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Strengthening the humanity and dignity of people in crisis through knowledge and practice

Impact Assessment of Humanitarian Response: A Review of the Literature

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Impact Assessment of Innovative Humanitarian Projects in Sub-Saharan Africa
The Feinstein International Center in partnership with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

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Preface

In late 2005 the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation launched the Sub-Saharan Africa Famine Relief Effort "Close to the Brink", in response to a major famine affecting South Sudan, the Sahel and southern Africa. As a result grants were awarded to seven projects implemented by six organisations in South Sudan, Mali, Niger, Malawi and Zimbabwe. The projects focus on reducing vulnerability to food insecurity and famine and strengthening livelihoods, based on interventions such as cereal banks, savings and credit schemes, provision of livestock, improved crop production and dam rehabilitation. As such, the projects are not 'emergency responses' in the conventional sense, but rather seek to address and mitigate the impact of chronic emergencies such as drought.

At the same time, the Feinstein International Center of Tufts University was commissioned by the Foundation to support the implementing partner organisations to develop their capacity for participatory evaluation, focusing in particular on impact assessment. The key activities of the 'Impact Assessment of Innovative Humanitarian Projects in Sub-Saharan Africa Project' (IAIHPSA) include: developing participatory evaluation techniques with the partner organisations; developing and field testing an impact assessment toolkit; and leading a final impact assessment in four of the seven projects.

This Literature Review forms a part of this process. The aim of the Review is to summarise current thinking on impact assessment in humanitarian assistance, and to consider how the outputs of the IAIHPSA project and other recent initiatives have addressed some of the key issues and challenges facing impact assessment in the sector. The Review is aimed primarily at IAIHPSA partner organisations, to provide additional background information and support to them in their development of participatory impact assessment techniques and processes. The Terms of Reference are attached as Annex 1.

The Review is divided into two parts: Part A presents a summary of the literature on impact assessment, focusing on impact assessment of humanitarian assistance and highlighting the key issues and challenges.[1] These are presented in terms of Conceptual Issues; Methodological Issues; and Organisational Issues. Part B then considers the development of the Participatory Impact Assessment (PIA) methodology by the Feinstein International Center and its application in the IAIHPSA project, and the extent to which the challenges outlined in Part A have been addressed by these and other recent developments.

[1] Part A of this review draws on a number of key reference documents (in particular Hofmann et al 2004; Roche 1999; Save the Children UK 1999, and the work of ALNAP and the Fritz Institute) supplemented by other reports, papers and agency guidelines on impact assessment. A full list of references consulted is presented in Annex 2.

Part A: Overview of Existing Literature on Impact Assessment in Humanitarian Projects

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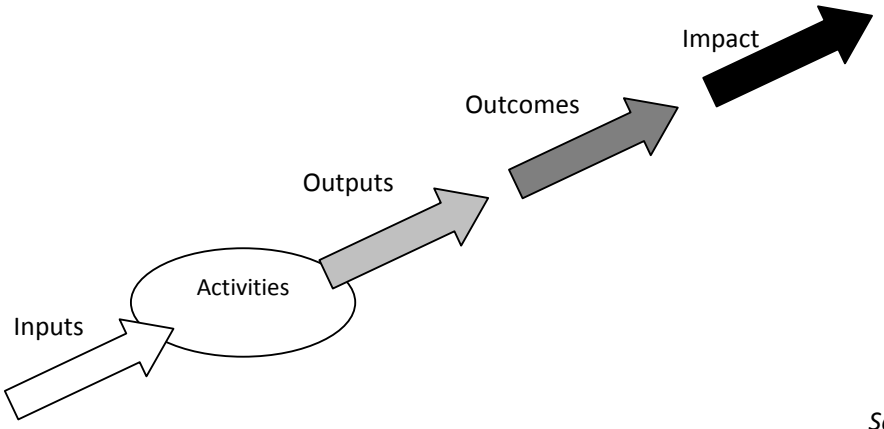
Introduction to Part A

Impact may be viewed as one step in a 'chain', which begins with Inputs, which lead to Activities, which have Outputs, then Outcomes (sometimes called Effects) and which ultimately lead to Impact – see Figure 1 below (Roche 1999) and the example in Box 1. The chain implies a linear progression which may not necessarily apply in all projects and activities – in some cases the process may be more cyclical or iterative. However, the chain provides a useful model for distinguishing the different dimensions of the development process.

Figure 1: The Impact Chain



Source: Roche 1999:26

Monitoring and evaluation processes tend to focus on the first part of the chain and assessing impact (as opposed to measuring outputs) has remained a challenge for all types of aid interventions for many years. Compared to some emergency responses, longer-term development projects operate in a less pressured time frame and outside some of the challenges presented later in this section, yet they still experience difficulties in analysing and presenting the impact of their work effectively (Oakley et al 1998; INTRAC 2001).

Box 1: Example of the Impact Chain: a community animal health project

Inputs: staff, training materials, funding
Activities: needs assessment, identification and development of training materials, and training courses for community animal health workers
Outputs: number of trained animal health workers
Outcomes: treatment of livestock in the beneficiary communities (i.e. the application of the training)
Impact: improved animal health among beneficiary communities and/or positive changes in beneficiary livelihoods through increased milk production

Many humanitarian and development agencies

have an explicit commitment to assessing the impact of their work. For example WFP, ECHO, UNICEF, ALNAP and DAC all include impact in their evaluation guidelines and many evaluation terms of reference include a requirement to assess impact (ALNAP 2001; ALNAP 2005; World Food Programme 2008). The OECD/DAC definition of evaluation comprises *'efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability and relevance of objectives'* (Hallam 1998); while the Sphere minimum standards call for *'systematic and impartial examination of humanitarian action'* to *'measure its overall appropriateness, efficiency, coverage, coherence and impact on the affected population'* (The Sphere Project 2004 - Common Standard 6: Evaluation).

In spite of these commitments, the lack of effective impact assessment is even more pronounced in humanitarian assistance than in the longer-term development sector. Some commentators have described the impact assessment of humanitarian projects as 'consistently poor' (Hofmann et al 2004), noting the absence of any, or at least good quality impact assessment (ibid; Fritz Institute 2006a; Hallam 1998; CARE USA 1999) and positive impact from humanitarian interventions is often assumed (Fritz Institute 2004). Others highlight the discrepancy between agencies' own perception of their impact and the perceptions of their beneficiaries (Hallam 1998).

It is not only at the individual agency level that impact assessment is not taking place effectively. Sector-wide assessments are rare and do not necessarily tackle impact (Fritz Institute 2005). For example evaluations carried out under the Tsunami Evaluation Commission have been noted for their failure to cover impact and for focusing largely on outputs (and to a certain extent outcomes) (ALNAP 2007; Fritz Institute 2006a).

In summary there is a significant gap between the rhetoric of impact assessment and the reality. At the same time, the need to understand impact is as great if not greater than ever, as the context of humanitarian assistance continues to shift: the increasing frequency and complexity of natural disasters requires agencies to be ever more flexible, adaptable and responsive to learning (Feinstein International Center 2004).

This rhetoric-reality gap is generating a growing concern and a desire to address the issue more effectively (Humanitarian Accountability Partnership – International 2005; Emergency Capacity Building Project 2007; Roche et al 2005; Hallam 1998). There are a number of initiatives aimed at improving standards and accountability with the humanitarian sector, many of which encompass a commitment to improving impact assessment. These include, amongst many others:

- The Sphere Project - Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response: standards and guidance notes on emergency interventions (The Sphere Project 2004) (www.sphereproject.org)
- The Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP): standard of accountability and quality management (Humanitarian Accountability Partnership – International 2007) (www.hapinternational.org/projects/standard/hap-standard.aspx)

- Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP): carries out annual reviews of humanitarian evaluations based on a quality proforma, as well as periodic 'Reviews of Humanitarian Action' (see for example ALNAP 2005, 2007; ALNAP 2003a, 2003b) (www.alnap.org)

- Emergency Capacity Building Project: 'Impact Measurement and Accountability in Emergencies: The Good Enough Guide' (Emergency Capacity Building Project 2007) (www.ecbproject.org)

- New Partnership for African Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (NEPARC): self-audit and accreditation according to transparency, accountability and governance criteria developed with the support of the Fritz Institute (www.fritzinstitute.org/prgCapacityBuilding.htm)

It is clear then that many agencies and individuals wish to assess the impact of their interventions on the lives of the beneficiaries they target, and yet successful impact assessment of humanitarian assistance remains elusive. Some of the main reasons for this include *conceptual* challenges, *methodological* obstacles and *organisational* issues. These challenges and issues are summarised and discussed in the following chapters.

Chapter 1: Conceptual Issues and Challenges

This chapter considers the conceptual issues and challenges that limit the humanitarian sector's ability to carry out useful and accurate impact assessments. It begins by defining the scope and purpose of impact assessment in the humanitarian sector, and then considers the specific conceptual issues relating to livelihoods and participation with regard to assessing the impact of emergency interventions.

1.1 Definition and Scope of Impact Assessment

One of the many challenges facing effective impact assessment in the emergency sector is the lack of clarity surrounding the definition and purpose of impact, of impact assessment and even of humanitarian aid itself:

Defining impact assessment in an emergency context involves the need first to **define humanitarian aid** itself, which is not a straightforward issue. Virtually all would agree that one of the key purposes of humanitarian aid is to 'save lives', but there is increasing and as yet unresolved debate on the extent to which it should also aim to 'save livelihoods' and have a longer term – i.e. sustainable - impact. In an emergency context, positive change may not necessarily be long term or 'lasting', but a growing number of commentators suggest that humanitarian aid should indeed have long-term sustainable impact, or at the very least that impact assessment should consider the longer-term implications of humanitarian interventions. For example, the European Commission's evaluation guidelines note: *'many humanitarian interventions, in contrast to development projects, are not designed to be sustainable. They still need assessing, however, in regard to whether, in responding to acute and immediate needs, they take the longer-term into account'* (European Commission 2007:88).

A common **definition of impact** is that used by Oxfam: *'significant or lasting change brought about by a given action or series of actions'* (Roche 1999:21). Assessing impact therefore involves *'the systematic analysis of the lasting or significant changes - positive or negative, intended or not – in people's lives brought about by a given action or series of actions'* (ibid.21). Although originating in the development sector, this definition may apply equally to emergency response. Assessing impact in emergency contexts is however further complicated by the fact that in some cases avoiding or mitigating a negative impact may be rightly considered a success. For example, in a situation of combined conflict and famine, reducing displacement or forced migration which would otherwise have taken place, may be considered a 'positive' impact of an intervention.

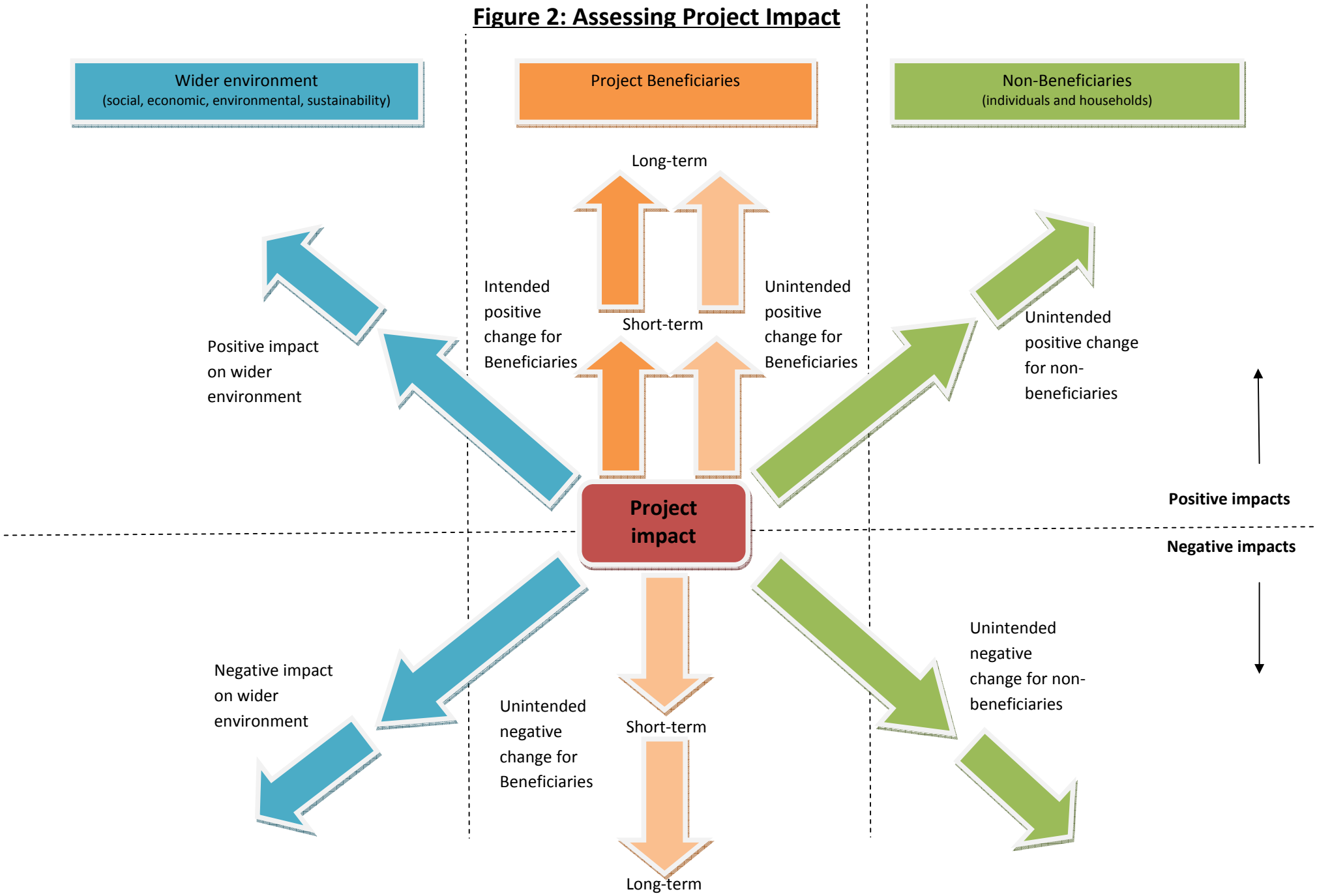
Box 2: Working definition of impact assessment:

'The systematic analysis of the lasting or significant changes – positive or negative, intended or not – in people's lives brought about by a given action or series of actions'

Impact assessment generally uses as a starting point the planned results of project actions on target beneficiaries, but can be expanded to include unintended impacts (both positive and negative), the effects on non-beneficiaries, and ultimately the impact on the wider environment (such as social, economic, environmental and other issues). These different dimensions of impact assessment are presented diagrammatically in Figure 2 below. The figure shows some of the dimensions of impact that can be assessed during impact studies. In reality many impact assessments do not attempt to cover all these dimensions at once. Most commentators however suggest that unintended impacts, particularly negative ones, should be included, i.e. the bottom centre and bottom right of the figure.

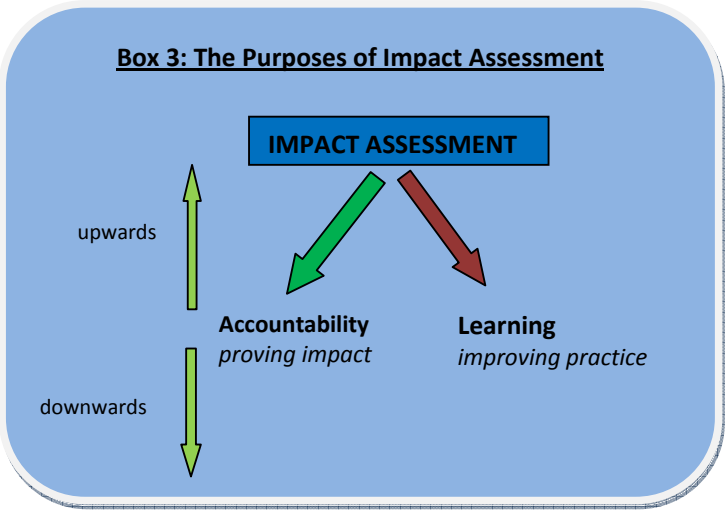
Whilst this diagram begins with the project as its starting point it is also possible, and at times may be desirable, to reverse this process, for example starting with people (rather than the project) and the changes they have experienced, and then assessing which if any of these changes are attributable to project activities. Roche calls this working '*context-in'*, instead of *'organisation-out'*, and suggests that it may be a particularly useful approach in emergency situations in order to take into account local capacity and responses (Roche 1999). Considering the wider context within which a project is operating may be particularly important in emergency situations, to ensure that the minimum standard of 'do no harm' is maintained.

Figure 2: Assessing Project Impact



The **purpose of impact assessment** is also a topic of some debate. Impact assessment is generally carried out to serve one or both of the following two purposes: accountability and learning. *Accountability* may be in two directions: most commonly 'upwards accountability' to headquarters and/or donors; and less frequently 'downwards accountability' in the sense of reporting and accounting to beneficiaries and other stakeholders in the recipient community. *Learning*, on the other hand, is a more internal process which involves the use of impact assessment findings to inform and improve current and future initiatives. These two different purposes of impact assessment have been described as 'proving impact' and 'improving practice' respectively (Kirkpatrick and Hulme 2001), see Box 3. Clarity on the purpose of an impact assessment exercise is important to ensure that the assessment findings are useful.

Box 3: The Purposes of Impact Assessment



It has also been suggested that measuring impact should be based on a 'theory of change' underpinning the intervention – i.e. the agency involved should be clear on what it hopes to achieve (its objectives) in terms of the impact on the beneficiary population, in order that this impact can be properly assessed (Fritz Institute 2006a; Hallam 1998; Hofmann et al 2004). However it is recognized that many interventions do not have clear objectives with regard to their intended impact, which further complicates the process of assessment. This applies particularly to the identification of longer-term impact objectives, which may easily be overlooked in humanitarian interventions that tend to focus on short-term objectives. If longer-term impact is not planned for at the start of an intervention, in terms of forming part of the objectives or overall goal of the project, it is hard to assess progress towards that goal (Hofmann et al 2004): *'projects with clear objectives and targets develop a hierarchy of indicators that link process to impact and thereby make M&E more coherent'* (ProVention Consortium, no date). There is also little widespread use in the design of relief projects of simple techniques to improve the quality of project objectives – such as the SMART approach (objectives should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound).

Impact assessment needs to be linked not only with project objectives – to the extent that project planning should include discussion on what the desired impacts should be – but also with each stage of the project cycle (Global Center for Development 2006). Many commentators argue that failure to include impact assessment considerations throughout the project cycle is one of the causes of the lack of effective impact assessment findings. For example, if there is no 'theory of change' or

discussion of anticipated impact at the planning stage of the project cycle, baseline data needed to assess this impact may not be collected; monitoring processes may fail to note significant changes in impact indicators; and sufficient time may not be set aside for impact assessment studies (Hofmann et al 2004). These issues are discussed further below in the chapter on methodological constraints.

The emergency sector has a shorter history of impact assessment compared to the development sector. This may in part reflect the particular characteristics of humanitarian assistance. There is commonly an 'assumption of impact', based on an unexplored link between the provision of services and beneficial results. For example, many people assume that the provision of food to hungry people automatically has a positive impact; hence there is no need to measure or monitor it (Maxwell and Watkins 2003). The same applies to disaster risk reduction (DRR) projects: *'the importance of identifying who benefits from an initiative cannot be overemphasized. There is a tendency in many, if not most, DRR evaluations to assume that benefits are spread evenly across a community, especially where evaluators focus on lives saved rather than the impact of an event on livelihoods'* (ProVention Consortium, no date). This attitude is further compounded by the nature of much emergency relief provision, which has been described as being 'almost faith-like' in nature, i.e. emergency actors may feel a genuine moral responsibility towards their work, to the saving of lives. This can lead to an assumption that the effectiveness of their work should be taken on trust (Roberts 2004). One commentator contrasts the 'quasi-religious terminology of humanitarianism and its associated principles' with the more bureaucratic language of other development interventions, such as 'effectiveness', 'accountability', 'impact' and so on (Darcy 2005).

Another challenge for impact assessment in emergency contexts, which may apply less in the long-term development sector, relates to the ethics of conducting impact studies. Such studies may be considered to be 'non-essential' in a context where people may be putting themselves at risk by engaging with evaluators; may be forced to recall traumatic or disturbing events; may have to divert time from essential tasks (such as obtaining food) to discuss the issues; or may have their expectations raised by the process (Roche 1999). Nonetheless, other commentators note that failure to assess the impact of interventions (and hence to inform and correct future interventions) can also cause 'real harm' and highlight their view that *'while it is widely recognized that withholding programs that are known to be beneficial would be unethical, the implicit corollary – that programs of unknown impact should not be widely replicated without proper evaluation – is frequently dismissed'* (Global Center for Development 2006).

1.2 Livelihoods and Impact Assessment

The 'Sustainable Livelihoods' model has long been recognised in the development sector as a useful approach to implementing and analysing development projects[2]. In recent years however there has

[2] See www.livelihoods.org for further information on the Sustainable Livelihoods approach.

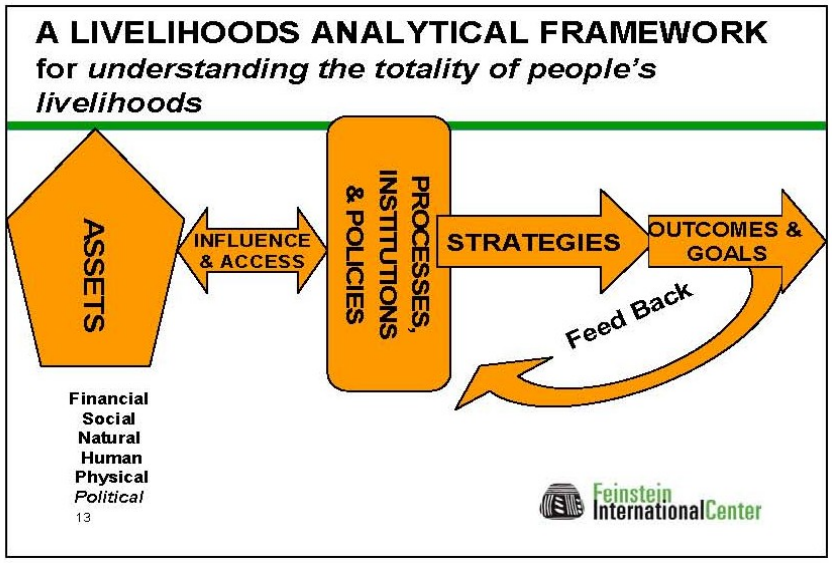
also been growing interest within the emergency sector in livelihoods as both an approach to implementation and a model for analysis, reflecting the trend towards 'saving livelihoods' as well as 'saving lives' in emergency situations. As Shoham puts it: *'there is an apparent growing consensus that livelihoods protection ... is a legitimate aim/objective of humanitarian interventions'* (Shoham 2004:52); see also the Red Cross and Red Crescent Code of Conduct for Disaster Relief: *'relief aid must strive to reduce future vulnerabilities to disaster as well as meeting basic needs*' (point 8) (SMART 2006:319); and the 2006 ALNAP review: *'evaluations should also examine the degree to which livelihoods of the affected population are supported or disrupted by the intervention, as this will have a significant impact on longer-term results'* (ALNAP 2006:12).

This interest in livelihoods is part of a growing debate on the connections between development and emergency responses, and between short and long-term interventions, which have historically been largely unconnected in terms of policy, organisation and implementation. Some initiatives, such as the concept of Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD) (ALNAP 2001), disaster risk reduction (DRR) (Twigg and Benson 2007) and other livelihoods-based relief approaches (Catley, Leyland and Bishop 2008) are all geared towards bridging this gap and bringing more coherence to the sector. The need to take the longer-term into account in emergency response – which historically has been very short-term focused – is increasingly recognised in order to avoid 'saving lives at the expense of livelihoods'; increasing vulnerability through failure to address destructive coping mechanisms; and/or failing to address social and political risks such as conflict over limited access to land and water (TRIAMS 2006a).

The Sustainable Livelihoods model was originally developed for the development sector, and a number of commentators have noted the need to adapt it in order to make it more applicable to emergency contexts. The Feinstein International Center at Tufts University adapted the DFID framework as follows:

Figure 3: Livelihoods Framework for Emergency Contexts

Source: Feinstein International Center 2004



Key among some of the adaptations of the framework is an increased emphasis on vulnerability, which plays a more central role in livelihoods in disaster situations (Jaspars et al 2007; Twigg 2001). The analysis of livelihood assets is also modified to allow for assets to be considered as liabilities as well as beneficial: for example, the acquisition or ownership of livestock in a conflict-ridden area may increase vulnerability to attack and theft (Jaspars et al 2007). Finally, politics and power are more explicitly assessed, in particular political vulnerability which may be significantly heightened in situations of conflict or instability (Jaspars and Shoham 2002; Humanitarian Accountability Partnership – International 2005; Jaspars et al 2007).

As noted above, analysis of impact should be based on a statement of intended impact – i.e. the project's objectives. In order therefore for a livelihoods approach to emergency impact assessment to be effective, the original project objectives need to encompass livelihood goals or desired outcomes against which changes can be measured.

A livelihoods approach to impact assessment in emergencies also has the potential to provide a longer-term view of the impact of humanitarian assistance in a broad context. One such example is a longitudinal study in Bosnia that assessed changes in livelihoods across three time periods: the end of the cold war, the height of the Bosnian war, and the present day. The study began with changes at the household level (taking a 'context-in' approach, as defined above) and the humanitarian interventions were unpacked as part of this process, rather than being the main focus of the investigation (Stites and Lautze 2005). The authors of the report highlight the benefits of this approach for providing a longer-term view of the 'relative role of humanitarian assistance within a larger set of household strategies' taken ten years after the end of the war; whilst acknowledging that the method was not designed to analyse the immediate impact of for example food aid or shelter on mortality or malnutrition in the short term (ibid.).

According to some commentators, livelihoods analysis for impact assessment has a number of limitations, some of which may apply equally to emergency and development situations. These include: the difficulty of deriving generalised policy messages, in part because of the challenge of comparability and replicability of data (an issue discussed below in Chapter 2: Methodology; and also in Part B); the focus on 'local complexities' may lead to a failure to address external policy and institutional factors adequately; and issues of politics, participation and rights may be overlooked (Ashley and Hussein 2000).

Livelihoods can be not only an approach to impact assessment, but also a tool for analysis. However, in spite of the growing interest in livelihood approaches there are few examples of methods and tools suitable for analysing the impact of humanitarian interventions. There appears to be more experience at present of using livelihoods analysis at the initial assessment stage than for impact studies (Hofmann et al 2004). Yet the need for such tools remains high, in the light of the failure of some humanitarian interventions to support livelihoods appropriately in emergencies (see for example Fritz Institute 2005). Chapter 2 below discusses some of these methodological issues.

1.3 Participation in Impact Assessment

Few development projects nowadays fail to refer to the importance of 'participation'. However, the concept remains very broad and its application varies significantly in different contexts. Most commentators agree that 'participation' is in fact a spectrum rather than a single issue, and that different levels of participation can occur at different stages of the project cycle; hence it is difficult to call any particular project or intervention unequivocally 'participatory' (Catley 1999b; Estrella and Gaventa 1998; Guijt 1998; Chambers 2007).

Table 1 below highlights the distinction between these different levels of participation, ranging from 'inform', where beneficiaries receive information about proposed activities or a pending evaluation; to 'self-management', whereby community groups might initiate and lead an evaluation themselves. When discussing participation it is important to distinguish between these levels and to specify the extent to which beneficiaries are actually engaged in the various stages of the project cycle.

Table 1: Levels of Participation in the Project Cycle

	Inform	Consult	Active involvement	Assuming responsibility	Self-management
Needs assessment					
Design					
Planning					
Implementation					
Monitoring					
Evaluation and impact assessment					

Source: Oakley et al 1998:138

Within the debate on participation, there is growing interest in participatory impact assessment. This may be the result of a number of factors: first, participatory assessment may in fact increase the accuracy of impact data compared to less participatory methods: if participatory approaches assume that local people can make valuable contributions to problems analysis and project design, it follows that they can also assess changes in their communities (Oakley et al 1998). Second, some actors may feel a 'moral' obligation to understand the perspective of the end-users of the service they are providing: *'people's perceptions and experiences must lie at the heart of efforts to evaluate qualitative change and project impact'* (ibid: 62)[3]. Third, it is generally recognised that some issues

[3] See also for example: 'the ideology underpinning participatory approaches is that people must have a central role in their development' (Nowland-Foreman 2002). Participation in impact assessment is in this sense an extension of this moral obligation.

such as social dynamics, empowerment, exclusion, and so on may be more easily investigated using participatory methods (Oakley et al 1998).

There is a general recognition that levels of participation at most stages of the project cycle are insufficient, in both the development (Roche 1999) and the emergency sectors (see for example Hofmann et al 2004) and some commentators suggest that the emergency sector should learn more from the development field (and indeed from the private sector) on how to increase participation in humanitarian assistance (Hofmann op. cit). Taking a truly participatory approach to impact assessment presents particular challenges however, including:

- The absence of clear definitions of what we mean by participation (in particular the spectrum outlined above). Participatory methods of data collection may form part of a wider, non-participatory process (Chambers 2007) leading to the illusion of participation that claims to deliver 'the people's views' but in fact remains extractive (White and Petit 2004)

- The question of who should participate – beneficiaries only; other community members; all stakeholders? (Estrella and Gaventa 1998; Oakley et al 1998)

- The question of 'objectivity' and whether this is compromised by participatory approaches. Some commentators suggest that participatory approaches may only yield 'subjective' results, while others refute this and claim that the apparent scientific 'objectivity' of quantitative (and extractive) data collection methods is illusory (Guijt 1998; Catley 1999b). Yet others use participatory methods and control groups to improve objectivity and thereby bridge the gap between these 'objective' and 'subjective' approaches (see Part B below)

- The concern by some actors that participation involves additional time, human resources and cost (for example in impact assessment) (Guijt 1998; Chambers 2007; Estrella and Gaventa 1998), although there is limited evidence to show that participatory evaluation requires more resources than conventional studies or surveys

- The potential risks to beneficiaries from engaging in participatory impact assessment in insecure or politically charged environments; and the moral questionability of enquiring into recent traumas (Hallam 1998)

- Methodological concerns (discussed in the following chapter and in Part B) which focus on issues of replicability, scaling up, and standardisation, set against the desire to retain flexibility and genuinely reflect the views of individuals.

There is little mention of humanitarian assistance in the literature on participatory impact assessment. Participation as a general approach has historically been relatively limited in the emergency sector (ProVention Consortium, no date; also ALNAP 2001). Some see this as a result of

the nature of humanitarian assistance, which has focused on rapid intervention in response to an acute crisis, leaving little time for consultation or discussion with potential beneficiaries. Hence, in spite of a growing commitment to participation in emergency interventions, *'M&E systems [in humanitarian assistance] remain predominantly top-down, designed to provide information to headquarters staff and donors'* (ProVention Consortium, op. cit), although there is a discussion on participation and food security programming in complex emergencies in case studies from Somalia and South Sudan (Roberts 2004; Bishop et al 2008).

Nonetheless, the humanitarian sector has, through the HAP standards, made an explicit commitment to participation through the project cycle: *'The agency shall enable intended beneficiaries and their representatives to participate in project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation'* (HAP Standard 3.2) (Humanitarian Accountability Partnership – International 2007). The challenge then remains to turn this commitment into reality within the particular constraints of the humanitarian sector.

Conceptual Issues and Challenges: Summary of Chapter 1

- Impact assessment generally starts with the project and moves outwards, covering positive and negative benefits, intended and unintended. It can also encompass the impact on non-beneficiaries and on the wider environment
- Agencies need to be clear on the objectives of their intervention (in particular with regard to whether they aim simply to save lives, or also to support livelihoods), in order to analyse the impact of their activities against these intended changes. The reduction of negative impacts also needs to be taken into account.
- Livelihoods are an increasingly important aspect of humanitarian assistance and appropriate tools and approaches need to be developed.
- There is interest in increasing the level of participation by beneficiary communities in humanitarian assistance, although the emergency sector is lagging behind the development sector in this area and appropriate approaches are still being developed.

Chapter 2: Methodological Issues and Challenges

Impact assessment of humanitarian assistance draws on a range of methodologies and analytical frameworks which are also used for impact assessment of longer-term development initiatives. Table 2 below presents selected methodologies and approaches that have been or could be applied to emergency response impact assessment.

Table 2: Selected impact assessment approaches for humanitarian assistance

Methodology	Location, organisation/ project type	Key Characteristics of IA method	Reference
Recipient Perceptions Review	Fritz Institute Indian Ocean tsunami	Questionnaire-based review scoring satisfaction with response (for both quantitative and qualitative indicators) See also 'Beneficiary satisfaction assessment' by USAID in West Bank/Gaza	Fritz Institute 2005; 2006b USAID 2005
Standardised Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transition (SMART)	Inter-agency initiative	Uses crude mortality rate (CMR) and nutritional status of under 5s to assess both the stress levels of disaster-affected communities. Primarily a means for standardising assessment	SMART 2006
Real-time evaluation (RTE)	Pioneered by UNHCR, DANIDA and others	Carries out an evaluation (which may or may not include impact analysis) during an emergency intervention in order to allow learning to be directly and immediately applied. Focus is thus on learning more than accountability. However timing militates against long-term impact being visible.	Herson and Mitchell 2005
Domestic Assets Index	Indian Ocean tsunami response	Quantified asset holdings before and after flood and intervention	Arlikatti 2007
Impact Survey	Various	Questionnaire collects quantitative and/or qualitative information on impact at household level	e.g. Simpson et al 2007
'Shoestring Evaluation'	Bamberger et al	Modification of standard quantitative survey approach for situations where time and/or budget are very short; includes an option for no control group and no pre-testing which could fit emergency situation	Bamberger et al 2004
Participatory Enquiry	Various	Uses Participatory Learning and Action (PLA, a variation on PRA) methods to generate data with communities Participation in planning and data analysis may vary	Catley 2005
Self-evaluation	Burkina Faso World Neighbors Seed	Teams of beneficiaries carried out evaluation with support from other local	Bandre 1998

	distribution and other livelihood support Also: ActionAid Somaliland Programme Review	stakeholders, following training by WN Review of AAS programme carried out by local partner NGO, following training by AAS	 ActionAid Somaliland 1999
'Most Significant Change'	Developed in Bangladesh by Rick Davies and colleagues	Selection of the most significant changes that have occurred during the monitoring period by beneficiaries themselves. Allows unintended and negative impacts to be identified, and highlights the priorities of beneficiaries as opposed to project implementers	Simanowitz 2001; Bond, no date
'Participatory Impact Monitoring'	Guide for local self-help groups	Local self-help groups and supporting organisations carry out reflections on impact at periodic intervals, then compare results and develop participatory plans accordingly	Germann et al, cited in Bayer and Waters-Bayer 2002
'Participatory Impact Assessment' (PIA)	Initially developed by Vetwork UK by adapting the participatory approaches used by AAS in Somaliland; further developed by the Feinstein International Center for veterinary, human health and food security projects in Africa	Systematic collection of qualitative data using PLA methods and including use of community-identified indicators; use of both control groups and triangulation with project monitoring data to improve validity. **Discussed further in Part B below**	Abebe 2006; Feinstein International Center 2007; Admassu et al 2005; PACE Ethiopia 2002; Ethiopia Participatory Impact Assessment Team 2002; Mekonnen and Hussein 2005; Nalitolela and Allport 2002; Catley and Admassu 2003; Catley 2005; Catley 1999b; Catley 1999a; also Burns and Suji 2007a, 2007b, 2007c; Burns et al 2008

Emergency situations present particular challenges for impact assessment. Some of these challenges also apply to impact assessment in development situations, but may be further exacerbated by the specific nature of humanitarian assistance and the operating context, largely due to the acute nature of rapid-onset crises requiring an urgent response.

As noted above, impact assessment of emergency programmes is a relatively young area and most commentators note the absence of relevant or good quality information for impact assessment (Oakley et al 1998). Some blame this on the lack of suitable tools and in particular of standardised and rigorous methodologies (Hofmann et al 2004; Global Center for Development 2006). For example, the ALNAP review of 2001 noted that the evaluation reports studied were *'consistently weak in key methodological areas'* (ALNAP 2001). A review of UNICEF evaluations estimated that only 15% of the reports included impact assessments, but also that *'many evaluations were unable to properly assess impact because of methodological shortcomings'* (Global Center for Development

2006:2). Other commentators suggest that the application of methodologies is where the weakness may lie, for example in the implementation of surveys (Hofmann et al 2004).

Some of these methodological constraints are discussed in the following sections, namely: time and timing; baselines; attribution; indicators; qualitative and quantitative data collection; and livelihoods analysis.

2.1 Key Methodological Constraints

2.1.1 Time and timing

One of the main constraints to successful impact assessment in emergency situations is time. Humanitarian assistance is often delivered rapidly in situations of acute crisis, when there are time constraints affecting all stages of the project cycle including the evaluation phase, even though, as noted above, planning for impact assessment ideally needs to begin at the start of an initiative. These time constraints affect most other aspects of impact assessment methodology as discussed below, such as baseline data collection, participation by beneficiaries, and ultimately the quality of the assessment results. The shortage of time to address key questions adequately is also highlighted in the Participatory Impact Assessments discussed below in Part B.

Whilst acknowledging that allocating adequate time to impact assessment is difficult and often means that impact assessments do not take place, some commentators still emphasise the importance of trying to make sure that sufficient time is assigned to impact assessment processes (ALNAP 2001; Hallam 1998).

The question of timing is also important: if the results are to have an impact on the direction of the current programme, the assessment needs to be completed and delivered as soon as possible (Hallam 1998). However, most impacts (as opposed to outputs and outcomes) take place over a long time frame and hence the real results of an intervention (particularly those related to livelihoods) may not be visible until some years after the programme has ended (Oakley et al 1998). A decision therefore needs to be made to balance the immediate usefulness of impact results being made available during or soon after an intervention, against the long-term learning to be derived from assessments taking place after some time has passed. The timing of an impact assessment also needs to take into account issues such as beneficiary calendars (harvests, migration, etc.) and external factors such as the stage of the emergency, and the political and security context.

2.1.2 Baselines

Obtaining adequate baseline data for impact assessment remains a challenge even in the development sector, where in theory at least more time is available at the planning and preparation stages (Oakley et al 1998), and often proves extremely difficult in emergency situations (Hofmann et al 2004; ProVention Consortium, no date). In fact the lack of adequate baseline data is sometimes

used as a reason for not carrying out impact assessments (Catley, Leyland and Bishop 2008). Baselines also need to address the seasonality of livelihood strategies: snapshot views may overlook seasonal changes in livelihood activities and results.

A number of methods exist for overcoming the challenge of obtaining baselines in emergency projects. First, there is growing interest in 'retrospective' or 'reconstructed' baselines, particularly as part of a participatory impact assessment (Roche 1999; Oakley et al 1998; ProVention Consortium, no date; Bamberger et al 2004; Emergency Capacity Building Project 2006). Using beneficiaries' recall, these baselines may not be appropriate for the collection of precise numerical data (such as exact prices, disease incidence etc.), but they have the potential to provide significant data on changes according to beneficiary perceptions. Participatory techniques such as timelines and proportional piling can help to quantify this information, which may be further statistically analysed, and triangulated with project monitoring data (which may include precise numerical data e.g. market prices) to improve validity (see Part B). Whilst reconstruction of baselines has the potential for bias and for 'telescoping' of recall (for example the inclusion of events or facts from before the recall period) the method does provide a pragmatic way forward for impact assessment in acute emergency situations where it is not possible to carry out formal baseline studies prior to the intervention (Bamberger et al 2004.

A second option is that of 'rolling baselines', whereby new beneficiaries joining an activity provide background information which is then compared with the status of existing beneficiaries. However, external variables need to be adequately analysed (such as the reasons why 'newcomers' were not originally part of the project) before this data can be deemed reliable (Oakely et al 1998; Bond, no date).

Third, secondary data and interviews with key informants can be used to help build up a baseline picture of the situation and status before intervention (Bamberger et al 2004). The 'Good Enough Guide' to impact assessment and accountability in emergencies suggests that at the very minimum, beneficiary communities should be 'profiled' at the outset of an intervention in order to obtain basic background data, against which impact may later be measured (Emergency Capacity Building Project 2007).

Even in rapid-onset emergencies, the Sphere handbook advises that participatory needs assessment should be carried out (The Sphere Project 2004). Baseline data is an inherent part of this process but is rarely recognized as such and is often used only for project design. For example a rapid assessment of water needs might include a map showing accessibility, availability and quality of water sources, three key baseline impact indicators which may not be recognised as such.

These alternatives illustrate that the lack of formal baseline should not form an insurmountable obstacle to effective impact assessment.

2.1.3 Attribution

A third methodological challenge for impact assessment of humanitarian assistance is the difficulty of attributing any particular change to a specific action on the part of an intervening agency (Hofmann et al 2004; Hallam 1998; Oakley et al 1998; Global Center for Development 2006). This is for a number of reasons:

- Impact is by its nature more long-term than for example project outcomes, and hence attribution to a particular input is more difficult (Roche et al 2005).
- Emergency responses often include a large number of actors and hence it is usually difficult to relate the actions of any one agency to a specific impact, in spite of the fact that this may form the motivation for the agency's involvement in impact assessment (in order for example to prove their effectiveness to their donors) (Hofmann et al 2004; Roche 1999).
- The importance of determining the 'counterfactual'[4] is particularly relevant in emergency situations, where the aim of an intervention may simply be to prevent the situation getting any worse or reducing negative impacts (ALNAP 2001).
- During an emergency, it is not only humanitarian agencies which affect the outcome. Local responses, indigenous coping mechanisms, and changes in the external context such as security, market conditions or climatic factors, may all contribute to the mitigation of the effects of a disaster on the local population. These factors may be difficult to distinguish during impact assessment studies (Hofmann et al 2004).
- Changes in qualitative indicators, such as social change, may be particularly difficult to attribute to specific interventions (Oakley et al 1998).
- Changes in nutrition are also notably difficult to attribute (Hofmann et al 2004; Roche 1999) – see discussion below on nutrition indicators.

In response to these challenges a number of methods may be used. In the development sector control groups offer a means of establishing a causal relationship between particular interventions and impact. However, in emergency contexts some actors feel reluctant to use them on ethical grounds, since the withholding of assistance in an emergency contravenes humanitarian principles (Hofmann et al 2004). However, it may still be possible to identify existing non-beneficiary groups who could act as a control, as long as key differences in their circumstances are taken into account. For example, the nutritional status of non-beneficiaries may be similar to that of beneficiaries receiving food support, but the former may have had to sell key livelihood assets in order to

[4] 'The situation or condition which hypothetically may prevail for individuals, organizations or groups were there no development intervention' (Hofmann et al 2004:7)

maintain their nutritional status (Hallam 1998). Some emergency interventions such as food aid are also easily transferable within and between communities, and hence official 'non-beneficiaries' may also benefit from it (ibid.). Comparisons between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries in order to establish attribution should therefore only be made when the systematic differences between the two groups have been ruled out or accounted for (Global Center for Development 206). Part B below contains some examples of innovative comparisons between control groups from among respondents during Participatory Impact Assessments.

Other alternatives for control groups include the use of 'new' groups (as noted above with regard to baselines), whereby beneficiaries joining an intervention after its onset may provide background data on 'unreached' communities (Roche 1999). Conversely, recipients leaving a scheme may also be followed up through 'tracer studies', which monitor the impact of the absence of the intervention on their lives (Goyder et al 1998). In all these instances, discussion is required in order to clarify the particular circumstances and other factors which may influence impact, in order to establish a causal relationship between the humanitarian assistance and the changes taking place among the affected population. In this respect it has been noted that participatory enquiry methods may be particularly useful (Ashley and Hussein 2000; see also Part B below). Secondary data may also support this process (Roche 1999).

In the light of the challenges facing attribution in emergency contexts, one commentator suggests focusing on 'painting a credible picture', rather than aiming for precise measurements of attribution, and calls for an analysis of 'contribution' rather than of 'attribution' (Mayne 1999). Another source debunks evidence-based approaches and advocates the use of 'plausibility statements' (Victora et al 2004). This means that, rather than trying to prove that a given impact is the result solely of their particular intervention, agencies should focus on establishing if their efforts have contributed to that positive impact, alongside other agencies' activities and possibly other contextual factors. Given the operating context for much humanitarian assistance, this appears to be a sensible way forward, although it may require a shift in thinking among some donors and operating agencies, as discussed below in Chapter 3, in terms of their desire or requirement to 'prove' their impact.

2.2 Indicators

As noted in Chapter 1, evaluation processes often tend to focus on measurement of *outputs* and *outcomes*, and struggle to assess *impact*. This tendency is reflected in the indicators used, which are commonly 'process' or 'implementation' indicators (for example quantity of seeds distributed, number of fields planted) and less often 'impact' indicators (for example positive changes in diet or food supply) (Hofmann et al 2004; ProVention Consortium, no date). This may in part be the result of the preferences and priorities of donors, who generally require precise data about expenditure and outputs for their own accountability purposes. Indicators are linked with project objectives and hence if the objectives are not clear or not easily measurable, appropriate indicators are difficult to determine (Hallam 1998; Hofmann et al 2004). At the same time, some objectives may be difficult

to quantify, for example those relating to quality of life, protection or in some cases livelihoods (Hallam op. cit.).

In some instances, 'process' indicators may be used as proxy impact indicators. For example research has shown that measles immunisation has a positive impact on mortality. In this case therefore data on the number of children immunised (i.e. a 'process' indicator) can be used as a proxy impact indicator for mortality. However, it is important to note that if proxy indicators are being used, the evidence base for the causal link with impact must be well established. In the case of measles immunisation, widely accepted medical research results have already established the connection (Hofmann et al 2004; Roberts 2004).

There is a danger during impact assessment (and indeed in most monitoring and evaluation processes) of collecting too much data. A key concern when defining impact indicators therefore is to ensure that only the minimum number are identified, in order to avoid unrealistic data collection requirements and inappropriate monitoring and evaluation burdens being placed on staff and communities in potentially difficult emergency situations (Emergency Capacity Building Project 2007; INTRAC 2001). The indicator identification process also needs to be flexible, particularly in potentially volatile emergency situations, so that indicators can be updated as necessary in the light of changing circumstances (Roche 1999). A mix of qualitative and quantitative indicators is generally recommended (see Chapter 2.3 below).

Some commentators also recommend that as much as possible indicators should be identified together with beneficiary communities, in order to ensure that objectives and impacts are geared towards beneficiary priorities (Emergency Capacity Building Project 2007). The 'Good Enough Guide' to impact assessment and accountability points out that such community-developed indicators help to define appropriate objectives for the project, even though these indicators:

- 'May or may not be compatible with other indicators
- May seem illogical to outsiders
- May not be applicable in other emergencies or other communities
- May not be time-bound
- May not enable comparison between projects' (ibid.46)

Using community-generated indicators allows issues to emerge which the implementing agency may not have considered as potential impacts, for example social factors such as increased dignity or improved social relations, as illustrated by the participatory impact assessments discussed below in Part B.

Indicators should also take into account the long-term impact of an agency's intervention, whether this forms part of the original objectives or not. Roche raises the issues of sustainability and notes *'the need for NGOs to understand the broader and longer-term consequences of their work, whether they are intended or not'* (Roche 1999, author's emphasis). In terms of the diagrammatic

presentation of impact assessment in Figure 2 above, this suggestion highlights the 'outer edges' of the diagram, not just focusing on the 'central' i.e. short-term issues. In answer to the potential challenge that humanitarian agencies should focus on saving lives in the short term rather than on sustainable impacts on issues such as conflict, Roche states that *'the provision of humanitarian assistance does not absolve ... the international community from its duty to help bring conflicts to an end and to resolve the root causes that brought them about. In fact, it makes it even more important to gather evidence about the broader impacts of humanitarian assistance in situations where other actors do not comply with their moral and legal obligations'* (ibid:185-6).

Table 3 below summarises some of the indicators suggested by various commentators for impact assessment of humanitarian assistance.

Table 3: Possible indicators for impact assessment of humanitarian assistance

Organisation/topic	Indicators	Reference
ALNAP Annual Review 2001	Indicators should cover both 'traditional' topics: ▪ Shelter ▪ Food aid ▪ Health etc. and also 'new' areas: ▪ Protection ▪ Humanitarian space ▪ Human rights ▪ Advocacy etc.	ALNAP 2001
Coping Strategies Index (Emergency Nutrition Network)	1. Dietary change 2. Increasing short-term food access (borrowing, gifts, wild foods, consuming seed stocks etc) 3. Decreasing numbers of people to feed (short-term migration) 4. Rationing strategies (prioritising children; limiting portion size, skipping meals)	Emergency Nutrition Network 2001
Tsunami Recovery, Assessment and Monitoring System (TRIAMS) *Impact Indicators*	1. Vital needs 2. Basic social services 3. Infrastructure 4. Livelihoods	TRIAMS 2006a
TRIAMS *Risk Reduction Indicators*	1. Scale of affected area in which community-based watershed management plans have been established 2. Stability of employment rates after discontinuation of food and cash for work programmes 3. Reestablishment of trade and transport links between affected areas and markets for products, labour and services 4. Remittance flows return to normal after disruption	TRIAMS 2006b

SMART Indicators	▪ Crude mortality rate (CMR) ▪ Wasting in children aged 6-59 months, based on: o Height-for-age o Weight-for-height o Weight-for-age	Young and Jaspars 2006
Livelihood Asset Status Tracking (LAST)	Scores the combined livelihood asset status of households; can be used as a proxy indicator for impact on livelihoods. Stages from worst to best situation for each livelihood capital asset are described and household placed on the scale.	Bond, no date
Vulnerability models	*Capacities and Vulnerabilities Analysis Matrix (CVA):* Focus on vulnerabilities (as opposed to needs, which are seen as short-term) and capacities with regard to the following factors: physical/material; social/organisational; motivational/attitude *Pressure and Release Model/Access Model:* Monitors the progress of vulnerability through root causes; dynamic pressures; and unsafe conditions, and hence allows monitoring of mitigation of these factors *Victim Security Matrix* Considers food, water, habitat and work security, from the point of view of: special groups and areas; institutions and governance; resource allocations and accountability; and technology and environment	Twigg 2001
Roche: Impact Assessment for Development Agencies – emergency contexts	▪ Mortality and morbidity rates ▪ Coverage and differential impact ▪ Protection and security ▪ Sustainability	Roche 1999
Save the Children UK: Guide to Assessment Monitoring, Review and Evaluation	▪ Health, including mortality, morbidity, malnutrition, health threats ▪ Livelihoods ▪ Psycho-social effects	Save the Children UK 1999
Feinstein International Center: Veterinary and human health services impact indicators [based on standard WHO indicators for primary healthcare]	▪ Accessibility ▪ Availability ▪ Affordability ▪ Acceptance ▪ Quality Also: number of marriages as a proxy indicator for livestock numbers among pastoralists and other livestock keepers	Catley, Leyland and Bishop 2008
Indicators for monitoring conflict/peace work	▪ Causes participants to take up peace initiatives on their own ▪ Contributes to the reform of building of institutions to	Anderson, 2004

	address grievances underlying the conflict ▪ Enables people to resist violence or manipulation ▪ Increases security and perceptions of security	

A number of the organisations cited in this table suggest the use of mortality and/or nutrition-based indicators for impact assessment, both of which are the topic of some debate, as summarised in the following sections.

Mortality as an impact indicator

Mortality rates appear to be a logical starting point for emergency operations aimed at saving lives, and where such data can be collected it may be useful for demonstrating impact (Hofmann et al 2004). However, using mortality data for impact assessment involves a number of challenges. First, there is no standard method for measuring mortality rates (ibid.). Second, it has been suggested that measuring mortality requires a relatively stable situation (which may not be the case in an emergency situation) and also needs a reasonable timeframe in order to establish rates and changes (ibid.), although another author notes that *'valid, population-based [mortality] data could still be collected in austere, relatively insecure areas, even when population numbers were unknown'* (Brennan et al 2006). To do this requires *'good local knowledge, strong logistics support and flexibility in data collection methods'* (ibid). Third, mortality data may be manipulated by respondents and other stakeholders for various ends, for example to secure more aid. Fourth, numbers may be under-reported for cultural reasons in areas where death is a taboo subject. Fifth, common methodological errors, such as the lack of standardised methods for determining sample size or defining households, household members, and selecting principal informants, can lead to unreliable data. Finally, some methods require tracking populations over an extended period, during which time some family members may leave or re-enter the household (Hofmann et al 2004).

In spite of these - largely methodological - constraints, it has been noted that mortality data can play a useful role in demonstrating the need for intervention and for policy advocacy, if not for impact assessment (Brennan et al 2006). Others suggest that the most useful level for the collection of mortality data is that of the whole operation, rather than at individual programme level, in order to monitor trends and impact. Thus they advise that individual projects should not be judged on the basis of mortality figures and note that such figures cannot help to identify specific gaps in humanitarian response programmes (Checchi and Roberts 2005). However, they strongly urge investment in mortality studies – carried out by experienced research professionals rather than agency staff, to avoid the methodological pitfalls described here – in order to understand the impact of a humanitarian operation as a whole, based on the pooling of resources of the operational agencies. As they point out: *'it does not seem unreasonable to use 1% (or even 5%) of a relief budget to help assess whether the other 99% (or 95%) is having an impact. The point is not to do many surveys, but to do a few well...'* (ibid.:33).

Nutrition as an impact indicator

As Table 3 above shows, a number of agencies and initiatives recommend the use of nutrition data as an indicator for impact assessment of humanitarian assistance. Some commentators suggest that acute malnutrition can play a useful role in monitoring trends over time and hence the impact of interventions (Young and Jaspars 2006). However, they also urge caution in that changes in nutrition are 'multi-causal' and hence other sources of data are also needed in order to establish attribution.

Too much focus on nutrition data (and the neglect of other indicators) can also mask other important issues and hence nutritional analysis should be accompanied by analysis of food and livelihood security, in particular coping strategies (Shoham 2004). It is possible for example that coping strategies may be employed that significantly erode livelihood assets in order to maintain nutritional status in the household. A nutritional survey alone would not identify these other trends (ibid.). At the same time, monitoring child nutrition only can also conceal deteriorating nutrition among adults in cases where parents limit their own intake for the sake of the children (SMART 2006). In some instances nutritional data can be overtly misleading: for example a World Food Programme evaluation planning document noted that according to global acute malnutrition indicators, the Red Sea Hills region in Sudan was worse off than Darfur, in spite of the fact that the latter region was clearly in far greater need (Young and Osman 2006).

In summary, the monitoring of nutrition levels during and following an emergency cannot on its own distinguish between localities, identify intra-household variations, pick up the erosion of livelihood assets nor identify and attribute positive impacts to any particular intervention or agency. It may however help to give a broad picture of overall nutritional trends in the wider context in which the intervention is taking place (ProVention Consortium and ALNAP 2007; SMART 2006).

2.3 Qualitative and quantitative data

Many commentators have suggested that a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative data is required for effective impact assessment (White and Petit 2004; Emergency Capacity Building Project 2007; DFID 1998; Save the Children UK 1999; Hofmann et al 2004; CGAP 1997; Chambers 2007; The Sphere Project 2004). Some however show a preference for qualitative data which, in the words of the Sphere guidelines *'may be more likely to capture the intricate nature of disaster responses'* (The Sphere Project 2004:39). A number note that participatory techniques (which generally yield qualitative data) may be particularly appropriate for emergency impact assessment, because they facilitate discussion on attribution, allow for recall to replace missing baselines, and may encourage the identification of unintended impacts (Roche 1999; Hallam 1998; ProVention Consortium, no date; INTRAC 2001). As noted above in the discussions on mortality and nutrition data, precise quantitative data may also be difficult to obtain with any degree of accuracy in an emergency situation, in which case reliable and methodologically sound qualitative data may be more useful.

Chapter 3 below highlights the growing emphasis among implementing agencies and donors on proving results. There is a danger that this may lead to a focus on quantitative indicators that can be easily measured, rather than on less easily measurable aspects such as protection and dignity (Hofmann et al 2004).

One of the criticisms of qualitative data collection is that it is not structured or systematic (Catley, Leyland and Bishop 2008). However, there is growing interest in combining quantitative and qualitative data collection, for example through 'hybrids' (combining tools and attitudes from both quantitative and qualitative schools); 'sequencing' (using one method followed by the other, the results of one helping to shape the other); and 'concurrent' (whereby a mixture of methods is used at the same time) (DFID 1998). It is also possible to use quantitative methods to assess qualitative indicators – for example one review of the Indian Ocean tsunami response involved a quantitative survey on beneficiaries' satisfaction rates with the interventions they received (Fritz Institute 2006a).

There is also growing interest in developing methodologies for the systematic collection of qualitative data using participatory techniques such as those known collectively as Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) and repeating standardised participatory methods. Even with small sample sizes, this enables the reliability of data to be assessed using conventional and relatively simple statistical tests. The approach has also used control groups, again with small sample sizes and statistical comparison of control and intervention groups. Triangulation with monitoring data for project activities further strengthens the validity of assessment findings. These adaptations have been used to carry out impact assessments at local level, and have also helped to inform policy (DFID 1998; see also Chambers 2007, and the discussion in Part B below). This trend towards the systematisation of qualitative data is supported by critics of the historic dominance of quantitative methods such as Robert Chambers, who notes the pursuit of 'excessive accuracy' and warn against 'bogus precision' (Chambers (1997) *Whose reality counts?* quoted in Guijt 1998). Chambers encourages the aim of 'approximate precision' which aims to be as accurate as possible under the circumstances, without the illusion of absolute precision which may be given by quantitative data but which may in fact be unsubstantiated (ibid.). The operating constraints of many emergency situations mean that 'approximate precision' may be the best option.

Quantitative data is commonly assessed according to four criteria of 'trustworthiness' (see Box 4). These criteria have been adapted for use with qualitative data (see the results shown in brackets in Box 4). The case for external validity or 'transferability' is perhaps harder for qualitative

Box 4: Defining the 'trustworthiness' of information

1. Internal validity (credibility)
2. External validity (transferability)
3. Reliability (dependability)
4. Objectivity (confirmability)

DFID 1998; Bamberger et al 2004

data to make, compared to the other criteria, particularly when researchers try to generalise findings from participatory enquiry to the same extent as those from sample surveys. An alternative approach is to focus on a 'representative' sample rather than claiming excessive 'transferability' of findings (DFID 1998; see also Victora 2004).

Alongside the need for a structured methodology, some commentators also highlight the importance of flexibility, particularly for impact assessment, in order to remain open to the unintended and potentially negative aspects of impact (see Figure 2 above) (INTRAC 2001). One study describes a (development) impact assessment in which the draft findings were presented to the beneficiaries in visual form based on a 'tree' diagram (rather than a draft report). The graphic formed the basis of a participatory meeting, during which beneficiaries were free to add to and reshape the graphic, thus greatly increasing both their input to the impact assessment and their ownership of the findings (ibid.).

Some commentators also highlight the importance, whichever methods are used, of triangulation, emphasising its role in validating (and thus increasing the 'trustworthiness' of) the data (ProVention Consortium, no date; ALNAP 2001).

2.4 Operating Context

Humanitarian assistance generally takes place in a very different operating context from that of long-term development projects and this context has a significant impact on both the implementation of humanitarian interventions and on the process of evaluating them (Hallam 1998). The key feature of many emergency contexts is change, and often *'turbulent, non-linear change'* (Roche 1999:267). Emergency situations are generally difficult environments in which to operate: they may be insecure, volatile, dangerous, inaccessible, or arduous (Hofmann et al 2004; ALNAP 2003a), and this can affect all aspects of planning, implementation and evaluation (Roche 1999). The political constraints are also frequently underestimated (ALNAP 2001).

The operating environment can therefore considerably hamper the process of impact assessment, in particular with regard to the methodological issues outlined above, such as the time available for the assessment, the collection of baselines and the establishment of attribution. At the same time, the operating environment can lead to the development of new approaches to overcome some of the key constraints: for example the Participatory Impact Assessment (PIA) methodology discussed below in Part B was largely a response to the need to carry out impact assessment in complex emergency situations with difficult operating environments.

At the same time, the operating context also affects the impact itself of an intervention and should be addressed as part of the analysis (Roche 1999). This has sometimes been a weakness of humanitarian impact assessment, possibly as a result of the lack of appropriate tools, but also at

times because it has not been prioritised by the implementing agency (ALNAP 2001). Some commentators maintain the importance of exploring and understanding the context of humanitarian assistance as a component of impact assessment and to making linkages between the historical context and the intervention (ibid.). In Figure 2 in Chapter 1 above, the green arrows to the left side of the diagram show how an intervention may have an impact on the wider context (including the operating environment); at the same time, this wider context has an effect (either enabling or constraining or both) on the project and on the impact it can achieve.

2.5 Methodological challenges regarding specific issues

2.5.1 Livelihoods analysis

As noted above in Chapter 1, the livelihoods model provides both a conceptual approach for the implementation of humanitarian assistance, and a means of analysis. It has the potential to be used in impact assessment, based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods adapted for that purpose (Ashley and Hussein 2000). At present there are few examples of livelihoods-based tools used in humanitarian impact assessment (most applications thus far in the sector have focused on emergency needs assessments); however interest in this topic is growing (Hofmann et al 2004).

Using a livelihoods approach has the advantage of being 'context-in' (see Chapter 1.1), starting with the beneficiaries themselves, their lives and their livelihoods rather than with project interventions (Hofmann et al 2004). When applied using participatory techniques such as key informant interviews and Focus Group Discussions, it facilitates the exploration of attribution, enabling discussions to identify which impacts were caused by which actions (in comparison for example with a quantitative nutrition survey) (ibid.). Techniques such as impact flow charts can assist in this identification of causality (Ashley and Hussein 2000).

Some constraints exist in the application of livelihoods approaches to humanitarian impact assessment. Some of the more qualitative aspects of livelihoods, such as wellbeing or protection, are considered difficult to measure or at least to quantify in terms of objectives, and hence are challenging to monitor (Ashley and Hussein 2000; Hofmann et al 2004). Other concerns include the fact that coping strategies may be difficult to investigate if they are considered to be unlawful or damaging; and the absence of standardised methodologies (Hofmann et al 2004).

Others have also expressed concern that livelihoods approaches may limit the analysis of intra-household issues and other topics such as gender and equity, given that the usual unit of analysis for livelihoods is the household. These concerns may however be addressed by the use of other complementary methodologies (Stites and Lautze 2005), as discussed below.

2.5.2 Gender and equity

ALNAP's evaluation guide highlights the importance of addressing *'cross-cutting themes such as ... gender equality in impact assessment of humanitarian assistance'* (ALNAP 2006:57). However, some commentators have noted that issues of gender are commonly overlooked in the planning, implementation, and particularly evaluation of humanitarian assistance (ProVention Consortium, no date; ALNAP 2001).

This concern also applies to other equity issues and vulnerability caused by socio-economic factors such as age, ethnicity and disability (ProVention Consortium, no date). The Tsunami Recovery Impact Assessment and Monitoring System (TRIAMS) workshop noted that *'it is crucial to pay special attention [in designing impact assessment procedures] to how the equity dimension has been taken into account in the allocation of resources, particularly in the social and health sectors, in the capacity to reach the poorest and the most needy sectors of the population and in correcting pre-tsunami inequalities.'* TRIAMS 2006b:24).

In order to ensure that impact assessment methodologies take gender and equity issues into account, specific action is needed at several levels of the impact assessment process:

- Sampling: to ensure vulnerable groups are adequately represented
- Numbers: disaggregation of data by gender and other vulnerable groups
- Interview sensitivities: separating women and men, young and old etc, for interview (whether for quantitative surveys or participatory data collection techniques)
- Content of data: exploration of equity issues, including intra-household (roles and responsibilities, workloads, access to resources etc.)
- Methodologies: specific techniques to identify equity issues (e.g. the 'Access to Resources tool'[5])

2.5.3 Peace

Given that conflict is often a feature of emergency contexts, particularly in chronic emergencies, it is worth briefly considering the challenges associated with impact assessment in these situations.[6] This may take two forms: first the impact assessment of interventions specifically designed to reduce or

[5] **Pasteur, K.** (2002) *Gender Analysis for Sustainable Livelihoods Frameworks: tools and links to other sources* http://biblioteca.upeace.org/masters/documents/Pasteur%202002.%20Gender%20analysis%20for%20sustainable%20livelihoods.pdf

[6] This section draws particularly on one specific reference: Anderson (2004) *Experiences with Impact Assessment: Can we know what good we do?* Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management

mitigate conflict ('peace initiatives'); and second, impact assessment of other interventions taking place in conflict areas, where the intervention may have had a (positive or negative) effect on the conflict. The latter is essentially an unintended impact (or by-product) of the intervention, and falls into the left side of Figure 2 above – impacts on the wider environment.

Some of the challenges in assessing the impact of peace initiatives include the following:

- The difficulty of identifying appropriate indicators that can be properly assessed (whether by qualitative or quantitative means)
- The fact that conflict mitigation may involve a long timeframe, and hence changes may not yet be observable when the impact assessment is being carried out
- The context-specific nature of conflict, which makes any results hard to generalise
- The challenge of attributing any particular change to specific interventions and in particular the challenge of considering the 'counter-factual' (see Chapter 2.1.3 for definition), especially given the fact that the impact of an intervention may simply be to reduce the level of conflict or of suffering as a result of the conflict: *'When so many things are happening in a complex environment, how can one know which actions bring about which outcomes? If positive steps are overwhelmed by destructive violence, does this mean no progress occurred? If violence abates, can this honestly be traced to programmatic efforts to reduce violence or are other factors responsible for change?'* (Anderson 2004:2)

In spite of these challenges, it is possible to carry out some form of impact assessment of peace initiatives and to analyse the contribution of other humanitarian assistance interventions towards mitigating or exacerbating existing conflict. Observation and participatory techniques which focus on beneficiary perceptions appear to be the most effective methods. The latter in particular can *'provide a critical source of information about, and confirmation, of impacts',* including causation (ibid.:11).

A technique which has contributed to the impact assessment of conflict and peace work is the model of '*dividers'* and '*connectors'*. The 'dividers' are the reasons for and sources of tension and conflict in the area, between the various groups and sub-groups; and the 'connectors' are the factors which help to keep people connected in spite of the conflict, such as shared systems and institutions, attitudes, common experiences, and shared values and interests (e.g. religion). These dividers and connectors can be used as indicators to assess the impact either of peace initiatives or of other, non-conflict related, humanitarian interventions (ibid.).

In conflict situations the importance of numbers to present impact is also noted: *'...the accumulation of patterns, representing the experience of many people in many settings, provided convincing evidence about programmatic impacts on conflict. If a particular outcome is observable again and*

again and if many actors close to the situations under review agree with the interpretation of causation, the sheer numbers of examples and breadth of agreement support the credibility of findings.' (ibid.:11).

2.5.4 Micro-finance

There are some particular issues relating to the impact assessment of micro-finance support, which differ from those associated with other interventions. Although micro-finance is not a common aspect of humanitarian assistance, some of the partner projects involved in the IAIHPSA project are engaged in providing savings and credit support to their beneficiaries as part of their response to chronic drought. It was therefore considered useful to include this topic in the literature review, and consequently some brief comments are presented here.

Support to micro-finance institutions (MFIs) presents a distinctive challenge for impact assessment, given that most MFIs have dual objectives – i.e. both social and economic aims. For example a women's savings and credit group may aim to benefit its individual members, whilst increasing its profitability as an institution (in order ultimately to benefit its members further) (CGAP 1997; Mayoux 2004; CGAP 2003).

If impact assessment of MFI initiatives is to be effective, both these objectives need to be considered and hence two sets of indicators are required (Copestake 2000). The first are *welfare* indicators: for example how membership of the MFI is benefiting the individual members and their households; and the impact on their income, food security and livelihoods (CGAP 1997). These indicators may be assessed using participatory and qualitative methods as discussed above, including livelihoods analysis.

The second set of indicators addresses the *profitability* of the MFI. Methods to investigate these indicators are more quantitative, based on market research techniques and business development analysis (Copestake 2000). The challenge for MFI impact assessment is to balance both these sets of indicators into a combined analysis.

The methodological challenges outlined above for impact assessment of humanitarian assistance interventions (time and timing, baselines and attribution) also apply to assessing the impact of MFIs. In addition, one commentator suggests the use of a 'rolling baseline' to address the issue of control groups. An initial needs assessment is carried out prior to the intervention, and then new groups which join the scheme are assessed at that time, providing an effective 'control' to compare with existing members. As with other control groups, as discussed above, the new members need to be analysed to check how representative they are, and factors influencing their membership status need to be taken into account (Bond, no date).

Methodological Issues and Challenges: Summary of Chapter 2

- There is a continued need for appropriate tools and methodologies geared towards the impact assessment of humanitarian assistance.
- Key methodological constraints include: time and timing; baselines; and attribution.
- The identification of suitable indicators also presents a challenge. Community-generated indicators have the advantage of reflecting beneficiary perspectives on impact; while in some cases quantitative nutrition or mortality indicators may be required, although both have limitations with regard to methodology and application of the results.
- Most commentators suggest a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods, with some favouring qualitative (and participatory) as more appropriate to the context and limitations of emergency situations.
- The operating context for most humanitarian assistance is complex and challenging and impacts on the methodological constraints listed above.
- Specific tools and techniques are needed to address key issues such as livelihoods, gender and conflict.

Chapter 3: Organisational Issues and Challenges

The rhetoric-reality gap discussed in the Introduction to Part A is not only the result of conceptual challenges and methodological constraints (as reviewed in Chapters 1 and 2), but also a consequence of various organisational factors. These are outlined below, beginning with the organisational culture of individual agencies, followed by the donor culture, and finally sector-wide organisational issues.

3.1 Agency culture and issues

Within individual agencies there are a number of organisational features that may hinder the development of effective impact assessment. These are summarised as follows:

- As a result of the particular nature of emergency response – based on rapid relief – the internal culture of many humanitarian agencies is focused on 'action' rather than 'analysis' (Hofmann et al 2004). This can lead to the absence of a 'learning culture' within the organisation, and indeed the sector as a whole, which has been described by one commentator as *'hierarchical, risk-averse and particularly poorly placed in terms of promoting learning'* (Kent 2004, quoted in ALNAP 2003b). Consequently impact assessment is not prioritised.

- Humanitarian interventions have historically been rather top-down in nature. Although this is changing, one of the legacies of this history is that participation (in planning, implementation and evaluation of interventions) has not been a key feature and hence the views of beneficiaries have not been automatically built into assessment (Hofmann et al 2004).

- There is a growing need for humanitarian (and indeed other) agencies to 'prove' themselves (in contrast to 'improving' their practice - see above Chapter 1.1. This can lead to *'the managerial tendency to focus more on intermediate outputs, objectives and targets [as opposed to impact] as measures of performance as they are more easily attributable to specific actions',* in spite of the growing rhetoric of becoming more outcome-focused (Van Brabant 1997). As a result more emphasis is placed on short and medium-term results, rather than long-term impact, as they can be more easily linked to a particular agency's inputs. This is in part a reflection of the donor culture discussed below.

- At the same time there appears to be a trend of increasing aversion to risk among both humanitarian and development agencies, again reflecting in part donor culture and the growing competition for resources, which means that some organisations have little interest in analysing (and certainly in advertising) their failures. This has been characterised as prioritising the *'institutional imperative'* - the need to support the organisation and keep it going - over the *'development imperative'* - the operational 'business' of the organisation, be it development or humanitarian assistance. In an ideal world, these two imperatives need to be balanced. Over-emphasis on the 'development imperative' may cause the organisation to founder, while too

much focus on the 'institutional imperative' may mean that the ideals and goals of the organisation are not pursued (Mike Edwards, quoted in Hewett 2006:3-4).

- Many commentators note the lack of organisational capacity and skills for impact assessment within humanitarian agencies (Hofmann et al 2004; Emergency Capacity Building Project 2006; Pepper 2006; ALNAP 2006) and highlight the need to address the underinvestment in appropriate training and capacity building so that staff are skilled and competent in this area (Emergency Capacity Building Project 2006; Hofmann et al 2004).

- Linked to this lack of capacity is the lack of support resources: most internal impact assessment (or more generally, evaluation) guidelines that are available often focus on development initiatives. Where specific guidelines for humanitarian assistance exist, they frequently cover evaluation as a whole, with impact forming only a part of this. Specific concepts and methodologies for assessing impact (as opposed to evaluating the overall efficiency and effectiveness of an operation) are not given.

- The lack of clarity on the objectives of humanitarian assistance, discussed above in Chapter 1, also constrains impact assessment (Hofmann et al 2004)

- High staff turnover in the humanitarian sector also contributes to organisations' poor capacity to conduct impact assessments of their work (ibid.).

- At the same time, one author notes a growing interest on the part of some development and humanitarian agencies in becoming learning organisations, partly in response to criticism that they fail to learn from their own experience and demonstrate their effectiveness (Van Branbant 1997).

Box 5: Organisational views of impact assessment

- "It's better for us not to measure impact or attribution, if we were to discover that we were having little or no impact, it's better that we don't know about it"
- "We work in a competitive funding environment, where it is more important to show success than to learn".
- "Donor requirements place an emphasis on financial reporting and implementation of activities. There is no incentive to report on impact"
- "This is what donors want"
- "As a project manager, I have a contract with HQ to deliver on the performance indicators of my projects and in reality, failure and not delivering what I have contracted to is unacceptable".
- "It's easier to measure process, and in any case it has to be done"
- "The short term nature of projects does not lend itself to measuring impact"
- "The reality is that HQ does not want to hear about failure, we only report success to our donors"
- "Truthfully speaking, it is not acceptable to fail in front of USAID or Gates. We can experiment with private funding, but not with big donors".
- "HQ told us 'do whatever it takes to get the funding'"

Participants at the IAIHPSA Impact Assessment Training Workshop (Feinstein International Center 2006)

3.2 Donor culture and issues

There are a number of issues and constraints within the donor community which also contribute to the poor record of impact assessment in emergency contexts, as follows:

- For donors, understanding impact does not appear to be a high priority and hence they do not put pressure on implementing agencies to carry out impact assessments (Global Center for Development 2006). As a result there is no incentive from the donors' side for agencies to demonstrate impact (INTRAC 1999; Global Center for Development 2006) nor are there penalties or consequences for failure to show impact (or for poor quality performance in terms of impact) (Fritz Institute 2006a).[7]

- There is an assumption that donors are unwilling to invest significantly in improving the quality of humanitarian assistance – a process in which impact assessment should play a prominent role (Fritz Institute op. cit.).

- It has been noted that the growing trend towards 'results-based management' puts increasing pressure on agencies to demonstrate results. However this shift may lead to greater focus on outputs rather than impacts, as implementing organisations strive to meet quantitative targets at the expense of quality impact and learning (Hofmann et al 2004).

- The short-term funding cycle commonly used in the humanitarian sector does not promote learning processes, nor facilitate assessment of long-term impacts (ibid.).

- Even where impact assessment takes place and results are available relatively rapidly, most donors are unlikely to be flexible enough to reallocate resources and change plans based on the results of the assessment (ibid.).

However, there are moves which aim to address some of these issues, for example the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative (www.goodhumanitariandonorship.org), a group of over twenty donors and organisations which has developed key principles and good practice guidelines as a framework to guide official humanitarian aid and as a mechanism for encouraging greater donor accountability (Good Humanitarian Donorship 2003).

3.3 Sector culture and issues

The nature of the humanitarian sector as a whole also constrains the promotion of effective and timely impact assessment:

[7] However, were such penalties to be implemented, they may discourage the shift in culture towards more openness regarding 'failures' and lessons, which is needed to promote real impact assessment and which is highlighted below.

- Humanitarian assistance is often characterised by many different actors and multi-disciplinary interventions. This diversity can make the process of impact assessment more complicated (Roche 1999; Wood et al 2001).

- The need for increased collaboration between humanitarian actors is noted by many commentators (Fritz Institute 2006a; Oakley et al 1998; Hallam 1998). Improved coordination has the potential to reduce duplication of effort, share resources, increase impact and share learning (Hallam 1998). Yet because of the competition between agencies (usually for funds), this is rare, and what is needed is *'less emphasis on selfishly seeking to attribute change to an individual project or organisation, and more emphasis on how agencies combine to produce significant change for people living in poverty'* (ibid.).

- With regard to collaboration, the value of joint evaluations and impact assessments – both inter-agency and sector-wide - is particularly emphasised in the literature, as they are considered to increase the potential to analyse the connections between emergency interventions and the wider context (ALNAP 2007; Hallam 1998; Oakley et al 1998; Fritz Institute 2004, 2006a). The need to develop this capacity is highlighted (Hallam 1998), since 'mechanisms for cross-organisational learning are poorly developed' (Hofmann et al 2004).

- There are currently few incentives for collaboration in the sector. One commentator notes that many international NGOs did not collaborate in their responses to the Indian Ocean tsunami since they had sufficient funds – and funding would be the only incentive to collaborate – with the result that several assessments and other efforts were duplicated (Hewett 2006).

- It is recognised however that collaboration and coordination with others requires agencies to cede control to a certain extent – and that if this is going to be encouraged for the sake of learning and efficiency, then the culture of the sector needs to change to promote this (Maxwell and Watkins 2003). This requires a shift from the growing 'contract culture' which focuses on the *'fulfilment of contracted inputs and outputs rather than on actual humanitarian outcomes'* (Roche 1999:165) and the promotion of a culture which *'documents programme failures as well as successes as a learning opportunity'* (Roberts 2004:28).

In conclusion, the literature suggests that a greater commitment to assessing the impact of humanitarian assistance and a shift in culture towards a greater openness to learning is needed on all sides, from implementing agencies and from donors. In order for this to take place, greater investment is required – in training and capacity building of staff (Global Center for Development 2006); and in the process of impact assessment itself (Emergency Capacity Building Project 2006). This will necessitate financial commitments from donors, who may have to face the trade-off that '*increased quality, effectiveness and impact may mean less rapid disbursement and higher*

'overheads' (Van Branbant 1997:16). Investing in learning and improving quality in this way will inevitably divert some funds from 'direct support' and therefore may be deemed too costly by some donors. However, as one commentator notes: *'ignorance is more expensive than impact evaluations'* (Global Center for Development 2006:20).

Organisational Issues and Challenges: Summary of Chapter 3

- Individual agencies often lack the incentives, skills and capacity to carry out quality impact assessments of their humanitarian assistance.
- In general, donors do not accord impact assessment a high priority and hence do not put pressure on implementing agencies nor do they provide adequate funding.
- The humanitarian sector requires a culture shift away from 'risk aversity' and the focus on quantitative outputs, to an emphasis on learning in order to improve quality

Feinstein International Center

Part B: Addressing the Challenges - the development of Participatory Impact Assessment (PIA) Methodology

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Introduction to Part B

Part B of this study reviews the development of the Participatory Impact Assessment (PIA) methodology by the Feinstein International Center (FIC) in the light of the issues and challenges outlined in Part A. Chapter 4 describes the origins, design and methodology of PIA, as promoted and used by FIC initially for impact assessment of community-based animal health initiatives, but later adapted to emergency livelihoods interventions, primary human health services and food security programmes. Chapter 5 discusses the extent to which these methods address the challenges and constraints presented in Part A.

Chapter 4: The Development of Participatory Impact Assessment (PIA)

4.1 The Origins of PIA

Participatory Impact Assessment (PIA) as used by FIC was initially developed in South Sudan by Vetwork UK for the assessment of community-based animal health systems (Catley 1999a). Due to the long history of conflict in the area, large quantitative surveys - as historically carried out in the veterinary sector - were not possible and baselines were not available. The approach built on the growing interest in participatory techniques for impact assessment during the late 1990s, while also recognising the opportunity to persuade policy makers of the validity of community-based animal health workers as an effective service delivery mechanism, especially in remote and inaccessible areas with little veterinary infrastructure (Catley 1999b). Some of the key aspects of the initial PIA approach were:

- To recognize and use local knowledge and observations, and capture this knowledge through the systematic use of participatory methods
- To standardise and repeat methods, while also allowing for open-ended discussion
- To repeat the methods to a sufficient level to allow statistical assessment of reliability; to keep sample sizes to a minimum during this process
- Where possible, to identify control groups and allow statistical comparison of control and intervention groups, again using minimal sample sizes
- To explore the use of 'before and after' methods in the absence of baselines, and the use of monitoring data on project implementation to cross-check the findings from participatory methods
- To develop approaches which were systematic and credible, while not requiring excessive technical support or resources; therefore, the approaches could be used by NGOs following some initial training and field-based mentoring
- To encourage critical review of the PIA methodology through approaches such as peer-review publication

In terms of policy and best practice, PIA has made a considerable contribution to the acceptance of community-based animal health workers by policy makers in the Horn of Africa region and internationally (Admassu et al 2005; Catley et al 2005). More recently, PIA has also been influential in a multi-stakeholder approach to developing a national guideline on emergency livelihoods-based livestock interventions in Ethiopia (Catley et al 2008; Abebe et al 2008; MoARD 2008).

From a methodological perspective, PIA has also succeeded in taking forward the debate on participatory approaches and quantification, and contributed to the development of impact assessment methodologies which use community perceptions of impact as a starting point, and which can be applied in a range of situations, particularly those where no baselines exist, or where insecurity or inaccessibility limit the application of extensive quantitative epidemiological surveys.

Although PIA was developed in the veterinary sector, it is increasingly applied to impact assessment in other sectors and has formed the basis of the impact assessment methodology for the IAIHPSA project (see Table 4 below).

Table 4: Selected examples of the application of the PIA methodology

Country	Year	Sector	Organisation	Reference
South Sudan	1999	Community-based animal health	VSF Belgium and VSF Suisse	Catley 1999a
Ethiopia	2002	Community-based animal health	Save the Children US	Admassu et al 2005, see also PACE Ethiopia 2002
Ethiopia	2002	Community-based animal health	CAPE Unit	Ethiopia Participatory Assessment Team 2002
Somalia	2002	Emergency veterinary relief	VSF Suisse	Hopkins 2002
Uganda	2004	Community-based animal health	VSF Spain	Veterinarios sin Fronteras 2004
Tanzania	2002	Community-based animal health	VETAID	Nalitolela and Allport 2002
Sudan	2004	Community-based animal health	Sudan Department of Animal Health and CAPE Unit	Republic of Sudan 2004
Ethiopia	2005	Community-based animal health	AU/IBAR	Mekonnen and Hussein 2005
Ethiopia	2006	Community-based animal health	Save the Children US, USAID	Abebe 2006
Kenya	2006	Farmer field schools	ILRI	Catley et al 2006
Ethiopia	2007	Livelihoods-based drought interventions	CARE, Save the Children US, USAID	Feinstein International Center 2007
Ethiopia	2007	Human health programme	Save the Children US	Catley and Bekele 2007
Niger*	2007	Integrated drought recovery	Africare	Burns and Suji 2007c
Zimbabwe*	2007	Integrated drought recovery	Africare	Burns and Suji

				2007a
Zimbabwe*	2007	Dams and gardens for drought recovery	CARE	Burns and Suji 2007b
Niger*	2008	Pastoralists drought recovery	Lutheran World Relief	Burns et al 2008
Ethiopia	2008	Emergency livestock feeding programme	Save the Children US	Bekele, in press
Ethiopia	2008	Emergency livestock vaccination	Save the Children US	Catley et al 2008
Ethiopia	2008	Commercial destocking in drought	Save the Children US	Abebe et al 2008

** Projects marked with an asterisk are those participating in the IAIHPSA project*

4.2 PIA Design and Methodology

The use of participatory data collection techniques for PIA was based on the premise that *'local people have their own, often complex, perspectives and world view'* (Catley 1999a:i) and in recognition of the considerable technical knowledge of livestock keepers, particularly pastoralists, with regard to animal disease and health care. This challenged the tendency of the veterinary establishment to prioritise professional knowledge and expertise over community viewpoints, particularly with regard to animal health.

The design of a PIA focuses on three key components:

1. What changes have there been in the community since the start of the project?
2. Which of these changes are attributable to the project?
3. What difference have these changes made to people's lives? (Catley op. cit.:5)

Validity issues during the design of an assessment are addressed using one or more of the following approaches:

- The repetition of some standardised methods to allow statistical assessment of reliability, based on the assumption that a reliable method is more likely to produce valid data than an unreliable method
- The use of retrospective baselines in 'before and after' scoring methods, and triangulation of findings against monitoring data on project activities. Timelines are particularly important in the application of retrospective baselines and 'before and after' methods, in order to reach a common understanding of the time when a project started and ended

- Listing of factors perceived to have caused changes in a community, followed by the categorisation of these factors as 'project' and 'non-project factors'; and ranking or scoring of all these
- Where possible, the use of control groups to allow statistical comparison of changes in control versus intervention groups

Sampling for PIA is generally either purposive or random, depending on which elements of PIA design are used and the operational and resource constraints.

Over time the PIA methodology has developed into the following eight key stages:

1. Define the questions to be answered
2. Define the geographical and time limits of the project
3. Identify and prioritise locally-defined impact indicators
4. Decide which methods to use and test them
5. Decide which sampling method and which sample size to use
6. Assess project attribution
7. Triangulate
8. Feedback and verify the results with the community (Catley, Burns, Abebe and Suji 2008)

The PIA approach adapts some of the participatory data collection techniques known as Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) (see Pretty et al 1995), such as visual methods (e.g. mapping), scoring, piling and ranking. For those methods which produce numerical results, the methods are standardised and used with community-generated indicators, and in some cases, additional indicators identified by the assessment team. Each 'standardised' method has two main components, namely a standard component with fixed indicators and scoring system, and a flexible component based on 'interviewing the results'. For the latter, questions are based on a checklist of key issues, rather than on a questionnaire. Standardised methods are repeated, thereby allowing data to be summarised and analysed using conventional statistical tests.[8]

[8] The development, design and methodology of PIA is described in full in Catley 1999a and 1999b and hence is not covered in detail here. See also Catley 2005 for a trainer's guide to Participatory Epidemiology, Catley et al 2002, and Catley, Burns, Abebe and Suji 2008.

Box 6: IAIHPSA PIA Methodology

The Feinstein International Center (FIC) carried out impact assessments of four of the seven IAIHPSA partner projects. The projects all focus on strengthening food and income security and reducing vulnerability to future disaster and in this sense are more equivalent to short-term development projects rather than emergency response. The focus of the PIAs was on the direct impact of the project on livelihoods, using three key research questions:

i. What impact has the project had on the food security and nutritional status of assisted communities?
ii. What impact has the project had on income (and savings) of the assisted communities?
iii. What impact has the project had on the livelihoods of the assisted communities?

Sample selection was based on open community meetings at which a number of households were selected for interview, and the remaining participants asked to participate in Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Sample size across the four impact assessments ranged from 10% to 13% for the semi-structured interviews, with larger numbers (including non-beneficiaries) taking part in the FGDs.

The key data collection methods were 'before and after' scoring and impact scoring, using FGDs and household interviews, to identify changes in food and income sources, and changes in food and income utilisation, based on community-generated indicators. Follow-up questions were employed to discuss attribution. The same process was repeated in each of the sample sites.

The inclusion of non-beneficiaries in the FGDs provided a form of 'control group', as their views were disaggregated from those of project beneficiaries. The FGDs also carried out a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) of the projects, which enabled the emergence of unintended and in some cases negative impacts. Secondary data was consulted to support the process of triangulation, and case studies were collected to illustrate the impact of the projects on individual households. The project baselines had been conducted prior to the initiation of the IAIHPSA project and hence did not always provide appropriate data to feed into the impact assessments. However the impact assessment teams were able to reconstruct baselines using the 'before and after' scoring method.

In most of the projects the provisional findings were discussed with community members to obtain confirmation of the findings.

Sources: Burns and Suji 2007a, 2007b, 2007c and Burns et al 2008

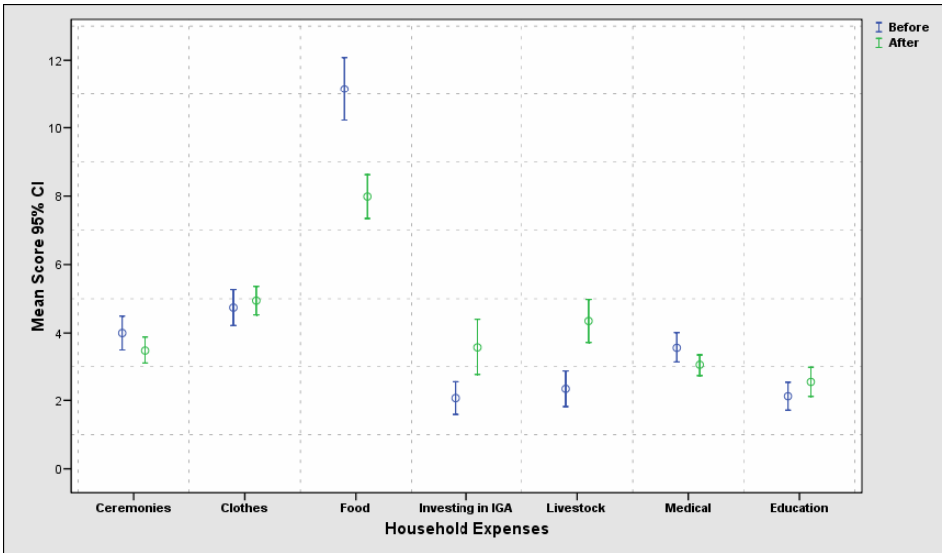
4.3 Addressing validity: examples from PIAs

As the selection in Table 4 above shows, the PIA methodology has been applied to a number of projects, not only community animal health initiatives, and the methodology has been tested in a range of contexts, including through the IAIHPSA project. The following examples show how the key validity issues listed above in Section 4.2 have been addressed by some of these assessments.

- **The repetition of some standardised methods to allow statistical assessment of reliability**
  - Proportional piling of benefits derived from cattle, in South Sudan (Catley 1999a)
  - Matrix scoring of different interventions, in Ethiopia (MoARD 2008)
  - Impact scoring, in Niger: 63 participants were asked to assign a relative score to the benefits resulting from the project (against a pre-agreed list of indicators generated by the community) using 25 counters. The results were tested for normal distribution using the P-P plot function in SPSS, and the relative mean score was calculated using Excel (Burns et al 2008)
- **The use of retrospective baselines in 'before and after' scoring methods, and triangulation of findings against monitoring data on project activities**
  - 'Before and after' proportional piling of cattle diseases, with cross-checking against rinderpest vaccination, in South Sudan (Catley 1999a)
  - 'Before and after' scoring to show changes in household expenditure, in Niger: respondents used 30 counters to show changes in relative household expenditure using proportional piling, see Figure 4 (Burns and Suji 2007c):

Figure 4: Changes in household expenditure, Chical Integrated Recovery Action Project

n = 74



- **Listing of factors perceived to have caused changes in a community, followed the categorisation of these factors as 'project' and 'non-project factors'; and ranking or scoring of all these**

  - Attribution ranking in a community-based animal health project, in Ethiopia: different service providers were scored using matrix ranking against a list of criteria such as accessibility, availability, quality, relationships, affordability etc. (Admassu et al 2005; PACE Ethiopia 2002)

  - Attribution ranking of changes in household food sources, in Zimbabwe: changes in food sources were listed by respondents, who were then asked to note which changes were attributable to the project, see Table 5 (Burns and Suji 2007a):

Table 5: Attribution table explaining changes in the importance of different food sources, Gokwe Integrated Recovery Action Project

Factors	Number of responses	
** Represents project related factors*	Njelele (n=117)	Nemangwe (n=145)
Availability of new (drought tolerant) seeds from Africare *	10	40
Decrease - crops were affected by drought/ floods	8	39
Variety of food crops introduced- reduced dependence on maize *	22	24
Training in agronomy led to better crop production and higher yields *	10	24
I had no draught power and was unable to till as much land as I did in 2005	4	3
In 2005, inputs were delivered late; early delivery in 2007 *	9	-
I had to subdivide my land to introduce the new crops - led to lower production for some	-	10

Data was derived using semi-structured interviews following the before and after scoring exercise on food sources. Factors scoring below 2% of the overall responses were not included in this table. Some people gave more than one response others gave none. (Number of responses: Njelele 70; Nemangwe 145)

- **Where possible, the use of control groups to allow statistical comparison of changes in control versus intervention groups**

  - Scoring of livestock diseases handled and not handled by CAHWs, in Ethiopia (Admassu et al 2005; PACE Ethiopia 2002)

  - Comparisons of the number of months of food security between project participants and non-participants, in Zimbabwe: the Focus Group Discussions included both project participants and non-participants. These two groups were asked to distribute 25

counters (representing the household's post-harvest cereal balance) along a calendar to indicate food utilisation until depletion. The data was entered into a graph to show the difference in results between the project participants and non-participants (Burns and Suji 2007a).

- Mortality in cattle which received supplementary feeding and those which did not, in Ethiopia, see Table 6 (Bekele, in press):

Table 6: Mortality in fed and unfed cattle, Save the Children Supplementary Feeding Programme, Liben and Arero districts, Oromiya Region

Location/group	Mortality
Bulbul area - affected by moderate drought; 22-day feeding programme started on 15th March 2008:	
Unfed cattle moved to grazing areas	108/425 (25.4%)
Cows fed using SC US feed	13/161 (8.1%)
Cows fed using private feed	56/151 (37.1%)
Web area - affected by severe drought; 67-day feeding programme started on 9th February 2008:	
Unfed cattle moved to grazing areas	139/407 (34.2%)
Cows fed using SC US feed	49/231 (21.2%)
Cows fed using private feed	142/419 (33.8%)

Chapter 5: Assessing Humanitarian Impact Using the PIA Methodology

Based on the information presented in Chapter 4, this chapter discusses the PIA methodology in the light of the issues and challenges facing the impact assessment of humanitarian assistance outlined in Part A above. The chapter is laid out according to the structure and topics of Part A, and thus begins with Conceptual Issues, followed by Methodological Issues and finally Organisational Issues.

5.1 Conceptual Issues

Definition and Scope of PIA

The PIA approach has the potential to be both 'project-out' and 'context-in' (see Chapter 1.1 above), to the extent that it starts with higher level project objectives (which, in the examples reviewed, are often linked to livelihoods) and assesses changes in them. These changes are then linked back to project interventions. This can help to ensure that impact is genuinely considered and avoids a focus on only outputs or outcomes.

PIA grew out of the need to make the case in a particular sector (animal health) and is well suited to the assessment of a specific, relatively narrowly defined area such as community-based animal health service provision. In the case of IHIAPSA, the approach was applied at the broad project level, reviewing overall project goals (such as livelihood or food security). However, this meant that the specific contribution of the various sub-components of the project was not necessarily assessed. For example, in the Zimbabwe Dams and Gardens Project, the savings and credit component was not distinguished from the garden component and hence the specific indicators and issues pertaining to impact assessment of MFIs (as described above in Chapter 2.5.4) could not be analysed, nor was the PIA able to address the issue of conflict over the management of the dam (an issue relating to the left side of Figure 2 in Chapter 1 above) (Burns and Suji 2007b). Similarly the assessment of the Chical Integrated Recovery Action Project in Niger was not able to analyse the impact of the community-based committees established by the Project to develop crisis mitigation mechanisms (Burns and Suji 2007c).

In this sense the PIA approach provides high quality information for *accountability* (particularly upwards, to donors etc.) and for developing an evidence base on particular issues and approaches for policy work (see Box 3 in Chapter 1.1 above). In order also to meet *learning* objectives, in the case of integrated or multi-faceted interventions, it may be necessary to invest in more detailed (and time consuming) impact assessments, whereby the method is applied both at the level of the overall project and also with regard to its component parts.

Referring back to Figure 2 in Chapter 1.1, the extent to which the PIA approach considers the dimensions beyond the upper central segment (i.e. positive intended and unintended impacts on beneficiaries, denoted by the orange arrows) depends to a large extent on the way it is applied. In particular, the additional discussions and probing questions which are intended to fill in the gaps and

follow up issues raised are the chief means to assess the impact on the wider environment for example, whether positive or negative (as denoted by the blue arrows). At times specific targeted questions on these areas may also be necessary, rather than waiting to see if they emerge by themselves. Similarly, issues of sustainability and long-term impact may be omitted unless additional methods are incorporated to address them. As discussed above and here below, time constraints may significantly limit the potential for these issues to be addressed.

As noted above, the IHIAPSA projects were all addressing long-term and chronic emergencies. There are at present few examples of the application of the PIA methodology to rapid onset and/or short duration disasters and hence the technique remains as yet largely untested in this area.

Livelihoods

As noted above, the PIA approach facilitates dialogue and the analysis of livelihoods, and is often based on a definition of livelihood options and strategies identified by community members themselves, as well as local definitions and understandings of food security, as part of the process of generating indicators. As the PIAs show, taking a livelihoods approach to impact assessment has the potential to consider humanitarian interventions from a more holistic viewpoint than more specific approaches such as nutrition surveys.

Two of the IAIHPSA impact assessments include figures showing the anticipated duration of food security (based on community definitions) to illustrate how the projects have had a positive impact on increasing the number of food secure months in the year. This provides a useful and interesting analysis and may also help to identify the mitigation of negative impacts - for example in a drought year, if the food security status of project beneficiaries is 'less negative' than non-beneficiaries (Burns and Suji 2007a, 2007c).

Three of the IAIHPSA assessments also identified key coping strategies with community members. This is interesting information in itself, but also has the potential to be developed further. For example, if combined with the concept of the Coping Strategies Index mentioned above in Chapter 2, impact assessment of emergency responses could investigate the extent to which these coping strategies have been successfully avoided, or used less as a result of the project's intervention. Analysing coping strategies and changes in them also helps to address the issue of vulnerability, which, as noted above in Chapter 2, becomes a significant factor in livelihoods analysis in emergency contexts.

Participation

The PIA approach helps to generate a community perspective on impact, for example through the community's identification of indicators that form the basis for the subsequent enquiry and therefore influence the whole process of the impact assessment. The use of participatory data collection techniques also involves beneficiary (and potentially non-beneficiary) community members.

Participatory techniques in general (including PLA) are subject to debate about the extent of 'real' participation in their application. Catley highlights concerns raised about power relationships between insiders and outsiders and power dynamics within communities, whereby PRA may be 'co-opted' by powerful elites (Catley 1999b). Chambers discusses the fact that much qualitative data collection, including participatory techniques, may be 'extractive' (Chambers 2007). He also notes the application of 'numbers' to participatory data (i.e. quantification processes) but challenges agencies to involve communities more in the aggregation and analysis of the figures, in order to reach 'assuming responsibility' and even 'self-management' in the use and application of these numbers, a situation he describes as 'win-win'.

In order to consider participation in impact assessment, the process may be broken down into several stages: defining the parameters of the study; identification of indicators; data collection; data analysis; and feedback. Table 7 below is a modification of Table 1 on participation levels in the project cycle from Chapter 1.3 above, adapted for these stages of impact assessment. As the table shows, PIA is based on 'active involvement' of the community at the indicator identification and data collection stages, through the use of participatory techniques. However, the data analysis uses statistical computer software and analysis hence there is no community participation at this stage, nor necessarily in the definition of the parameters of the study. Depending on how it is handled, the sharing of results may range from 'informing' to 'active involvement'.

Table 7: Participation levels in impact assessment – the example of PIA

	Inform	Consult	Active involvement	Assuming responsibility	Self-management
Defining study parameters	X	X			
Identification of indicators			X		
Data collection			X		
Data analysis and conclusions	X				
Feedback	X	X	X		

In this sense PIA is much less 'participatory' than some other techniques (such as the Self-Evaluations described in Table 2 in Chapter 2) which aim to reach the 'assuming responsibility' and in some cases 'self-management' levels of participation in impact assessment. These approaches are more fully 'participatory' than PIA, but at the same time are not able to generate the quantified data produced by PIA.

However, the extent and level of participation will in part depend on the 'end users' of the impact assessment results. If the findings are primarily aimed at local organisations at project level, it could be argued that much of the repetition and statistical analysis is not necessary. Where the ultimate

target is to change policy however – as it was in South Sudan when the methodology was first developed – 'hard data' may be required, and this will have an impact on the level of participation possible. It may be concluded therefore that the more complicated the required analysis, the less participatory the process can be.

5.2 Methodology Issues

Time and Timing

Although the IAIHPSA projects are not strictly speaking emergency projects, in the sense of responding rapidly to an acute humanitarian need, the impact assessments carried out on them still suffered from a shortage of time, and timing challenges. Time constraints were similarly recorded in some of the CAHW PIAs (see for example Abebe 2006 and Admassu et al 2005), although it was noted that carrying out a PIA under these circumstances required significantly less time than would a standard epidemiological quantitative survey to obtain similar results (Admassu et al op. cit).

As the IAIHPSA assessments found, where insufficient time is allocated for field work there are inevitably *'trade-offs in terms of process and quality'* (White and Petit 2004:92) between carrying out sufficient repetitions on a large enough sample size on the one hand, and the quality of the study in terms of in-depth methodologies and in particular the ability to engage in qualitative discussions and follow-up questions on the other. The June 2008 IAIHPSA workshop noted that: *'the emphasis on getting quantitative data meant less qualitative and less innovative participatory numbers were collected'* (Feinstein International Center 2008), and the impact assessment reports themselves note that the time shortage meant that the teams were unable to carry out on-going review and analysis of the initial findings while they were still in the field (which was originally planned for one day each week). Consequently questions and methods could not be fine-tuned during the process and as a result, some data proved to be of little use. The shortage of time also led in some cases to a reduction and simplification of the methodology, which had implications for the level of detail achieved (Burns and Suji 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, Burns et al 2008).

It is important therefore that adequate time is allocated, in order that *'standardized methods [can] still leave scope for the open-ended and flexible inquiry typical of PRA, while also allowing direct comparison of views obtained from different community members'* (Catley 2005:2). Flexibility remains a hallmark of participatory methods, and hence it is important that it is not too compromised in the search for quantifiable data. The key here may be to clarify the level of rigour required for the end users (see 'Participation' in 5.1 above) so that the design incorporates a sufficiently large sample and levels of analysis to satisfy the purposes of the assessment, but no more to avoid the use of unnecessary time or resources.

Baselines

One of the key strengths of the PIA approach is its ability to produce accurate impact data in the absence of baselines (in fact the approach could perhaps be sub-titled *'Where There Is No Baseline'*). Although as discussed above some caution needs to be exercised to avoid bias and 'telescoping', the 'before and after' scoring technique effectively dispenses with the need for baseline data in many cases, especially when results are triangulated against data on actual project activities. This makes PIA particularly useful in emergency and other unstable contexts where it has not been possible to obtain accurate baselines at the beginning of an intervention. In some cases however the absence of basic background data may hinder the impact assessment: for example in a destocking programme in southern Ethiopia some beneficiaries' basic data was not recorded and it proved difficult during the PIA to identify and locate them, which limited the impact information that could be obtained (Feinstein International Center 2007).

Attribution

As discussed in Part A above, attribution can be particularly challenging in impact assessment. The perspectives of beneficiaries are considered by some commentators to be one of the best sources of verifying attribution, as discussed above. The PIA method helps to address attribution challenges (although it may still be difficult in complex emergency situations involving many different actors), as it records beneficiaries' perspectives on the causes of change, notes those changes attributable to project interventions, and derives numerical summaries.

The inclusion of non-beneficiaries in the Focus Group Discussions, as implemented by IHIAPSA, can also contribute to the identification of causality between changes and the project, whilst at the same time helping to identify some of the project impacts on non-beneficiaries (the right side of Figure 2 - green arrows).

The PIA methodology includes the use of control groups to support attribution in different ways:

- comparing diseases 'handled' and 'not handled' by CAHWs (Admassu et al 2005)
- comparing 'project service providers' (CAHWs) with 'non-project service providers' (Admassu et al 2005; Abebe 2006; Catley and Bekele 2007)
- comparing 'project intervention' with 'non-project interventions' (Abebe et al 2008)
- comparing beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries (Burns and Suji 2007a, 2007b)
- comparing 'fed cattle' with 'unfed cattle' in supplementary livestock feeding programmes (Bekele, in press)

Indicators

The PIA method of identifying key indicators (for example of project impact, positive changes in livelihood or food security) with the community and the prioritisation of these mean that a standard set of indicators can be applied across different locations within a programme area. The prioritisation also helps to keep the key indicators to a reasonable number to avoid over-ambitious data sets.

This process also helps to keep the focus of the assessment on *impact*, rather than on *outputs* or *outcomes*, since the initial questions begin at the goal level of the project. This may be particularly useful in assessing the impact of humanitarian assistance, which as discussed can tend to concentrate on the delivery of *outputs*.

Community-generated indicators also have the potential to identify qualitative and social factors which would not necessarily be detected by outsiders. For example, in the Gokwe project in Zimababwe food security was defined as the availability of maize (sadza) in the household, but this was then broken down into indicators such as 'full granaries, good interfamily relationships, cheerful children, shiny skin, and the ability to offer hospitality to guests' (Burns and Suji 2007a). Another PIA in Tanzania identified the availability of 'meat for ceremonies' as a key indicator of food security (Nalitolela and Allport 2002).

Qualitative and Quantitative Data

In cases where numerical data is needed to prove impact, answer accountability, provide an evidence base for a particular approach or make a policy case, the PIA methodology is an excellent mechanism for presenting qualitative information in a numerical format that is recognisable by those who would only give credence to 'scientific' figures. This may be particularly appropriate in situations where quantitative data collection is not possible (for example in emergency situations) and/or there is an overt commitment on the part of the implementing agency to participatory processes which prioritise the views of the beneficiaries over 'external' analysis.

There may however be some situations where the generation of numerical data is not such a high priority, in which case the need to carry out as many repetitions as the PIA methodology requires to produce statistically valid data could be reduced. This may allow more time to be spent on a broader range of qualitative issues. Where numerical data is not generated and hence statistical analysis cannot be applied to check validity, there remains the need to ensure that the data is 'trustworthy', as described above in Chapter 2.3, in particular with regard to 'narrative data' for example. There has been some debate on the extent to which participatory and qualitative methods can be considered to fulfil the 'trustworthiness' criteria as adequately as quantitative data collection techniques (Bamberger et al 2004). Proponents of participatory enquiry (see for example Pretty 1993, quoted in DFID 1998) maintain that *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability* and *confirmability* are all possible for qualitative data and should be considered as the equivalent of the conventional scientific research criteria of *internal* and *external validity*, *reliability* and *objectivity*. In order to do

this it may not be necessary to present all the data collected numerically (as in most applications of the PIA method) but sufficient attention does need to be given to sampling, representativeness of the views, and consistency of questioning.

The issue of relative versus absolute data also remains challenging. In the IAIHPSA impact assessments, relative changes in food and income sources were assessed 'before and after' project intervention through proportional piling. However, in some of the assessments the results are not accompanied by an explanation or by data on absolute changes. Without this additional information, it is not possible to understand the implications of the changes. For example, a shift from one food source to another is not necessarily a positive impact, unless the implications of that shift are explored. In other cases, this information is given – for example in the Chical Integrated Recovery Action Project, a reduction in the relative contribution of labour migration in favour of a greater contribution from petty trade and income generating activities (as promoted by the project) is noted by community members to be a positive impact (Burns and Suji 2007c). This is less of an issue with relative expenditure (as opposed to income or food sources), since reduced proportional expenditure on food is generally accepted to be a proxy indicator for increased income.

Operating Context

As noted above the PIA approach may be particularly suited to difficult operating contexts, for example in emergencies, compared to extensive quantitative surveys because it can take less time and can produce valid data using a much smaller sample frame.

Part A highlights the importance of considering the impact of interventions on the wider context – economic (e.g. markets), social, political, environmental, and even conflict (see below). Whilst in-depth consideration of these topics may be beyond the scope (and time and resources) of many impact assessments, these issues cannot afford to be overlooked completely. The basic PIA methodology as implemented by IAIHPSA could therefore perhaps be complemented by additional techniques which enable these issues to emerge, such as additional FGDs using Venn diagrams and impact trees.

Gender

Chapter 2.5.2 in Part A highlights the importance of ensuring that equity issues such as gender are not overlooked in impact assessment. PIA methodology has the potential to do this, but in practice this will partly depend on the time and resources available for the impact assessment, since ensuring that interviews and FGDs are separated as appropriate according to gender and other vulnerable groups, disaggregating data, and implementing additional data collection techniques to investigate gender and intra-household dynamics all take additional time and effort (and in some cases additional skills). Supplementary participatory techniques to address these issues could perhaps be usefully added to the PIA 'basket' of methods.

Conflict

As discussed above, agencies have a responsibility to understand the impact of their interventions (whether directed at conflict mitigation and peace building or not) on existing conflict. As noted for gender issues above, there may be additional participatory methods (such as using the 'dividers' and 'connectors' concept described above in Chapter 2.5.3) that can be added to the PIA basket to address this issue.

MFIs

Support to savings and credit groups and other micro-finance institutions is generally less common in humanitarian response. However, in 'chronic emergencies', such as the recurring droughts and food insecurity faced by the IAIHPSA projects, such support may be appropriate. In these cases, impact assessment should perhaps aim to address some of the issues discussed above in Chapter 2.5.4, such as considering the dual aims of 'profitability' and 'welfare'. Participatory techniques may be appropriate to collect this data and the quantification of results as in the PIA approach should still be possible.

5.3 Organisational Issues

The PIA approach has the potential to make the case for participatory data collection techniques within organisations, as well as to produce an evidence base on the impact of specific interventions. It may be less appropriate, as it is currently applied, for impact assessment beyond project level, such as inter-agency, sector-wide or operation-wide assessments, which as noted above in Part A, should form part of the impact assessment of humanitarian response.

The application of the PIA approach to the IAIHPSA projects did not encounter most of the organisational constraints discussed above in Part A. However some challenges were noted in the assessment reports, some of which reflect organisational limitations. As highlighted already, time constraints restricted the full application of the methodology and the follow up of some issues in most of the assessments and the balance between repetition and quality was not fully maintained in all cases. In order to implement the PIA approach (and indeed any other impact assessment methodology) sufficient time needs to be committed by all stakeholders. Similarly, capacity (in terms of training and skills) was a constraint for the IAIHPSA teams, with regard to exposure to the PIA methodology on the part of enumerators and appropriate language skills for the team leaders (or the availability of competent translators).

It is interesting to note that when it was initially developed in South Sudan, PIA was not institutionalised within Operation Lifeline Sudan (where those involved in its design were working) because of organisational constraints, in spite of recognition by most actors of the benefits of the approach.

Many of the organisational constraints discussed here and above in Part A will only be overcome when aid managers take the lead to change organisational culture with regard to learning, and

allocate sufficient resources (in terms of both staff time and funding) to enable such learning to take place.

Summary of Part B

- The PIA approach offers one positive method for the numerical presentation of data, based on community indicators and overall impact on livelihoods.
- IAIHPSA successfully applied this method to the partner project impact assessments.
- A number of challenges remain:
    - Balancing the need for sufficient repetitions to derive the quantitative results with flexibility to follow up more qualitative issues remains a challenge
    - In particular the PIA basket of methods could be expanded to include techniques that uncover gender issues; impact on the wider environment; and unintended impacts (for example on non-beneficiaries) but this requires additional time, resources and skills
    - Given the need for statistical analysis in order to derive quantitative results, it will be difficult to increase the level of participation in aspects of the PIA process beyond the identification of indicators and the data collection
    - The successful application of the approach remains dependent on adequate time being allocated and the skills and capacity of the implementing team. This can only be achieved with a commitment to genuine learning about impact on the part of implementing organisations, and the sector as a whole.

Conclusion

In spite of the apparently growing commitment to impact assessment of humanitarian assistance, the gap between the rhetoric and the reality remains. This is the result of a number of key challenges:

Conceptual challenges:

These include particular questions such as: where should impact assessment begin and end; should it be 'organisation-out' or 'context-in' or both; where do livelihoods fit in; how participatory can emergency impact assessments be?

Methodological challenges:

Time is inevitably short, baselines may not be available and attribution is particularly challenging in emergency projects. Setting indicators is also a key challenge for humanitarian response, given the difficulties of assessing changes in quantitative factors such as mortality or nutrition, balanced with the need to address qualitative issues such as livelihood impacts. The particular characteristics of many emergency situations also present methodological challenges in terms of the accessibility, security and stability of the operating context.

Organisational challenges:

The current culture of many implementing agencies and their donors does not foster effective impact assessment of humanitarian responses. Humanitarian agencies' growing 'risk-aversity', the increasing competition for resources, the lack of inter-agency cooperation, and the lack of skills and capacity all limit the application of sound impact assessment practice.

The PIA approach is one response to some of these (and other) challenges, and offers one way forward for impact assessment in some emergency contexts – particularly slow onset and longer-term emergencies. It has the potential to collect data in a participatory way, based on community perceptions of impact, and quantify and present it in ways that can impact on policy makers and contribute to the evidence base. The challenge for PIA appears to lie in ensuring that sufficient time is allocated to balance the need for statistical repetition with the inclusion of qualitative discussion (possibly expanding the standard basket of techniques) and greater flexibility to address issues beyond the initial scope of the assessment, all of which require additional time, resources and skills.

The commitment of time and resources appears to be one of the key factors limiting impact assessment in the humanitarian sector. In order for assessments to be carried out in a timely and effective manner to produce reliable and useful results (whether using qualitative or quantitative methods or the apparently preferred mix of the two), donors and agencies need to come to a genuine commitment to the process. This will involve an understanding that a certain percentage of funds 'diverted' from immediate humanitarian response can usefully and ethically be spent on impact assessment, particularly to improve learning and hence the quality of current and future

responses. Unless the verbal commitment of donors to impact assessment is translated in this way into funding, the rhetoric-reality gap may never be narrowed.

Finally, in the face of the many challenges outlined in this study that constrain the application of principles of impact assessment leading to reliable and useful results (for whichever level of end-user), there is a need to focus on pragmatic ways forward. This does not necessarily mean compromising key principles - for example striving for participation, or taking into account livelihoods impact rather than simply saving lives. However, given the difficult and challenging circumstances of emergency contexts, rather than\ aiming for comprehensive and ostensibly 'objective' scrutiny impact assessment should perhaps focus on achieving a 'credible analysis' (Feinstein International Center 2006) which can inform and guide current and future interventions and contribute to improving the quality of humanitarian response.

Annex 1: Terms of Reference for the Literature Review

1. Background

Under the Bill & Melinda (B&M) Gates funded project; Impact Assessment of Innovative Humanitarian Projects in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Feinstein International Center, Tufts University (FIC/Tufts) is supporting seven NGOs in developing and applying an assessment approach to measure the impact of their drought response projects funded under a separate B&M Gates grant. Within this scope of work, FIC/Tufts will conduct a review of impact assessment experiences which combines conceptual and methodological issues with organizational and institutional constraints. The resultant report will be made available to all the agencies involved in this initiative and to the staff of the Gates Foundation.

2. Purpose of the Review

As the Project is drawing to a close, the literature review provides the opportunity to consider the contribution of the Project to the debate on impact assessment of humanitarian projects. The purpose of the Review will therefore be to summarize current thinking on impact assessment in humanitarian projects as presented in key outputs; and to consider how over the last 2 years the Project and other initiatives have addressed some of the key issues identified in these analyses.

3. Review outline

The review will focus on the following two areas:

1. Overview of existing literature on impact assessment in humanitarian projects:
    i. Methodological issues and challenges
    ii. Conceptual issues and challenges
    iii. Contextual issues and challenges
    iv. Organizational issues and challenges
2. Recent initiatives to address these challenges:
    i. B&M Gates Project – key lessons learned
    ii. Other FIC initiatives
    iii. Other recent developments
3. Summary of key issues and conclusions

Under Section 1 above, the Review will focus on existing overviews and analyses (such as the ODI Hofmann report, the Oxfam/Chris Roche book on impact assessment, SCF/Louise Gosling etc), summarizing the key debates and highlighting the key obstacles and challenges facing impact assessment of humanitarian projects.

Section 2 will draw on documentation from the Project, other FIC impact assessments and the work of other organizations to identify ways in which these obstacles have been addressed and the key lessons learned, to present an up to date summary of the topic.

4. Deliverables

Review report highlighting the contribution of the Project and other initiatives to the development of effective impact assessment of humanitarian emergency response.

Annex 2: References

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