



FOOD ECONOMY CASE STUDY: REFUGEES IN TANZANIA

HOW FOOD ECONOMY ANALYSIS CAN REVEAL THE SIGNIFICANCE OF REFUGEE COPING STRATEGIES

The Context:

Mtendeli refugee camp in north-western Tanzania hosts 29,000 refugees from neighbouring Burundi. In February 1998, flooding cut the main access routes to the area, maize stocks began to run out and refugees were put onto a 2/3 ration for up to two months.

How could the refugees cope with this problem? Although officially discouraged from doing so, many refugees find work on local Tanzanian farms and cultivate small plots around the camp on land borrowed from local villagers or in the neighbouring forest reserve. The conclusion was that most refugees could cope with the reduced ration; by consuming their own crop production (fortunately the break in the pipeline coincided with a harvest of beans) and by purchasing food using the money earned from agricultural labour.

Much depended, however, upon the refugees being able to leave the camp as they had been doing, i.e. unofficially. Were the authorities to clamp down on refugee movements, preventing them from harvesting their crops and from finding employment outside the camp, many could rapidly have faced a deficit of up to one-third of their food intake.

Food Economy Analysis provides quantitative information on refugee coping strategies - a pre-requisite for understanding the likely impact of shocks such as a break in the food pipeline.

It is often assumed that a break in the refugee food pipeline will...

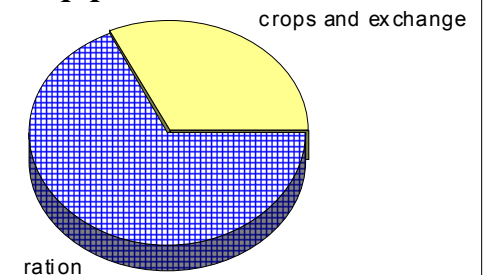
lead rapidly to acute food shortages and an increase in malnutrition among refugees.

But food economy analysis showed that:

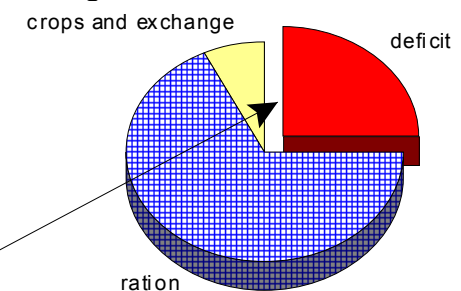
provided Burundian refugees in Tanzania were able to leave the camp as 'normal', to cultivate small plots around the camp and to find employment locally, they could fill the deficit created by a short term cut in official rations.

Refugees unable to leave the camp cannot supplement the reduced ration through employment and cultivation.

Sources of food after a break in the pipeline



.... and if access outside the camp were restricted



The pie represents 100% of annual food needs for a typical family
Source: UNHCR, WFP & Save the Children Fund-UK