics of protracted emergency and food insecurity in Somalia.

The audience of this paper comprises those involved in the design, operation and funding of food security information activities. The case study is intended to contribute toward a discussion of key factors related to the conceptual and operational improvement of food security information work in complex emergency contexts. Several of the points raised herewith will be of added value once placed and discussed in a comparative context.

The paper is based on a review of key documentation on Somalia, on the FSAU and on selected FSAU products as well as on key person interviews with FSAU staff as well as FSAU users from a two-week visit to Nairobi in July 2002.

The paper is divided in six sections. Section 2 reviews the status of food insecurity and vulnerability in Somalia. Section 3 highlights the specificity of the political, socio-economic and agricultural context while Section 4 outlines the operational setup, key characteristics, and products/services of the FSAU. Section 5 draws attention to the implications of the emergency context for the work and operations of the FSAU. Finally, Section 6 summarises the main conclusions, with a view to identifying the distinctive elements that the Somalia experience brings to food security information work.

## 2. The status of food insecurity and vulnerability in Somalia

Somalia ranks among the least five developed countries in the world by UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI) (see Box 1 for key indicators) (Marchal *et al.*, 2000). Prolonged food insecurity and vulnerability resulting from limited employment opportunities, inflation, volatile markets for cereals and a ban on livestock exports, combined with successive years of crop failure, flooding, conflict and demographic changes have created a protracted emergency, with considerable variation in the degree of vulnerability, insecurity and economic viability among different regions (UN, 2002).

In particular, twelve years of near continuous warfare have taken their toll on the civilian population of Somalia, causing injury, disease, displacement, and hunger. War-related injuries and deaths, including those caused by the millions of landmines in the country, have remained consistently high throughout the past decade. Regular outbreaks of epidemic diseases such as cholera, tuberculosis, malaria, and leishmaniasis (*kala azar*), plus chronic food shortages, contribute to the death of nearly a quarter of all children before their fifth year and to an average life expectancy of only 46 years.<sup>1</sup>

Food security trends have fluctuated depending on changing environmental, security and market conditions. Thus, it has been estimated that one in every five harvests in Somalia is a partial failure and one in ten is a complete write-off (UNDP, 2001:67).

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<sup>1</sup> See "Médecins Sans Frontières issues "Top 10" list of the year's most underreported humanitarian stories": War, Disease, Hunger, and Lack of Health care Contribute to Mortality in Somalia <http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/6686f45896f15dbc852567ae00530132/adc95658b4e9615c85256ca200734a83?OpenDocument>

### Box 1: Somalia - key indicators

- Out of a population of 7 million, about 750,000 Somalis are chronically vulnerable, including 300,000 internally displaced nationwide.
- Malnutrition of children aged five and under continues to be a chronic problem in the southern and central regions, with rates as high as 39 and 27% in some areas. Out of every 1,000 infants born, 224 die before they reach the age of five.
- Life expectancy for men is 45 years and for women 48 years.
- About 49% of the population lives without access to sanitation and 77% without access to safe water.
- The Gross Enrolment Ratio is only 17%.
- Only 17% of the adult population is literate.
- An estimated 1.2 to 2 million landmines have been laid throughout Somalia since 1997, inhibiting free movement, trade and humanitarian access.

Source: Highlights CAP 2003

Population sub-groups most vulnerable to food insecurity include (*ibid.*:72):

- Riverine Bantu agricultural communities in the Middle and Lower Juba regions. Aid agencies identify these as the most chronically poor in Somalia
- Internally Displaced populations in urban areas. Nutritional surveys conducted in Somalia since 1980 reveal that IDPs are consistently the group that suffer most from acute malnutrition
- Returning refugees
- Poor agro-pastoralists in southern Somalia
- Urban poor in southern Somalia

*In southern Somalia, Bay and Bakol* were chronically food insecure due to conflict and displacement between 1995 and 1999. In 1997-98, drought and flooding resulted in the country's worst harvest since 1994, leading to the largest food aid intervention since the famine, targeting 700,000 beneficiaries (*Ibid.*:67). Improved security after 1999 in combination with good *gu* and *deyr* rains resulted in the highest food production since 1994 in irrigated and rainfed sectors. The estimated number of food insecure people fell from 750,000 to 400,000. But food insecurity had again increased by mid-2001, as a result of failure of the 2001 *gu* rains in the south and the embargo on livestock imports from the Horn of Africa by Gulf States and inflation.

*In northern Somalia*, food security has generally been better than in the south in the last decade due to better physical security and a greater reliance on pastoral production. It has been argued that nomadic pastoralists who are mobile and are able to move their assets are better able to cope with conflict and climatic stress than sedentary farmers (*Ibid.*:68-69). However, in recent years, macro-economic shocks have not spared pastoralists and livestock traders. They have been hard hit by the ban of livestock imports from Somalia by countries along the Arabian Peninsula due to Rift Valley fever, which has caused substantial loss of trade-related employment and income and has affected the livelihoods of a large number of pastoral households.

### 3. The specificity of the Somalia protracted emergency context<sup>2</sup>

Certain characteristics of the protracted emergency in Somalia have implications for the conceptual framework and operational set-up of early warning and food security information

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed context analysis see Menkhaus (2000)

work. The following context-specific characteristics of the Somali protracted emergency context are reviewed below:

- a) Prolonged absence of a central government
- b) Dispersed inter-clan nature of conflict
- c) The 'tragedy of the commons' in prolonged conflict
- d) Agro-ecological, economic and socio-cultural diversity: pastoralism, agro-pastoralism and riverine farming
- e) An externalised assistance community network: the SACB
- f) The central role of remittances in the Somali economy

### **3.1 Prolonged absence of a central government**

A distinct characteristic of the political emergency in Somalia is the long-standing absence of a central government. In fact, the sudden collapse and implosion of the Somali state at the overthrow of the Siyad Barre regime in 1991 by opposing clans has been described as a unique event in the history of nations (Coletta and Cullen, 2000:60). Somalia has been without a central government ever since. *State collapse, lawlessness, banditry and inter-clan warfare over the last decade resulted in widespread famine* that claimed the lives of about a quarter of a million Somalis (Hansch *et al.*, 1994:24). The fighting destroyed agricultural communities in southern Somalia and generated enormous refugee flows and internal displacement.<sup>3</sup>

State fragmentation and localization of political authority translated into varied structures of governance and authority at community, district and regional levels aimed at filling the vacuum of a defunct central government. Politics were established in the northwest "Republic of Somaliland" in 1991 and in the northeast "Puntland State of Somalia", with public administrations that fulfilled some basic functions of government. In the two Southern regions of Bay and Bakol, the Rahanweyn Resistance Army (RRA) set up an administration in 1999 (UNDP, 2001:34).

The most significant development since 2000 has been the establishment of a "Transitional National Government" (TNG) in Mogadishu. Its authority, however, is limited to a part of the capital and it appears to enjoy more support in the international community than at home. Warlord activity and external interference *prolong instability*, although the autonomous regions of Puntland and Somaliland have experienced greater stability for most of this period.

The protracted absence of government structures has critical implications for food security information work, particularly in terms of operating and maintaining a field data collection system and in terms of information audiences. These aspects will be further discussed in Section 5.

### **3.2 Dispersed inter-clan nature of conflict**

Another feature of the Somali emergency context is that most armed conflict since 1995 has been within, rather than between, major clans. An analysis of the root causes of conflict shows that clan divisions have been used by elites in the fight to control resources in the context of a weak state (Nafziger *et al.*, 2000: 37). Factions that were once relatively cohesive have since splintered into warring sub-clan militias.

The UN peace enforcement operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) from 1993 to 1995 succeeded in ending the famine in some regions and facilitated the return of refugees and displaced

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<sup>3</sup> It has been estimated that between one and two million Somalis have been displaced either internally or across borders. (Refugee Policy Group, 1994:114).

persons. However, UNOSOM left the country in March 1995 without achieving national reconciliation, and having generated only modest support for the massive task of reconstruction. In a 2002 report, the UN Secretary-General described the country as one of the most dangerous environments in which the UN operates. For this reason, UN plans of a peace-building mission have been indefinitely postponed.<sup>4</sup>

Today, Somalia is less vulnerable to major armed clashes, but more prone to smaller, localized, and less predictable armed hostilities (Menkhaus, 1998a), which affect food security and accessibility as well as agricultural recovery. The dispersed nature of the conflict bears on how linkages between conflict and food insecurity feature in food security analysis, conceptually as well as operationally. Clan, state, aid, and dynamics in agricultural systems are important determinants of conflict that need to be considered in food security analysis. So are the different ways that men and women are affected by conflict and how they contribute to conflict resolution. Further, operational adjustments to conditions of physical insecurity and dispersed conflict have been necessary: in the early years of the FSAU, field monitors reported coded indicator-based data by radio to Nairobi.

### 3.3 The degradation of common property resources in prolonged conflict

Prior to the collapse of the Somali state, a triple land classification system had been reduced into a double classification system. In Bay region in the past, land used to be classified as private farmland; communal, clan or village land; and remote open access land (Shepherd, 1988:6)<sup>5</sup>. In the attempt to create a modern nation state, the government abolished the clan as a political entity, and, with it, communal land rights. Thereafter, communal land was treated with open access land as state land, and only the sanctity of private farmland was upheld. One motive behind this action may have been to reduce local conflict (see Box 2).

However, the disintegration of the state intensified decentralised, clan-based violence driven by the struggle over resources. Thus, the degradation of common property resources had not been resolved when the right to manage communal land was withdrawn, but worsened even more following the collapse of the state. The examples of negative environmental impact are manifold: Deforestation through charcoal burning and silting of rivers result in extreme events that are exacerbated by the lack of state control. Access to communal water points is restricted by private control over land.

#### Box 2: Land access and conflict

"In the old days we would kill people who came and grazed in our area without permission...That is why when the republic came, it cancelled all the grazing reserves: to stop the fighting."

Village Elders of one Bay region village.  
Source: Shepherd (1988)

The seriousness of the environmental decline is expressed in a letter by Horn Relief used for advocacy work at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development:

"The illegal charcoal trade in Somalia is devastating the fragile arid and semi-arid ecosystems and turning the country into a useless desert. Currently 70-100 year old acacia trees are being clear cut to feed the enormous demand for charcoal in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Hundreds of

<sup>4</sup> Report of the Secretary General on the Situation in Somalia (S/2002/189), cited in: International Crisis Group (2002).

<sup>5</sup> In his essay "The Tragedy of the Commons" Garrett Hardin describes a traditional English village pasture open to all, where herdsmen can freely graze their cattle. Each herdsman, however, has the incentive to graze as many cattle as possible in order to obtain greater profits from their sale. The consequence is that the herdsmen become trapped in a race to increase their herd on what is a finite piece of pasture land, and herein lies the tragedy. The carrying capacity of the pasture eventually is exceeded and the negative effects of overgrazing becomes a detriment to all users. See: <http://www.ceip.org/files/events/TragedyCommons.asp?EventID=48>.

square kilometres of trees and shrubs are cleared every month and turned into waste lands that are unable to support vegetation or livestock, while each month boats loaded with 10,000-30,000 tons of charcoal set sail for the Gulf countries. The most visible effect of harvesting trees and bushes for charcoal is deforestation, soil erosion, and ultimately desertification. Deforestation and desertification will have major adverse effects on rainfall availability, capacity of soil to hold water and support vegetation, and local climates. Areas that have been cleared by charcoal burners no longer hold life, and remain uninhabitable by Somalia's pastoralists.<sup>6</sup>

The degradation of communal and state land affects long-term food security, thereby constituting an important component of food security analysis. In particular, it raises the need to address not only short-term, but also medium- and longer-term food security information issues.

### **3.4 Agro-ecological, economic and socio-cultural diversity: pastoralism, agro-pastoralism and riverine farming**

Given the importance of intra-clan relationships in localized conflict in Somalia as described above, the *socio-cultural dimension of people's livelihood strategies need to be taken into account in efforts aimed at improving food security and agricultural livelihood strategies* (Longley *et al.*, 2001). Somalia is highly diverse in terms of agro-ecological conditions and the prevailing livelihood strategies of its people. The three main agricultural livelihood systems in Somalia are: pastoralism, agro-pastoralism and riverine cropping, as illustrated in Figure 1. *Nomadic pastoralists or semi-nomadic herders constitute about 60% of the population.* Farmers, mostly in southern Somalia near the Juba and Shabelle rivers, make up about 20 to 25%. Town dwellers account for 15-20% of the population.<sup>7</sup>

Livelihood patterns are differentiated along ethnic lines. For example, agro-pastoralists and riverine farmers tend to come from the minority Rahanweyn and Bantu ethnic groups. These, however, have traditionally been regarded as second-class citizens by the four main pastoral clans of the country and have been both socially and politically marginalised over time. As agro-pastoralism is becoming more common among traditionally pastoralist Marehan communities, conflict over agricultural resources is likely to increase (Longley *et al.*, 2001).

When allocating relief, rehabilitation and development resources to different livelihood groups in particular, it is important to consider that such resource allocations can become easily causes of tension. Thus, it is argued that *food security information cannot be limited to bio-physical and economic aspects of food and agricultural systems, but needs to be integrated with socio-cultural and political information.*

Southern Somalia has two very distinct cropping systems: irrigated and rain-fed. Riverine farmers and agro-pastoralists alike undertake both types of cropping. Irrigated agriculture is concentrated along the middle and lower stretch of the Shabelle River and some areas of the Juba River. The irrigated areas are dependent on the flow of water in the Shabelle and Juba rivers which is affected by rainfall in the catchment areas of eastern and southern Ethiopia, and of northern Kenya. This is one reason why *food security analysis has to cut across national borders.*

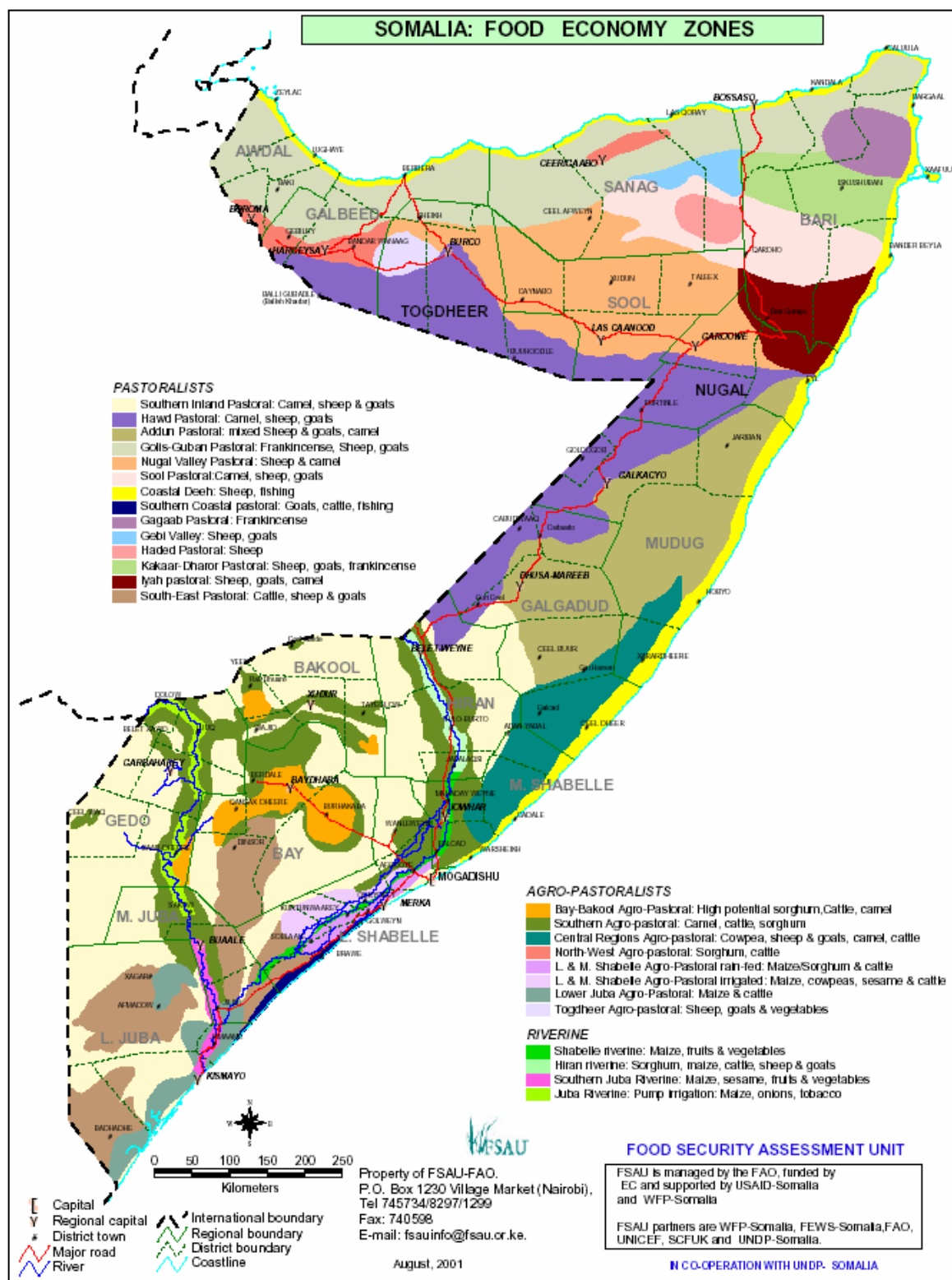
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<sup>6</sup> Petition by Fatima Jibrell, Managing Director of Horn-Relief, Somalia to Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al Nahyan, President of the UAE, and, to His Excellency King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz Al-Soud, King of Saudi Arabia, presented at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). Cited from correspondence on Horn Relief's Report on the WSSD, 12 September 2002.

<sup>7</sup> UN Somalia website: <http://www.unsomalia.net/infocenter/factsheets.htm>



Figure 1: Main livelihood and food economy zones in Somalia



Rain-fed agriculture, the main form of settled crop production accounting for about 77% of the total cultivated land, is concentrated in the inter-riverine belt and follows a weak bimodal rainfall pattern as described in Box 3. The three most important regions for rain-fed sorghum production are the Bay, Bakool and Gedo regions respectively (Figure 1). Despite existing insecurity, there is movement of goods and people both within and between the rainfed and

irrigated areas. This has important implications for food and seed availability, as total crop failure under both these conditions simultaneously is highly unlikely and therefore an exchange is likely to take place. Thus, *local commodity exchange needs to play a role in food security analysis.*

### 3.5 An externalised assistance community network: the SACB

Since the withdrawal of UNOSOM troops in 1994, the expatriate presence in Somalia has gradually dwindled in response to a succession of security incidents. Programme implementation and information collection is therefore largely dependent upon Somalis (ENN, 1998), with a large portion of the international Somalia assistance community posted in Nairobi, Kenya. The Somalia Aid Co-ordination Body (SACB), plays a key role in inter-sectoral coordination for the international assistance provided for Somalia. Comprised of donors, UN agencies and international and local NGOs, the SACB operates at both the policy level (through an Executive Committee chaired by a donor) and at the operational level (through a Sectoral Steering Committee chaired by the UN Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator).

As most users of FSAU information are members of the SACB, the former's existence is likely to have a strong bearing on the structure and operations of the FSAU. This influence is expressed in the description of the FSAU as "an information system in exile" by the Oxford management group, following the Unit's 1998 midterm evaluation. It is a view that is not fully shared by the FSAU management, which stresses that efforts that have been made to strengthen the Somalia field assessment component. Some of the Nairobi focus of the FSAU reflects how the Somalia assistance community organized the SACB.

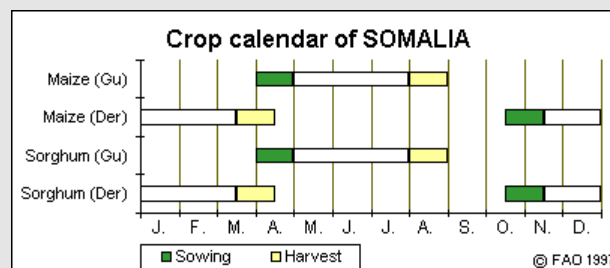
### 3.6 The central role of remittances in food security

Remittances in Somalia play a key role in household food and livelihood security and in the national economy. Thus, factoring remittance flows in food security analysis is an important challenge. The Somali diaspora, itself largely a by-product of protracted conflict, has been estimated at over one million. Their remittances are mostly used for household consumption (food), children's education, family events such as weddings, births or funerals; and the establishment of micro-enterprises, such as shops and kiosks (Africa Action, 1998). In the 1990s, the wider diaspora, partly formed by refugee outflows, accounted for about \$500 million remitted annually to Somalia without Somaliland, with similar amounts for Somaliland (Horst and Van Hear, 2002).

Taking remittances into account in food security analysis is significant, given that these have different implications for different population groups. In the 1993 UN Consolidated Appeal for Somalia, for example, it is argued that *internally displaced people may have more difficulties in accessing clan support systems and receiving remittances than people returning from exile as they have may have access to clan support systems and remittances* (UN, 2002:17). Capturing these differences in entitlements has a bearing on food and livelihood security.

#### Box 3: Rainfall and cropping patterns in Somalia

Southern Somalia has a weak bimodal rainfall pattern, with the main planting rains being received in what is known as the Gu season from April to July, followed by the shorter and less reliable Deyr season from September to November. From the end of the Deyr to the start of the next Gu season is an intense dry period referred to as the Jilaal.



The weak bimodal pattern sometimes allows for crops such as sorghum to ratoon from the Gu to the Deyr season. Ratooning avoids the need to re-plant the crop and hence reduces the seed requirement. Food security monitoring of bi-modal rainfall patterns the complex interaction between the seasons and among different agro-ecological zones need to be captured in the analysis.

#### 4. Food security information in Somalia: the Food Security Assessment Unit (FSAU)<sup>8</sup>

The Food Security Assessment Unit (FSAU), established in 1994 by WFP Somalia and USAID and managed by FAO with EC funding and USAID support since January 2000, provides comprehensive and in-depth information and analysis on the food security situation and nutritional status of people living in Somalia as well as an early warning system of potential food crises.

By focusing on the underlying causes of food insecurity and on the impact of evolving food security problems, the FSAU is able to provide technical assistance into short-term emergency food relief intervention as well as medium- to long-term planning and programming by UN agencies, donors, NGOs and the Somali people aimed at strengthening the coping capacity of Somali households (see Box 4). More than 150 international NGOs, donors, UN agencies, embassies and institutes subscribe to FSAU information products which are often the only, and most reliable, source of information on food security on Somalia.

In collaboration with UNICEF and others, the Unit has carried out nutrition and food security workshops to identify ways of reducing malnutrition and make interventions more relevant to beneficiaries. Training in data collection for local counterparts, including practical field-testing of tools and protocols, has led to improvements in the effective use by Somalis of food security information and data (UN, 2002).

##### Box 4: Strengths of FSAU

*“The FSAU is one of our main sources of information on the humanitarian and food security situation in Somalia”, argued the Deputy Head of Information, ICRC. “Due to its extensive field network and technical specialists, the information is of high quality that cannot be easily reproduced by other agencies.”*

International, bilateral organizations and NGOs are reliant on the information that the FSAU produces for general background and advocacy purposes, and Somali groups recognize the role that the FSAU plays in representing the food security and nutrition situation to the international community. More specifically, the use of FSAU information has had an impact in terms of adjusted estimates for food aid requirements, and improved targeting of geographical areas and population groups most in need. FSAU information has enabled the Somalia Aid Co-ordination Body to plan an early response to identified food security problems and thus contributed to an improved coordination of the humanitarian community.

*Source:* Author’s interview; McEwan and van Roosbroeck (2002)

#### 4.1 The operational set-up

##### *Field team*

The FSAU field team is composed of twenty-two *Field Monitors (FMs)*. These are Somali professionals that initially participated in seasonal crop surveys at the planting (establishment) and harvest stages for the two major cropping seasons (*dyer* and *gu*). While each of these surveys took about 15 to 20 working days, many of the field monitors were then taken on permanently at the end of 1998 (Shoham and Kangyangwa, 1998). All of them are male and the majority are agronomists, with only two having a livestock background. The FMs are concentrated in southern Somalia, with fewer in the north-east, north-west and central regions. Four senior FMs were appointed as focal points in March 2002, with a view to creating local teams.

The Nairobi based *Field Team Manager (FTM)* and the *Assistant Livestock Officer (ALO)* are responsible for supervising the operational aspects of the field team; provide training support

<sup>8</sup> For more information on the FSAU organizational set-up and activities, and products, see <http://www.unsomalia.net/FSAU/index.htm>

for the crop and livestock assessment activities; and assist with networking with partners in the field. A *Field Operational Support Officer (FOSO)*, recruited in June 2002, is responsible for training and supporting the decentralization process.

#### *Core Unit*

The Unit in Nairobi is headed by a *Project Co-ordinator*, who since June 2002 works alongside a Somali *National Co-ordinator*. The Analysis Team further included a *Food Security Analyst*, who left his assignment in July, with his responsibilities now partly shared among *Assistant Food Security Analyst*, a Somali and former Field Monitor, and the *Head of Information*. There have been changes to a SC-UK seconded *Household Economy Approach Post*, which was instrumental in mainstreaming HEA methodology, but which will not be continued for a third year as originally planned. The Position of the *Livestock Specialist* (Pastoral Livelihoods Specialist) was only filled for eight months. The important positions of *GIS Technician and Data Entry Analyst* are held by Kenyan nationals and the *Information and Communication Officer* Position is held by a locally recruited British National. There are no Somali staff members in the information management section of FSAU (data base and GIS). The expatriate *Head of Nutrition* co-ordinates nutrition activities and advises and supervises four nutritionists and one nutrition monitor (Somali national). In addition to the core staff several months of international consultancy have been used for developing the household economy approach, for conducting a "users survey", for hiring an Information Technology consultant, and for editing and workshop facilitation services.

#### **4.2 Conceptual framework: household economy approach**

The FSAU uses the household economy approach (HEA) to identify how rural households make ends meet both under normal and stress conditions. It thus analyses the effects of external shocks, such as drought, crop failure or the livestock ban and to predict how households will respond by wealth group and season. As a result of this process, a contextual and dynamic picture is created adding significant value to other food security indicators. The advantages of HEA is that it brings into sharp focus on food access rather than merely food availability, and underscores how risks and shocks have different potential impacts, depending on the socio-economic status of households and their ability to expand or extend existing food and income sources to meet food shortfalls (McEwan and van Roosbroeck, 2002).

HEA divides the Somali population into four main food economy zones (FEZs): pastoralist, agro-pastoralist, urban and riverine (see Figure 1). Households in each of these groups access food and income in a similar way and share similar livelihood characteristics. Further field analysis subdivides these four groups into 22 FEZ's. Each FEZ has a baseline profile describing how in a normal year, households in that FEZ will access their food sources, income and expenditure, identifying a 'reference' year as well as detailing 'usual' coping mechanisms and wealth breakdown. Baseline profiles are stored in the FSAU database.

Baseline information for each FEZ can be entered into a spreadsheet (an electronic analysis tool) which then assesses the multi-dimensional factor of a food security problem for that FEZ. For example, crop loss, milk loss, decline in livestock price and staple food price increase, can all be acknowledged and assessed at once by the spreadsheet which then calculates a 'deficit'. The Food Security Analyst can translate the deficit into a quantifiable food gap for the FEZ for the period that the external 'shock' lasts.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For further information see the FSAU website: <http://www.unsomaliam.net/FSAU/methodology.htm>

### 4.3 Analysis of food security indicators

The FSAU collects, logs onto its database and analyses information on the following indicators within Somalia:

- a) *Crop Data* for the main *gu* cropping season and the secondary *deyr* cropping season (maize and sorghum). Information is stored by district, region, and food economy zone.
- b) *Market Price Information*: weekly data collection for 30 items in 35 markets in collaboration with FEWS NET.
- c) *Rainfall Data*: FSAU field monitors gather quantitative information from 10 rainfall stations. Cross-checking is carried out with information from satellite imagery in conjunction with FEWS-NET.
- d) *Import/Export Data* from Berbera and Bossasso sea ports.
- e) *Trend Data*: Information on rainfall, pasture, grazing, livestock, crops, food consumption, coping mechanisms, displacement/migration, market, health and security. Trends are analysed by district and provide essential information for early warning.
- f) *Nutrition Surveillance*: malnutrition rates and trends, and rapid screenings where there are IDPs and other vulnerable populations.
- g) *Food Aid Data* collected by WFP, CARE, ICRC and UNICEF on a regional and district level and some impact assessment.

Analysis is based on both quantitative and qualitative information collected on a monthly basis, through the network of the 22 Somali field monitors. Specialised partner agencies provide additional data which is assimilated into the process of information analysis, both in the field and at FSAU headquarters in Nairobi.

### 4.4 FSAU information products and services

Key FSAU information products and services include:

- *Publications*, including the *Monthly Food Security Report* and the *Monthly Nutrition Update*; *Focus* examines specific food security issues in more depth, such as the implications of crop establishment and harvest; *Flash* draws attention to deteriorating food security conditions and serves as an early warning alert.
- *Digital Maps* at national, regional and sub-regional levels.
- *Vulnerability Assessments* that provide an improved context for understanding the effects on particular groups and households of current and potential shocks such as drought, floods, crop and livestock disease or changes in food and other commodity prices.
- *Food Security Briefings and Updates*, on both a regular and an ad hoc basis coordinated through the SACB to provide decision-makers with the latest information on potential food security threats.
- *Holding fora with food security information users*, during which the FSAU presents its findings and analysis, which is then discussed and challenged. These fora are designed to meet the requirements of a broad range of users of food security information in Somalia. The resulting consensus on the food security situation is thus authoritative and reliable.
- *The Food Security Integrated Database* comprises the following modules: crop information, market information, food aid/food needs, rainfall, import/export, food economy baseline information, including population figures and qualitative trends.
- *The Food Economy Spreadsheet*, includes baseline information for each FEZ that is entered into this electronic analytical tool which then assesses the multi-dimensional factor of a food security problem for that FEZ.
- *Non-food Analysis* to identify interventions other than food aid.

## 5. Implications of the Somalia emergency context for the work of the FSAU<sup>10</sup>

### 5.1 Creating local capacity through a strong field assessment team

The Somalia protracted emergency is characterised by a widespread absence of government authority and the lack of institutions at various levels in large parts of the country. This has critical implications for the structure and operations of the Food Security Assessment Unit. *“In countries with a government in place an information systems would usually have a network of field staff at its disposal at district level”*, said the FSAU Head of Information. *“In Somalia, such a network is not in place.”* Consequently the FSAU field monitoring structure was established and needs to be financed entirely from the project budget.

The recruitment of field monitors is sensitive and a number of factors add to *operational cost*. All field monitors still have to be recruited by expatriate staff, as local staff, and even the field staff manager may fear reprisal, in case one clan would appear to be favoured in recruitment. So far, all field monitors have received the same emoluments, and a concerted effort has been made to avoid creating a hierarchy among them. Security constraints complicate field staff in-country travel to the assessment sites as special travel and car rental arrangements made to minimize risk add to the cost. Payment of staff has to be arranged through money lenders and involves substantial transaction fees. In addition, the lack of a counterpart structure in which FSAU activities could be institutionalised at local level implies that donor funding will be required for the foreseeable future to maintain this network.

Despite all of these difficulties, the FSAU field network is perceived as one of the unit's *assets*. *“The FSAU network of field monitors is critical for maintaining field data collection in areas of conflict”*, said the FEWSNET Regional Director. Unique to the FSAU field assessment team is that the assessment capacity is *not compromised by other tasks*. It is rather rare that field staff is assigned only a food security assessment function, as is the case in the FSAU. Often field monitors are assigned a double role: In the case of the field monitors of the Operation Lifeline Sudan, for example, the food security assessment task is combined with the role of monitoring the implementation of food aid programmes.<sup>11</sup>

Given the severe insecurity, field monitors initially kept a *low profile* and reported by radio to the Unit's Head Office in Nairobi on a list of indicators covering crop performance, livestock sales and conditions and market prices. These were analysed and results issued in a monthly report. Gradually, information from *other sources* of information was also collected. The partnership with FEWSNET has been crucial to this expanding role of field monitors. More recently, the FEWSNET team is making further contributions through its network of field enumerators (France and Sharp, undated).

Enhancing analytical capacity at local level has been a critical concern in the evolution of the field monitoring component. *“The ability to collect information improved, but the ability to process it had lagged behind”*, according to the FSAU Project Co-ordinator. Therefore, as the field monitors in recent years were able to increase their visibility, they also increasingly developed working relationships with NGOs and UN agencies at local level. They now carry out decentralised assessments with Somali beneficiaries, encouraging dialogue and joint analysis among different stakeholders. In addition, the creation of local teams among the field monitors themselves will also facilitate local analysis.

*“Field monitors are more than mere providers of information”*, argued the Representative of the NGO InterSOS. They also support NGOs in developing local intervention programmes. However, *“there is a need to make available the information generated by the field monitors”*,

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<sup>10</sup> This section highlights selected institutional, conceptual, methodological, and operational issues related to the work of the FSAU.

<sup>11</sup> Personal Communication: Anne Witteveen, Household Food Security Co-ordination, South Sudan

she continued. *“Other NGOs may not be aware of the baseline information available.”* The FSAU has already acted on this by developing a map of field monitors and focal points among them.

In conclusion, the need for an FSAU field monitoring component evolved out of the lack of functional government structures. As long as these conditions persist, the field monitoring component will require continued external support. It is considered one of the FSAU’s assets, with the role of field monitors evolving considerably. From initially collecting and transmitting information to the FSAU office in Nairobi, some monitors are increasingly taking on a focal point role in actively supporting local development initiatives. While this enhances the possibility of satisfying the multiple needs placed onto the unit and to linking relief, rehabilitation and development responses, it also raises the question of how broad or how specific the role of field monitors should be, to ensure their effectiveness.

## **5.2 Intensifying links with decision-makers: the forum approach**

A distinct feature of the Somalia emergency context is a sophisticated co-ordination response mechanism in place among members of the assistance community. The majority of FSAU partners and users are affiliated with the SACB. The SACB is a voluntary co-ordinating body that provides a common framework for the allocation of international aid to Somalia, comprising donors, UN agencies and international non-governmental organizations.<sup>12</sup>

The FSAU Somalia encourages shared analysis and consensus building with partners by using a “forum-approach”<sup>13</sup>. Through this approach, the FSAU actively involves partners in the analysis and interpretation of its findings, as is shown by the overlapping circles on the right side of Figure 2. This goes beyond the traditional approach of data collection, processing and analysis, which provides information without following-up with decision-making fora and interactive communication with decision-makers (as shown on the left side of Figure 2.)

The forum approach does not only include monthly presentation and discussion of assessment results, but also consulting with major partners prior to the release of the monthly food security report. *“There is no presentation of FSAU results to the Somalia Aid Co-ordination Body (SACB) without prior consultation with the major food aid donors, in particular WFP and CARE”*, said the Head of Information of the FSAU. Close interaction with decision-makers and information users, however, is also controversial. For example, the National FEWSNET Representative for Somalia, stated that *“information units need to be free and independent”*, and asked *“how much consultation can be justified, while preserving an information unit’s independence?”*<sup>14</sup> This points to the need to find modalities of involving information users while preserving the neutrality of assessments and recommendations.

Regular interaction, dialogue and joint discussion of assessment results between FSAU and agencies involved in the food security response are important to foster joint learning. This was demonstrated in the July 2002 meeting of the SACB Food Security and Rural Development Committee, a sector forum and important audience of the FSAU. When presenting the most recent Household Economy Analysis results of the *gu* crop establishment data, the FSAU mentioned that in Bay region the poorer households were likely to require food aid interventions.

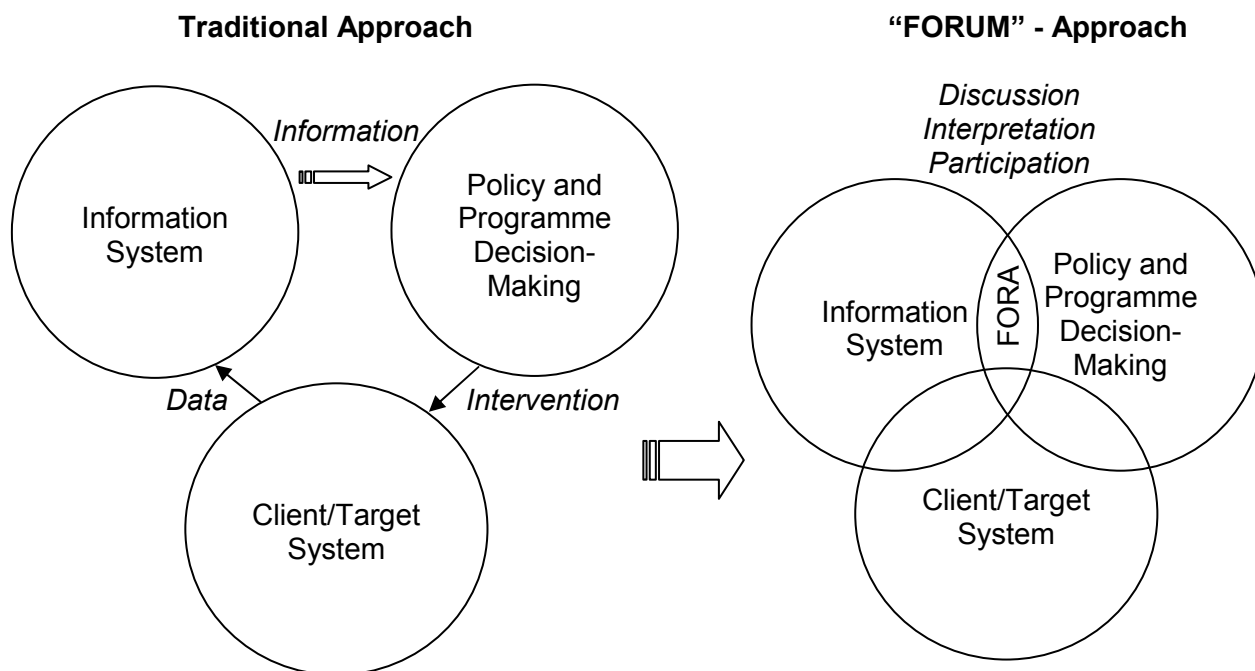
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<sup>12</sup> The International Committee of the Red Cross and Federation of the Red Cross remain autonomous but act in close cooperation. Other international and regional bodies, such as the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), World Bank, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the Arab League maintain ad hoc membership, mainly as observers.

<sup>13</sup> Correspondence with Buzz Sharp, Comments on Afghanistan Case Study, 16 December 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Interview Sidow A Ibrahim, National FEWSNET Representative for Somalia, July 2002.

**Figure 2: Information systems: from decision-input to interaction with decision-makers and participation of clients**



A lively discussion followed during which several members of the committee disagreed with the FSAU recommendation. Food aid was seen as an inappropriate instrument in food surplus areas such as Bay in 2002 and its impact on longer-term poverty reduction was questioned. The discussion helped to deepen the interpretation of HEA data in view of potential interventions among Committee members, and highlighted the need for further discussion between the information and intervention community on what will be the most appropriate mix of interventions for specific food insecurity scenarios.

The existence of the SACB also demands information quality standards that would be hard to meet in countries where such strong co-ordination committees are not in place. The joint participation of donors and the NGOs assisted by them is thereby a key factor. The SACB also enhances the standardization of methods. For example, USAID will no longer fund nutrition assessments that do not include a team member of the Food Security Assessment Unit.<sup>15</sup>

The Forum approach does not imply that the FSAU should take ownership of the decisions to be made. Rather, the FSAU could focus on providing decision-makers with scenarios, rather than define their interventions, according to the former Project Manager of Africover Project. What is important is that decisions-makers better understand the implications of various intervention options. Recommending a specific amount of food aid, rather than a range of options is likely to overlook the policy priorities in such decisions, which may differ from agency to agency.

Similar concerns were also expressed in the area of non-food interventions. "There are definitely limits as to what the FSAU can recommend in the area of non-food interventions. The FSAU cannot take the responsibility for the interventions that agencies undertake", argued the Deputy Head of Information, ICRC. Nevertheless, the impact on how decision-makers approach interventions can be substantially influenced. "FSAU information is used by ICRC for prioritising interventions in terms of focusing on those areas that are most

<sup>15</sup> Personal communication, Noreen Prendiville, Co-ordinator, Somalia Nutrition Surveillance Project, FSAU, November 2002.



vulnerable and in terms of what kind of interventions to choose. As a matter of fact, FSAU information influenced our change in approach, away from merely providing relief towards livelihood-oriented interventions”, he continued.

Assessment and programme planning is also becoming more integrated at the decentralised level in Somalia. FSAU Field Monitors are increasingly involved as key informants in the formulation of assistance programmes by local NGOs. On the one hand, this is a desirable development as it demonstrates the resourcefulness of FSAU field staff (see also section 3.1). On the other hand, it may compromise the neutrality of field monitors vis-à-vis potential beneficiaries. Once these communities realize that the information they provide will have a bearing on resource flows, it may become more difficult to maintain objectivity.

As the unit increases its emphasis on providing information for longer-term programming, in addition to identifying food aid needs, the forum approach will also become more relevant at a decentralised level. As developmental aspects become part of the FSAU mandate, interaction, consultation and participation of stakeholder and target beneficiaries at local level will become increasingly important. In Figure 2, this is expressed through the overlap of the target group/client circle with the circles representing the information and programming agencies. Initial steps for strengthening target group participation was made through the employment of a field staff development officer, whose task is to strengthen linkages between field monitors and local NGO staff and beneficiaries in joint capacity-building activities (see also Section 3.2).

In conclusion, the forum approach used by the FSAU enhances the depth of food security analysis, facilitates joint learning between those involved in the provision of information and those implementing assistance programmes, and creates a platform for discussing intervention options. The forum approach appears to a large degree facilitated by the existence of a highly formalised and well-organized co-ordination mechanism under the SACB. Whether the forum approach can be replicated in other complex emergency settings is likely to depend on the willingness of donors to invest in co-ordinating assistance.

### **5.3 Gender**

“*Gender aspects do not feature in FSAU analysis*”, recently observed the Food Security Analyst of the FSAU. “This has its roots both in information systems and in the context of the system as well as in cultural sensitivities among local communities”, explained a former team leader of the FSAU, indicating that this is also the case with food security information systems in other emergency contexts.

Gender has a key role to play in various aspects of food security information work, including analytical frameworks, information sources, and operations. These are briefly reviewed in the context of the FSAU below.

#### *Analytical framework*

The HEA framework was not designed to investigate intra-household issues and does therefore at present not provide a gender-disaggregated analysis of the effects of shocks and stresses on the household economy and of the coping strategies of men and women (McEwan and van Roosbroeck, 2002:33). Further, the FSAU has not taken measures to incorporate gender analysis as a key component of food security analysis.

While some HEA baseline surveys incorporate data on division of labour by gender and age, the 2002 Midterm Review concluded that, given the key role that women play in food and nutrition security, more imaginative ways need to be sought to incorporate gender analysis.

Looking at food security issues with a gender perspective is particularly important, as the traditional division of roles and responsibilities may shift as a result of conflict and protracted

emergency. The effects of the conflict on the gender division of labour have been considerable: “The hardships of war have forced women to become more responsible for their own and their families livelihoods. Many men have been lost in the fighting, and women have picked up the burden of men’s home responsibilities while keeping up with their own duties.” (Coletta and Cullen, 2000)

### *Operations*

The FSAU field team is all male, largely due to cultural, safety and security considerations which severely limit women from travelling alone. Nevertheless, it should be possible to train and hire some women in the operation and management of the FSAU.

### *Information Sources*

While field monitors argue that they try to seek the opinion of women as key informants, in practice few women are reached and the information collected is unlikely to reflect the needs, interests and constraints of both men and women. Training in gender analysis could perhaps motivate field monitors to seek the input of women more into their information collection and analysis.

To conclude, while it is understood that gender disaggregated data is difficult to collect in the Somali context, given the central role that women play in food security and nutrition, and in coping with food insecurity, it is important to find ways of introducing gender analysis into the work and mode of operation of the Unit. A consultancy aimed at exploring ways to “engender” the work of the unit in terms of data collection and analysis could benefit not only the work of the Somalia Unit, but the work of food security information systems in other emergency contexts as well.

## **5.4 Responding to diverse information needs for relief, rehabilitation and development interventions**

The political, agro-ecological, socio-economic and socio-cultural landscape of Somalia is highly diverse. Regions differ significantly in terms of having re-established stable administrative structures as well as in their level of economic development. The northwest and northeast regions, Somaliland and Puntland, have remained relatively stable recovery areas with emerging functional administrations. In parts of southern Somalia, localized polities have come up, typically drawing on a combination of traditional, clan-based authority and Islamic courts, often supported by local business people. These polities have provided variable levels of legal protection and law and order to residents, but they have proved to be relatively weak and prone to collapse in the face of warlordism and clan conflict (Menkhaus, 1998b:220-4). Other parts of the country lie in between these two extremes, experiencing levels of governance, security and economic activity which constitute neither crisis nor recovery.<sup>16</sup>

*These regional variations have a bearing on information requirements for planning and programming food security interventions*, depending on whether these aim at short-term relief of food crisis or longer-term structural changes that address the underlying causes of food insecurity in different settings (urban, farming, agro-pastoral or pastoral). The experience of the FSAU has shown that it is extremely difficult to cater for such a broad spectrum of user demands, according to the Mid-term Review 2002 (McEwan and van Roosbroeck, 2002:39). It has been easier for the FSAU to meet the needs of users planning short-term (food aid) interventions – as this was the Unit’s initial focus<sup>17</sup> – because this need

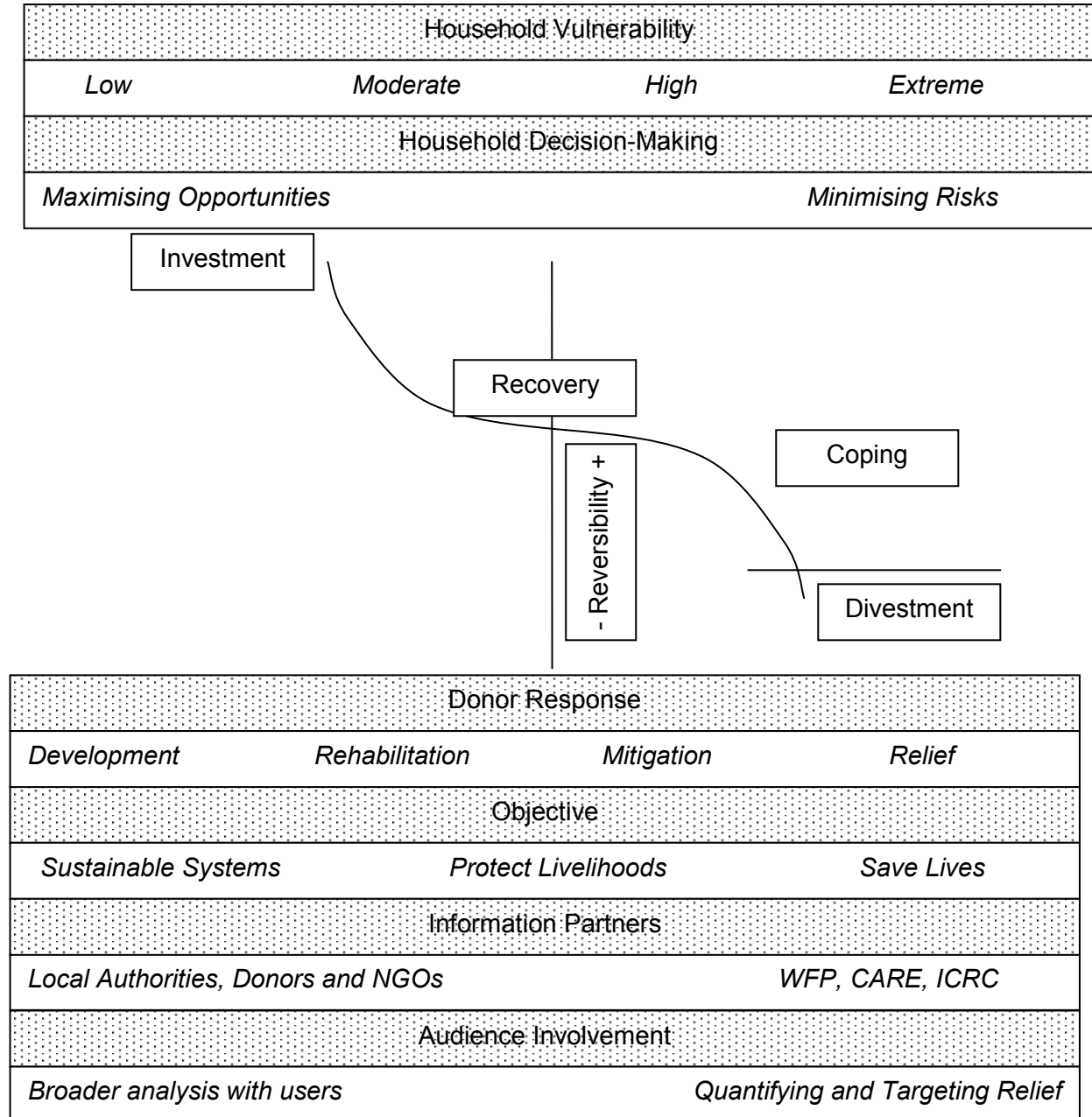
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<sup>16</sup> SACB: Somalia: A Socio-geopolitical landscape

<sup>17</sup> A mid-term review conducted by the Oxford Policy Management (OPM) in 1998 found that the FSAU was overly influenced by programming needs related to acute emergency interventions. It

is acute, refers to a specific point in time, and the type of response is pre-determined as food aid (*ibid.*).

**Figure 3: A flexible approach to meeting diverse information needs**



Source: B. Sharp, FSAU Somalia

The transition from focusing on food aid response-related information needs to covering a broader spectrum of development-related information requirements may imply operational changes in terms of extending the partnership and network approach. The more information

further indicated that the information provided by the FSAU was less useful for those agencies interested in shifting their focus from emergency programming to rehabilitation and development activities and suggested that the Unit should determine the food security information needs of all agencies working in Somalia.

needs for developmental purposes increase, the more a multitude of actors will be needed to cover the information spectrum. This would imply that the FSAU would take on a data and information co-ordination role, rather than carrying out most of the primary data collection. Consequently, the Unit would need to concentrate on key data and information to provide a national comprehensive overview and provide technical support to partners for methodological development and standardization of definition formats and codes (*Ibid.*).

The FSAU is currently developing a flexible approach to satisfy the diverse information needs of varied audiences at various levels (see Figure 3). According to this framework, audience information needs vary according to whether the assistance focuses on saving lives (relief), on protecting livelihoods (mitigation and rehabilitation) or whether it aims at building sustainable systems of production and consumption.

In the case of relief, information focuses on quantifying and targeting assistance, which may be done by outsiders in a rather extractive way. In the case of rehabilitation, mitigation and development assistance, however, a broader analysis with users is necessary, implying the use of more decentralised, gender-sensitive assessments and analysis building on participatory approaches. In this case, bi-directional communication between the FSAU and local users becomes increasingly important (an aspect which has been considered in the proposal for Phase IV of the FSAU).

Another aspect related to adjusting an information system to changing needs and budgets is its ability to expand or contract operations. How small or large a food security information unit should be must be linked to the seriousness of the situation and the size of the required response, according to the FEWSNET Regional Director. Where or when a high level of resources is being invested into emergency responses, a sizeable investment in emergency-related food security information systems is justified. In cases where the emergency response is small the unit should have the ability to contract its emergency-related activities in favour of rehabilitation and development-oriented information activities, in order to remain cost efficient<sup>18</sup>.

The *role of remittances* and the sustainability of the *resource base for long-term food security* are critical contextual factors likely to increase in importance, as the FSAU moves towards covering a broader user spectrum. While remittances play a key role in the short-term coping capacity of some vulnerable livelihood groups, they can also be investment flows to be considered in rehabilitation and developing programming. Similarly the degradation of natural resources, for example as triggered by charcoal exports to the Gulf States can become threats to long-term food security. Therefore, as the FSAU is increasingly being called upon to support longer-term programmes as well as short-term early warning ways to better integrate remittance flows and ecological threats into food security analysis.

In conclusion, a conceptual framework supporting the adaptation of food security information work from quantifying and targeting short-term relief in the immediate aftermath of acute crisis to rehabilitation and development policies and programmes (where and when appropriate) can help meet newly emerging and diversified information needs. As information needs expand, partnerships and networks will become increasingly necessary, resulting in a change of operational priorities of the food security information unit from primary data collection towards data and information co-ordination. The adaptation towards changing needs will also be facilitated if the information unit maintains a capacity to expand and contract according to emergency-related needs.

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<sup>18</sup> Personal Communication: Nick Maunder, Regional Director, FEWSNET.

## 5.5 Analysing food security-conflict linkages

*“In Somalia you cannot address food insecurity without knowing about the conflict”*, argued the Liaison Officer of Concern Worldwide. Civil conflict, political tension and insecurity are major constraints in the pursuit of livelihood of rural families and are thus key determinants of structural food insecurity in Somalia, along with natural disasters and resource scarcity. The dynamics of food insecurity are closely related to the nature of the conflict in which the frontlines are often diffuse and highly dynamic.

In view of the above, *“there may be a need to develop a more comprehensive understanding of vulnerability”*, underscored the Chief of the United Nations Co-ordination Unit for Somalia (UNCU), which pursues a political economy approach to vulnerability (as evidenced in the monthly UNCU Humanitarian Updates. While it may be difficult for the FSAU to carry out conflict analysis by itself, working closely with the UNCU offers a possibility to integrate political and conflict analysis into food security analysis.

*Conflict analysis is widely recognized as an important component of food security and vulnerability analysis*. However, food security field monitors face a number of constraints to making conflict analysis an integral part of data collection. Adding a conflict analysis module to the portfolio of field monitors may pose a security risk to them. For example, the Africa Regional Advisor of USAID/OFDA indicated that the work of the FSAU may be compromised if it were to deal with clan issues.

A recent review by FEWSNET and CARE has drawn attention to the *linkages between food security early information and conflict early warning*. When food insecurity is largely determined by conflict, an improved ability to predict rising tension could help in initiating preventive and mitigation action and avoid escalation of both conflict and food insecurity. In addition, conflict early warning initiatives may benefit from the wealth of information available to the FSAU. Consequently, the FSAU may be in a good position to develop new partnerships and joint pilot activities in linking food security information and conflict early warning and prevention initiatives.

In conclusion, addressing food insecurity and conflict linkages could be addressed in a number of ways: a) by establishing collaborative arrangements with institutions engaged in the political analysis of conflict, such as the UNCU, in order to incorporate conflict in vulnerability analysis; b) by incorporating political analysis of conflict into food security analysis; and c) by developing joint pilot activities linking food security information and conflict early warning and prevention.

## 5.6 Integrating food security and nutrition information

*“The impact of food security on nutrition has generally been underestimated”*, said the Co-ordinator, Somalia Nutrition Surveillance Project, FSAU. Nutrition should be perceived as a critical factor in good health and food security and the FSAU has contributed to this a great deal. The FSAU has initiated a project to improve the quality, reliability and coverage of nutrition information, which is funded by USAID, in addition to the EU-funded food security assessments. The nutrition project contains the following main components:

- Establishment of an efficient surveillance system;
- Conduct of nutritional surveys as part of the FSAU regular assessment work;
- Analysis and interpretation of data using relevant contextual information;
- Dissemination of nutrition information.

The project has contributed substantially to the co-ordination and standardization of nutritional assessments in Somalia. All USAID-funded nutrition assessments now include an FSAU representative on the team, thereby ensuring that *food security-related determinants are adequately considered in causal analyses of malnutrition*.

Nutrition information has been used in crisis response and mitigation planning as:

- a) a general welfare indicator in the absence of other demographic, health and economic indicators;
- b) a food security indicator; demonstrating the impact of climatic, environmental and political influences on the population; and
- c) a component of the food intervention monitoring system.

Presently, the key results of the FSAU nutrition project are published in the monthly FSAU *Nutrition Update*, which appears along with the FSAU *Food Security Report*. Both of these key FSAU information products build on one another, and as far as USAID is concerned, it is preferable to continue publishing these FSAU information products separately.

A key challenge for the FSAU is *how to further integrate food security and nutrition work while also determining how the Unit can benefit from such an integration*. Chastre and le Jeune (2001) have compared some key features of household economy analysis and nutrition surveys (Table 1), which help assess the scope of food security and nutrition integration:

**Table 1: A comparison of household economy analysis and nutrition surveys**

	Household Economy Approach	Nutrition Surveys
Unit of Analysis	Household	Individual (Children 6 to 59 months)
Data Categorization	Breakdown by Socio-economic Category	Prevalence rates according to entire 6-59 months, with breakdown by age groups, but not by wealth groups
Time Period Covered by Results	Analyses situation over previous months and predicts situation over coming months. Captures seasonal variation.	Reflects on the situation at one point in time.

Source: Chastre and le Jeune (2001)

Table 1 shows that differences in the unit of analysis, in the categorization and in the time span of data need to be considered when integrating food security and nutrition information. For example, the predictive value and seasonal dimension of HEA need to be borne in mind when planning nutritional surveys. Further, an HEA-informed nutrition analysis will be more likely to allow for a separation of food-related from health-related causes of malnutrition and will thus result in a more comprehensive analysis. Therefore, *a combined analysis of food security and nutrition can lead to better programming and more appropriate interventions*.

Integrated food security and nutrition framework may also help in further developing the HEA approach. "There are issues with the definition of baseline years in HEA analysis" said FSAU Nutrition Surveillance Project Co-ordinator. *Using a nutritional lens to analyse how household economy baselines are defined may thus be one way in which the accuracy of household economy analysis can benefit from close integration with nutrition*.

In addition to the above conceptual and technical challenges, institutional challenges to the integration of nutrition and food security frameworks are as important. Integration will require good collaboration both at the project management as well as at the donor level. An information user focus may be the best avenue in maximising the integration of the food security and the nutrition assessment components of the FSAU.

## 6. Conclusions

The following key characteristics of the Somalia protracted emergency have been highlighted in this paper:

- i) The widespread lack of government structures and authority and its implications for the organization and operations of the FSAU field monitoring system and for strategies on medium-term sustainability of food security information work;
- ii) the dynamic and diverse nature of instability and conflict and its repercussions on the modalities of integrating conflict analysis and food security analysis;
- iii) the heterogeneity of emergency contexts within Somalia and its implications for the type of information required by different clients, ranging from relief and early rehabilitation interventions in the southern part of Somalia to development programming in Somaliland.
- iv) the Nairobi-based SACB as a major client of FSAU information and its bearing on FSAU structure, data analysis and communication strategies.
- v) the key role of remittances from the Somalia Diaspora for food security, which is captured by the household food economy approach in terms of people's coping capacity, but needs to be better understood in terms of longer-term implications on food security.
- vi) the degradation of common property resources, and its implications for short and long-term food security monitoring.

The *set-up and operations of the Food Security Assessment Unit* in Somalia are influenced by the above-mentioned *specific contextual emergency features*. For example, the field monitoring component was developed and is being maintained to carry out primary data collection as a result of the prolonged absence of government and the dispersed nature of insecurity. Further, the analysis and communication capacities and modalities of the Units' main office are partly induced by the presence and information demands of the SACB, located in Nairobi. Therefore, when designing food security information activities in complex emergencies, *contextual determinants* and their implications for institutional set-up, for the analytical framework, and for operational modalities need to be analysed and integrated in the design process.

Facilitated by the well-organized co-ordination mechanism under the SACB, the FSAU has developed a *forum approach* to enhance the *depth of food security analysis*, facilitate *joint learning* between those involved in the provision of information and those implementing assistance programmes, and *create a platform for discussing various intervention options*. The replication of the forum approach in other complex emergency settings is likely to depend on the availability or the possibility to establish effective co-ordination structures among the participants of the assistance community.

The *transition from an acute emergency to a protracted emergency* in Somalia has increased the breadth of food security information requirements for programmes in different regions and locations as parts of the country in terms of relative stability, functional governance, socio-economic development and the diversity of livelihood base. This goes hand in hand with an increased number and *diversity of actors*. With the increase in response capacity to address not only acute food shortages, but to also tackle the underlying causes of long-term food insecurity, the profile for food security information widens. Thus, when moving from relief to rehabilitation and development programming, information must not only cover *food security outcomes* (as required for identifying relief needs and targeting), but increasingly *food security determinants* and livelihood assets (natural, physical, financial, human, social).

The conceptual and operational framework developed by the FSAU to support the adaptation of food security information work in terms of *broadening and diversifying needs* warrants further development. As information needs expand, partnerships and networks will increasingly be necessary, resulting in a change in *operational priorities* for the food security information unit from primary data collection towards data and information co-ordination.

Eventually, adjustments in the *analytical framework*, the Household Economy Analysis, will also be needed to better address not only food shortages but the underlying causes of food insecurity.

*Remittances* have been identified as the biggest foreign exchange contributor to the Somali economy, with estimates of between USD 500 million to USD 1 billion per year. They are thus a critical factor for food security in the Somalia context. Remittances are common in protracted complex emergencies that result in extended expatriate communities. As such, there is a need to better understand their short and long-term implications for food security. Remittances not only determine the short-term coping capacity of vulnerable livelihood groups, but also need to be factored into rehabilitation and developing programming as potential investments. An assessment of the relative impact of remittances on food security (for example as compared to the contributions of the Consolidated Appeals Process) will be useful in better integrating remittance flows into policy and programming.

*Natural resource degradation and its effects on long-term food security is another important factor that needs to be incorporated in food security analysis for longer term programming.* The degradation of natural resources, for example as triggered by charcoal burning for export to the Gulf States, can become threats to long-term food security. Therefore, as the FSAU is increasingly called upon to support longer-term programmes as well as to inform short-term responses, there is a need to find ways to better integrate ecological threats and other factors affecting long-term food security into food security analysis.

The gender dimension of food security information is still largely overlooked, ranging from the *gender imbalance in the composition of the monitoring team* to the need for *gender disaggregated data collection* and a *gender-focused analytical framework*. The lack of gender sensitivity in food security information work in emergencies is so widespread that a consultancy aimed at exploring ways to “engender” the work of the unit in terms of data collection and analysis could benefit not only the work of the Somalia Unit, but the work of food security information systems in other emergency contexts as well.

As food insecurity is largely determined by conflict and political instability, an improved ability to predict rising tension could help in initiating preventive and mitigation action and avoid escalation of both conflict and food insecurity. *Food insecurity and conflict linkages could be build in a number of ways:* a) by establishing *collaborative arrangements* with institutions engaged in the political analysis of conflict, such as the UNCU, in order to incorporate conflict in vulnerability analysis; b) by *incorporating political analysis of conflict into food security analysis*; and c) by developing joint pilot activities *linking food security information and conflict early warning and prevention*.

A challenge for the FSAU is also how to further integrate food security and nutrition work. On the one hand an HEA-informed nutrition analysis will be more likely to allow for a separation of food-related from health-related causes of malnutrition and will thus result in a more comprehensive analysis. On the other hand an integrated food security and nutrition framework may also support the HEA approach in defining *household economy baselines*. Therefore, *a combined analysis of food security and nutrition can lead to better programming and more appropriate interventions*.



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