

Post-Conflict Agricultural Rehabilitation: Linking Social Protection, Livelihood Promotion and Humanitarianism

- **Organisation:**
Overseas Development Institute
- **Partners:**
Food and Agriculture
Organization of the United
Nations (FAO)
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- **Start Date:**
April 2003
- **End Date:**
September 2005
- **Value:**
€193,985
- **Countries/ Regions Covered:**
Sierra Leone, Somalia and
Afghanistan

Background and Objectives:

The report addresses how international actors might move beyond conventional seeds and tools interventions to address vulnerability and support the agricultural component of rural livelihoods in countries emerging from conflict. It examines how agricultural rehabilitation can contribute to linking humanitarian assistance, social protection and longer-term development through the provision of effective support in ways that are consistent with principles from humanitarian, livelihoods and rights-based approaches. The report is based on lessons from Afghanistan and Sierra Leone, and draws its analysis from livelihoods analysis and social protection.

Research Findings:

- Given the role of agriculture in rural livelihoods and the resilience of agricultural production in response to conflict, the report suggests that the objective of agricultural support should not focus solely on increasing production but should also aim to enhance consumption and markets and livelihoods more broadly, including institutional support. However, the crisis thinking that appears to influence programming results in piecemeal, project-based approaches that fail to reflect the resilience, capacities and ingenuity of rural populations.

- At the same time, there are other approaches being implemented from an almost contradictory perspective in which efforts to promote self-sufficiency and sustainability are based on an inadequate understanding of local livelihoods and the causes of vulnerability. Such efforts have been seen to fail to match local level interventions with the meso and macro institutions and policies necessary to support them more sustainably.
- Support to each level of a market chain is one way in which these meso- and macro-level interventions can be realized. Though market approaches are now beginning to attract the attention of donors and programme planners, they are fraught with practical difficulties in a post-conflict environment and remain a major challenge. Careful monitoring and impact assessment, together with analysis informed by a political economic perspective are needed to improve on existing approaches.
- Despite the emphasis on targeting for vulnerable groups, existing agricultural interventions are ill-suited to addressing the causes of vulnerability. We suggest that the key to appropriate social protection in post-conflict situations lies in an understanding of vulnerability that incorporates notions of powerlessness. Possible synergies between the concepts of

In cooperation with



social protection and livelihood promotion potentially provide a means of achieving greater convergence of purpose across relief and development.

- At a conceptual level there is considerable scope for strengthening the linkages both between livelihood protection and promotion and relief and development. In practice, however, various challenges remain and there is relatively little evidence from the case study countries to suggest that social protection and promotion are being applied successfully in linking relief and development. Moreover, there is a very real risk that social protection may merely serve to exacerbate the political and social inequalities that characterise chronic and post-conflict situations. Addressing such inequalities may require lengthy processes of institutional reform.
- Agricultural institutions – of the government, private sector and civil society - provide the primary entry point through which the aid community can intervene to

support rural livelihoods in more sustainable ways. In the agricultural sector, however, the priority for public sector capacity building is particularly unclear, since agriculture is considered to be primarily a responsibility of private and civil society actors. Despite policy visions stating that agricultural development should be private-sector led, there appears to be very limited understanding of what this might entail in practice. In particular, the tendency for NGOs to promote supply-driven approaches risk ‘crowding out’ potential private sector providers.

- Another challenge lies in ensuring that efforts to rebuild formal institutions remain cognizant of the strengths and importance of the informal institutions that have inevitably taken centre stage in agricultural systems during the conflict years.
- It must also be recognized that some of these institutions may serve to reinforce rather than alleviate structural vulnerability. There is often a perceived need to fundamentally reform or even replace institutions, however institutional reform is by no means easy in countries emerging from conflict.

Policy Recommendations:

- The essence of agricultural support in countries emerging from conflict should be in facilitating the transition from supply-led programming to establishment of sustainable (market-driven) systems for service delivery, and this should be developed within a framework of broad-based efforts to protect and promote rural livelihoods.
- Promoting a transition from supply-led programming to the establishment of sustainable systems for service delivery provides the strategic vision that is currently lacking in post-conflict agricultural programming.
- A fundamental shift must take place in the role of NGOs, massive capacity building efforts at all levels are required, and there must be clarity and consensus on the role of the state vis-à-vis the private sector.
- The notion of ‘post-conflict transitions’ is used to examine the principles that are appropriate to particular contexts and programming objectives. If a pragmatic approach to humanitarian, livelihoods and rights-based principles is to be adopted, then this requires greater clarity of both the political agenda and the impact of conflict on local livelihoods and informal institutions.

For further information on this research project, please visit:

EC-PREP website: www.ec-prep.org

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EC-PREP is supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). In 2001, DFID, in collaboration with the European Commission, launched the European Community’s Poverty Reduction Effectiveness Programme (EC-PREP). The main objective of this research initiative is to produce findings and policy recommendations that support and contribute to improving the European Community’s effectiveness in attaining poverty reduction targets via its external assistance programmes. The programme has funded 13 Research Projects and 10 Commissioned Studies, which relate to one or more of the six focal areas of EC’s development policy. More information about the research funded by EC-PREP can be found on www.ec-prep.org.