

USING HEA IN ASSESSMENT AND RESPONSE PLANNING

Source: Out-take from A Guide to the Household Economy Approach, FEG Consulting and SC-UK, for the RHVP, 2007

Central to the challenge of responding effectively to humanitarian crises is the recognised need to improve assessment practice; to achieve a more consistent and accurate picture of the scale and nature of the problems people in crisis face, and to ensure that decisions about response are properly informed by that understanding. The lack of a system-wide, transparent method for prioritising response has been identified as a major problem and a contributing factor to the inequitable allocation of humanitarian resources across different contexts. There is a recognised need for greater consistency in the way problems are framed, in terms of observable symptoms, proximate causes and acute risk factors.¹

Two other points about food security assessments in particular are relevant here. Firstly, there is a consensus that they should provide a basis for determining a broader range of intervention options than at present. Secondly, it has been suggested that they should distinguish more clearly between situations where the primary rationale for food assistance is to save lives, and situations where the main rationale is to protect assets or livelihoods².

HEA brings the following strengths to needs assessment and response planning:

- Using a relatively simple and conceptually clear framework, HEA provides a quantified comparison between current or predicted access to food and cash income and minimum needs for food and non-food goods and services. It answers the question, 'How much support is required?' And through establishing different thresholds (the **Survival and Livelihoods Protection Thresholds**) the question can be expanded to, 'How much is needed to save lives?' or 'How much is needed to protect livelihoods?'
- Quantification of food and income in absolute terms (kilocalories accessed and cash earned) means that comparisons between different wealth groups and different areas can be made, which facilitates prioritisation of resources
- Because HEA is based on a holistic view of livelihoods – estimating the effect of change on both food and cash income, and on the need to sell assets or forego
- non-food expenditure – which also takes into account the role of markets, it enables a range of possible interventions to be identified. This is illustrated in the figure below.

¹ Darcy, J and Hofmann, C-A. *According to Need? Needs assessment and decision-making in the humanitarian sector*. Humanitarian Policy Group Report 15, Overseas Development Institute, London. September 2003

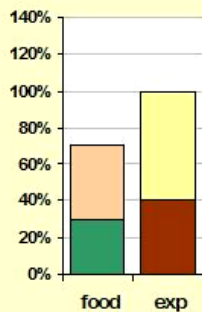
² Darcy, J and Hofmann, C-A (see above)

The range of interventions for addressing a deficit

Food Deficits may be Addressed via a Range of Interventions

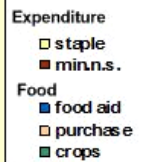
The basic measure of outcome in a household economy needs assessment is the food deficit or food gap. If there is a food deficit then an intervention of some kind is required. Food aid is not the only option. As this figure shows a range of interventions can help 'fill' the food gap, protecting food security at household level. Information on patterns of local livelihood (collected during household economy fieldwork) will help to identify the most appropriate intervention in any particular situation.

The Outcome Analysis – The Starting Point for Identifying Appropriate Interventions



The graph provides an example of a food economy outcome analysis for a defined group of households (e.g. the poor from a particular livelihood zone). In this case, poor households are facing a food deficit equivalent to 30% of annual food needs.

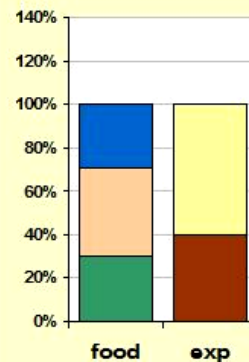
LEGEND



The **left-hand bar** illustrates food access, as a percentage of minimum annual food energy needs.

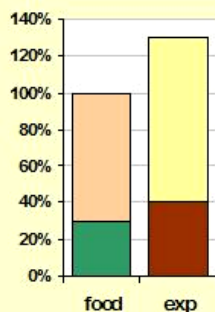
The **right-hand bar** shows the pattern of cash expenditure, expressed as a percentage of baseline. (Note: staple = staple food, min.n.s = minimum non-staple expenditure.)

A food intervention



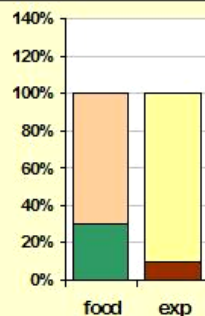
Free food or food-for-work is one option for filling the food deficit, but there are others...

A cash income intervention



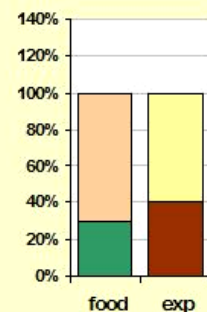
If cash income is increased, the deficit can be filled through increased purchase. The intervention may be direct (i.e. in the form of cash) or indirect (i.e. through support to one or more income generating activities).

A non-food intervention



In a crisis, households must purchase more than just food. They also need to pay for items such as water, seeds and inputs for the next production season, school fees, etc. Provision of these items can free up cash to increase food purchase.

A market price intervention



Increasing prices often cause reductions in food access in a crisis. Measures to stabilise food prices (e.g. the release of food from government grain reserves) can help to increase household food purchasing power, thus filling the deficit.