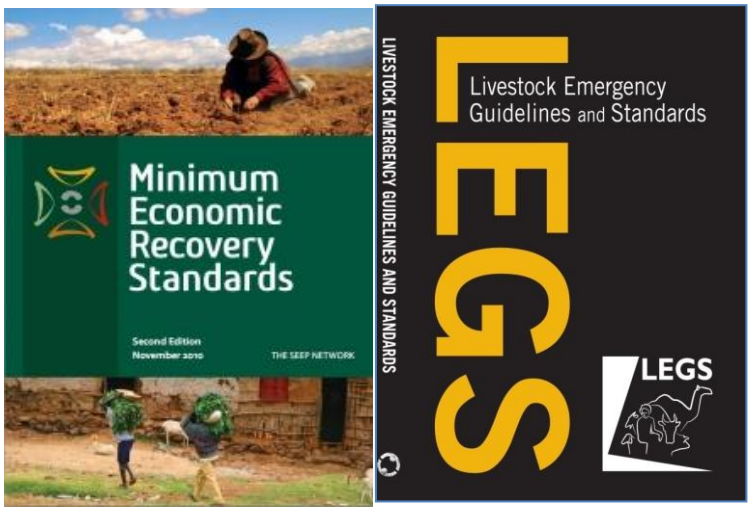

Panel 29: Why do Humanitarian Standards matter?

Theme: Politics and practices of natural disasters and disaster response

Livelihoods Standards in Humanitarian Practice: The Case of Sphere Companion Standards Minimum Economic Recovery Standards (MERS) and Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards (LEGS)

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WORLD CONFERENCE ON HUMANITARIAN STUDIES, ISTANBUL, OCT.24, 2013

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Abstract

There is growing recognition in the humanitarian sector of the need to consider livelihoods as well as lives in humanitarian response, as evidenced by the publication in 2009 of two standards initiatives, both companions to Sphere – the Minimum Economic Recovery Standards (MERS) and the Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards (LEGS).

MERS and LEGS are evidence-based standards developed by broad consultation. MERS provides a guide to economic recovery in post crisis situations, containing core, assessment and analysis standards, together with four technical standards covering financial services, productive assets, employment creation and enterprise development. LEGS contains guidance on the design, implementation and evaluation of livestock-based livelihoods responses in disasters, including participatory tools to identify timely and appropriate responses, supported by technical standards on destocking, veterinary services, water, feed, shelter and restocking.

Evidence from case studies around the world shows that the application of livelihoods-based standards can improve the quality and timeliness of humanitarian response during and after a crisis. These standards provide tools and frameworks for the protection of livelihood assets and the redevelopment of livelihood strategies during and after a crisis. They also contribute to the debate among practitioners about the importance of livelihoods in humanitarian response.

Introduction

This paper discusses how livelihoods-based minimum standards and guidelines provide tools and frameworks to change how decision makers currently design emergency response interventions. The paper looks at linkages between research and practice and how research and knowledge sharing initiatives have been conducive towards adoption of best practices and minimum standards. By reviewing the examples of the two Sphere companion standards MERS and LEGS, the paper shows that minimum standards can contribute to improved practices in humanitarian response when it comes to supporting and protecting the livelihoods of people affected by crisis. The paper includes a literature review that draws connections between research and practice, followed by a review of the broadly consultative and evidence based processes that led to the development of the MERS and LEGS standards, and specific examples of how the standards provide guidance and tools to practitioners and decision makers to support and protect the livelihoods of populations affected by crisis. This final section first looks at the case of MERS

which provides more general recommendations in order to make the case for early economic recovery and livelihoods thinking, and then provides more concrete examples from livestock dependent livelihoods strategies from LEGS.

Research questions

How do livelihoods-based standards contribute towards raising awareness and changing the way decision makers from humanitarian agencies respond to and support livelihoods in emergencies?

Guiding questions:

- How can evidence and consensus based standards improve policy responses that support and protect livelihoods?
- How can standards provide guidance to practitioners to avoid poor policy decisions?
- How can standards provide guidance to decision makers in terms of improved assessment, situation analysis, and better timing of livelihoods-based interventions?

Research and Policy in Humanitarian Studies and Practice: a brief literature review

The field of humanitarian studies can be heralded as a positive example of the interrelationships between research and policy, where research has played a fundamental role in influencing policy making and practice. The following literature review aims to make the connections between humanitarian standards (the Sphere Project and companion standards LEGS and MERS) and how they evolved from policy networks and broad consultative processes in an attempt to bridge the research and practice gap and further promote evidence based policy making and dissemination of best practices.

'Policy entrepreneurs[1]' and policy networks have been instrumental in bridging the gap between research and practice in the field of humanitarian work. In the case of humanitarian studies policy entrepreneurs have been critical in promoting a shift towards "evidence based policy making" (Stone and Maxwell 2001). Review of the literature shows that after myriad studies documenting the unintended consequences of humanitarian interventions, the current trend in the humanitarian community has shifted towards agreement to establish norms for mitigating or preventing these negative effects (Maxwell and Barret 2005) and promoting joint standards initiatives. With so much empirical evidence to prove what should be done and what should not

[1] A policy entrepreneur is a person who takes ideas and translates them into practice.

be done, the goal of current research should be to provide clear policy recommendations and guidelines to practitioners. This shift towards practical research with an impact responds to prior research initiatives that lacked appropriate dissemination and were limited to academic circles.

According to Maxwell and Barret (op. cit.) the Sphere Project is an excellent example of how research influenced policy and practice. The Sphere Project Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response is an effort to improve humanitarian response and the accountability of humanitarian agencies. These "Minimum Standards are an attempt to describe the level of assistance to which all people have a right, regardless of political, ethnic or geographical specificity. It lays out guidance in terms of assessment and analysis, participation and transparency, protection of assets, production, income and employment, access to markets, and nutritional adequacy" (ibid.). Buchanan Smith (2003) describes the backdrop against which Sphere standards were developed as agencies working in humanitarian emergencies became open to scrutiny and were called on to become more accountable. According to Buchanan Smith "the days of unquestioning acceptance of the good work of humanitarian agencies were over". In this account of how the Sphere Project came to existence, the authors highlight that the Red Cross started the "Code of Conduct for the IFRC Movement and NGOs in the early nineteen nineties" but it wasn't until the humanitarian crisis in Rwanda in 1994 that the initiative for Sphere took off with Study 3 of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda (op. cit:6).

Bringing together policy entrepreneurs from Interaction, Oxfam and IFRC, the paramount study by Borton et al (1996) on the response to the crisis in Rwanda was groundbreaking and lauded for its independence in spite of the negative findings of the evaluation. The research findings included statements about the general lack of professionalism of NGO staff, the proliferation of NGOs, lack of regulation, overlap, wasted resources and duplication, and issues concerning the rights of those affected by emergencies. The Sphere experience with its highly consultative process, and simple and user friendly format brought research and evidence into the hands of field practitioners through its minimum standards and guidelines. Today Sphere represents the leading and most recognized standard in the industry of humanitarian assistance. (For a full description of the Sphere process see Buchanan Smith 2003).

The Emergence of Livelihoods-based Standards

Following the lead of the Sphere Project, two other initiatives emerged to fill the gap in the humanitarian debate concerning livelihoods issues. The Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards (LEGS) and the Minimum Economic Recovery Standards (MERS) came out of similar rights based and highly consultative processes driven by a desire to raise awareness about the

unintended consequences of humanitarian interventions on the livelihoods of people affected by crisis situations and thereby share knowledge and disseminate best practice.

LEGS

Similar to Sphere in terms of process and format, LEGS was a response to the failure to take into account livelihoods and the crucial role of livestock in humanitarian responses. According to ODI "widely available research shows that if urgent action is taken early in a crisis to protect livelihoods, the effects of drought on pastoralists can be mitigated and the need for a massive emergency response can be reduced" (ODI 2006).

During an international workshop convened by the African Union/Inter African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR) in Kenya 2004, participants noted the need to improve the quality of livestock responses in emergencies and the lack of any internationally recognized standards and guidelines to assist decision makers and practitioners in the field. The Feinstein International Center of Tufts University was given the task of initiating a process to address these concerns and increase the understanding of the need to support livelihoods, and in particular livestock, in emergency response (Watson 2011). At that time a number of agencies were documenting their experiences of livestock based interventions including Oxfam GB, Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC), and the LEGS process drew on these experiences (ibid.).

LEGS grew out of this recognition that many livestock interventions are of poor quality, are badly timed and/or simply inadequate. LEGS was therefore created to improve the quality of livestock interventions in emergencies through the development of international standards and guidelines for the assessment, design, implementation and evaluation of livestock interventions to assist people affected by humanitarian crisis. LEGS' target audience includes livestock professionals but also general humanitarian practitioners to support them with examples of best practice, and also provides guidelines to donors and decision makers involved in funding of livestock interventions (Watson 2011). The LEGS guidelines were produced as a handbook in 2009, based on a broad consultation process: the technical chapters were drafted by focal point authors drawing on proven best practice from around the world, and a consultation draft of the Handbook was placed on the LEGS website and shared with the mailing list of over 1,700 organisations and individuals worldwide. The feedback and case studies provided by the consultation process were used to revise the draft and produce the final version for publication. A second edition of LEGS will be published in 2014 following a similar consultation process. LEGS became a formal companion to Sphere in May 2011.

Using the livelihoods framework, LEGS promotes the protection and rebuilding of livelihood assets. The LEGS Response consists of four stages: preliminary assessment, participatory

response identification, analysis of interventions and options, and monitoring and evaluation. Following publication of the LEGS Handbook, a participatory training program was launched, based on regional training of trainers courses around the world. Fifteen LEGS Training of Trainers courses have been carried out to-date, creating a cadre of 260 LEGS trainers who have delivered 126 training courses to over 2,600 people in 26 countries. Through the training program, hard copy sales and pdf downloads LEGS is beginning to influence both the policy and practice of emergency planning. A recent briefing paper on the use of evidence in humanitarian decision making by the Feinstein Center highlights how decisions in the humanitarian field are still contextual and path dependent, as many tools are unrealistic and inappropriate for emergency settings (Darcy et al 2013). LEGS provides tools for decision makers to identify risks and protect assets before it is too late. The LEGS Participatory Response Identification Matrix (PRIM) is an example of an instrument designed to help practitioners design appropriate, feasible and timely interventions while understanding the constraints involved in the context of a humanitarian crisis.

MERS

The origins of the Minimum Economic Recovery Standards are rooted in past crises such as the Indian Ocean tsunami, the Haiti earthquake, and the increasing prevalence of prolonged complex emergencies, for example in the Horn of Africa and Afghanistan. These crises highlighted the need for strategies that support 1) the stabilization and/or re-emergence of enterprises as a source of income and employment for affected populations, and 2) the development and strengthening of institutions to support the stabilization and coping mechanisms of households to weather these crises. In response to these concerns, the Small Enteprise Education Promotion Network (SEEP) Network hosted member efforts to explore the challenges and emerging practices of economic recovery in crisis environments. Members repeatedly identified the need for more consistent, technically sound interventions, and for the development of a knowledge base in the field.

SEEP received funding from USAID through the FIELD-Support LWA (Leader with Associates) mechanism to convene a task force to develop the first draft of economic recovery standards. In September 2007, SEEP hosted a workshop in Washington, D.C. to launch the Standards process. A broad consortium of practitioners from 30 international humanitarian agencies discussed key issues in the field and together defined the technical focus and structure of the Standards. Each of the six sections of the Standards was developed by a practitioner-led working group, comprising a mix of experience in relief and development environments. The draft produced by this group was shared for two rounds of feedback and input in 2008; the result was the first edition of the Standards, published in early 2009.

During 2009 and 2010, SEEP organized regional consultations on the Standards in East Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, Europe, and Southeast Asia. Multiple participant NGOs, including ACDI/VOCA, AED, CRS, and Mercy Corps, tested out the use of the Standards with existing field projects in a diverse group of crisis-affected contexts. In June 2010, SEEP reconvened many of the original Standards contributors as well as new members from non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, donors, and international organizations. The group reviewed the input from the regional consultations and field tests and updated the Standards to reflect recent industry advances. In all, over 200 individuals have contributed or shared feedback in some way for the Standards. The second edition of the Standards was published in November 2010.

In the case of MERS research also played a substantial role through the creation of SEEP's Market Development Working Group. The working group drew from the findings of a paper by Nourse et al (2007) that revealed how "relief initiatives in their admirable work to meet basic needs of people affected by crisis, often inadvertently distorted private sector markets and unintentionally created vulnerabilities and dependency" (Nourse et al 2007:5). Based on evidence gathered from 13 case studies of conflicts and natural disasters, SEEP's research found that relief efforts in their aim to provide lifesaving goods and services flooded local markets with low-priced imported commodities, in kind donated goods, and parallel distribution systems. This challenge of post crisis market distortion was the result of an "emergency mindset" aimed at providing relief fast, while viewing private sector development as a daunting task given the complexity of identifying legitimate local businesses and entrepreneurs while avoiding emergency "profiteers".

Based on case studies from complex emergencies as varied as Sudan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sierra Leone, Indonesia, Colombia, Palestine, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Mali, and with the participation of a group of SEEP Members including CHF international, CCF, Concern, DAI, The Feinstein Center of Tufts University, Interaction, IFRC, IRC, Mercy Corps, Practical Action, the Sphere Board, among other key players from the field of humanitarian assistance, the joint effort led to the creation of a task force that would develop the Minimum Economic Recovery Standards . The work of the SEEP Working Group identified that relief efforts which ignored market dynamics in fact increased vulnerability of unaffected households and led to the development of "relief" or "dependency" culture.

The standards base programming and policy recommendations on sound research and practitioner testimonials, case studies are drawn from a series of research papers published by the SEEP Network such as Miehlbradt, A. and McVay M 2006, Maxwell et al 2008, Tilman, B Norell and Stephens 2004). According to the Concept Paper Economic Recovery After Crisis: Developing Practitioner Guidelines by the SEEP Network, the standards were developed

alongside a growing body of evidence and research on microfinance and microenterprise in crisis environments with the clear objective to provide practical guidance to practitioners. "Despite the wealth of research…there are as yet no practical, comprehensive guidelines for organizations implementing economic recovery in crisis effected environments" (SEEP Network, p.4).

Like LEGS the MERS initiative created a training of trainers program which is an effective way to familiarize field practitioners with the standards. The hands-on participatory training, in addition to placing the handbook in the hands of decision makers from key NGOs and government agencies, teaches practitioners how to use and apply the standards in their daily work. The MERS training program has been carried out in Bangkok, Dakar, Nairobi and Beirut, and currently has 25 accredited MERS trainers worldwide. The Minimum Economic Recovery Standards were accepted as companion standards to Sphere in May 2011 and has been referred to and used in a guides developed by UNHCR (2011) and UNDP (2013). The MERS have also been included in curriculum of graduate-level courses at the George Washington University and the School of International Public Affairs at Columbia University in 2011.

Livelihoods-based Standards: Examples of standard responsive practice

THE CASE OF MERS

The Minimum Economic Recovery Standards provides practitioners with a simple format inspired by SPHERE. The Minimum Standards articulate the minimum level of technical and other assistance to be provided in promoting the recovery of economies and livelihoods affected by crisis. Each standard is presented as follows:

- The Minimum Standards are qualitative in nature and specify the minimum levels to be attained.
- The key actions are necessary activities and inputs to be taken in order to meet the minimum standards.
- The key indicators are 'signals' that show whether a minimum standard has been attained. They provide a way of measuring and communicating processes and results of key actions
- The guidance notes include specific points to consider when applying the minimum standards, indicators and key actions in different situations. They provide guidance on tackling practical difficulties, benchmarks or advice on priority issues. They may also include critical issues relating to the standards, indicators or actions, and describe dilemmas, controversies or gaps in current knowledge.

Six Categories of Minimum Standards: Core Standards for Economic Recovery, Standards for Assessment and Analysis, Standards for Productive Assets, Standards for Financial Services, Standards for Employment, Standards for Enterprise Development.

Using examples of poor programming and standard responsive programming the handbook allows practitioners and decision makers to base their decisions on sound advice from experienced practitioners to design effective, timely and context sensitive interventions.

Example of Poor Programming – MERS
An agency conducts a livelihoods assessment and finds that many people are interested in raising livestock as an economic activity. The program provides beneficiaries with cattle, sheep, and goats with the plan that the beneficiaries will sell the animals' offspring as a way to earn income. However, the agency did not conduct a market assessment and so did not realize that most households did not have the resources to care for the animals, such as access to reliable feed sources and veterinary services. As a result, many households found it more expedient to sell the animals immediately, without gaining any value from them by fattening them or collecting milk. Other households lost their animals to disease (MERS, p.22)

Examples of Standard Responsive Programming
A program buys basic agricultural equipment from a local wholesaler and distributes them to farmers to replace tools lost in the floods. This large order gives the wholesaler the cash necessary to restock other merchandise, which increases the availability of farmer supplies in the affected area for all farmers. *(MERS, p.79)*
A program is running a project after a crisis intended to increase women's income via credit to purchase goats. The aim is that the women will repay the loan in two years, with the anticipated impact that they will double their income baseline in three years. The program clearly identifies its key assumptions and indicators to track different phases of the program (MERS, p.52)

In the above examples, this basic comparative framework between poor programming and standard responsive practice guides practitioners towards a more reflexive practice when designing programs.

Another example of poor versus standard responsive programming is illustrated with an example of how timing and appropriate assessment and analysis can make the difference when dealing with small farmers in crisis environments:

Example of Poor Programming:
A flood comes shortly before a major planting season. Farmers in the area typically conserve seed for the next season's planting, but most of their stocks are destroyed. Immediate programs

provide food and shelter, but an agricultural program to facilitate access to seeds does not come in time for the planting season. As a result, farmers plant less than usual, hurting both farmers' incomes and food security in the coming year.

Drawing from evidence and research carried out by the International Center for Tropical Agriculture this example of standard responsive programming, on the other hand, shares valuable lessons learned from best practice in seed systems and seed security during drought and flooding:

Example of Standard-Responsive Practice

Rain-fed agriculture in Burkina Faso and across the Sahel has always been vulnerable to prolonged drought and flooding. Timely assessment and analysis of the impact of natural disaster on seed systems and seed security ensures that the problem is accurately identified and diagnosed. Interpreting this information increases practitioner knowledge of seed systems and contributes to better quality Relief Services collaborated with the International Center for Tropical Agriculture in the development of a practical seed-system security assessment tool. This tool has been used three times in as many years in Burkina Faso. The assessment is guided by a Seed Security Framework that looks at availability, access, seed, and varietal quality. The assessment seeks to determine what seed channels farmers rely on in normal times (e.g., their own saved seed, social networks, the grain/seed market, the commercial sector, or government and NGO projects) and the extent to which seed is available following a disaster. If seed is available, then the problem is access, which is better addressed by the distribution of vouchers to farmers rather than direct seed distribution. In this way, local markets are reinforced and farmer choice is respected. The tool has been used to respond to a flood in 2007, the food price crisis in 2008, and to train the Ministry of Agriculture and NGO practitioners. The lessons learned from these consecutive assessments resulted in the successful implementation of a series of seed vouchers and fairs, and an ongoing project to strengthen rice and cowpea seed storage and management, and has strengthened the capacity of government and NGO seed practitioners. *Source:* See Louise Sperling, 2008, "When Disaster Strikes: A Guide to Assessing Seed System Security," CIAT Publication No. 363 (Cali, Columbia: International Center for Tropical Agriculture), (http://crsprogramquality). MERS HANDBOOK p.49

Although these recommendations can seem rather generic, having this type of guidance and information available can be very empowering for field practitioners. Avoiding mistakes by learning about best practices can have a major impact in terms of duplication and reinvention of the wheel. Now we turn to the case of LEGS that provides more specific recommendations in regards to livelihoods of communities dependent on livestock.

THE CASE OF LEGS

Like Sphere and MERS, LEGS is founded on a rights based approach drawing on the right to food and the right to a standard of living. Recognizing the key role livestock play in livelihoods of disaster affected communities, LEGS is founded on three livelihood based objectives:

- To provide immediate benefits to crisis affected communities through livestock-based interventions
- To protect key livestock assets of crisis affected communities
- To rebuild the livestock assets of crisis affected communities

LEGS follows the format of the Sphere handbook. It begins with introductory chapters on initial assessment and participatory response identification, followed by a chapter on common standards, and six technical chapters: destocking, veterinary services, livestock feed, water, shelter, and restocking. Each chapter contains minimum standards, key indicators, and guidance notes, as well as participatory tools to facilitate decision making. Like MERS, LEGS uses case studies to illustrate good practice in each of the technical areas, and focuses on the process of response and design. The LEGS Response is based on four stages: preliminary assessment, response identification, analysis of technical interventions and options, and monitoring and evaluation (Watson 2011).

The first stage, assessment, encourages practitioners to understand the context and role played by livestock in the livelihoods of affected communities, the impact of the emergency or crisis on livestock, as well as situation analysis (insecurity, conflict, policy context). Stage two uses a Participatory Response Identification Matrix (PRIM) to bring together stakeholders to explore appropriate and timely responses. Under Stage 3, a number of participatory tools (advantages and disadvantages tables, decision trees and timing tables) as well as the minimum standards and guidance notes, assist users to carry out a comparative analysis of intervention options. Stage 4 promotes monitoring and evaluation of livelihoods impact as an integral part of the emergency response design and implementation.

The following is an example case study contrasting development and emergency approaches which illustrates how emergency response interventions frequently undermine development approaches and beneficiary livelihood strategies:

Case Study: Veterinary Services in Ethiopia – contrasting 'development' and 'emergency' approaches	
Developmental Approach	Emergency Response
• Privatization of clinical veterinary services supported by government policy since 1993 • Numerous programs to assist rural private practitioners (degree and diploma holders) to set up private clinics and pharmacies, funded by EC, World Bank, DFID, USAID and others • Enabling legislation for private para-veterinary professionals	• Designed without involvement of local private sector • 'Truck and chuck' – dumping of large quantities of free veterinary medicines • Limited epidemiological basis for intervention e.g. vaccination programs targeting 20% of population • Funded by the same donors who fund development • Undermines local private practitioners i.e. the services needed for recovery

As this example clearly demonstrates, in the past emergency response from donors has overlooked local private sector actors. The impact on these actors from dumping of large quantities of in kind donations of pharmaceuticals can be highly destructive to the local private sector and consequently have a negative effect on community livelihoods.

BOX 4 LIVESTOCK INTERVENTION IN VIETNAM FLOODS

In September 2010, the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) conducted a LEGS workshop for its Disaster Liaison Officers (DLOs) from the Asia-Pacific region, together with other partners. Participants included two DLOs from Vietnam and a representative from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) that WSPA had worked with in late 2009 after Typhoon Mirinae.

After the flooding in Quang Binh Province in October 2010, WSPA, with support from MARD, used the LEGS approach to carry out an assessment and design an intervention. The assessment process highlighted one particular area, Tan Hoa Commune in Minh Hoa District, where the local population is very dependent on their livestock for food, income and draught power. The floods had destroyed crops and pasture, and damaged homes, animal shelters and infrastructure, including the office of the commune veterinarian. Many of the population were busy ploughing and replanting their crops, using their surviving cattle and buffalo as draught power. Those who had lost their own animals were reliant on family, friends and neighbours for the use of theirs as the cost of getting this work done mechanically was well out of reach of the majority of the population.

Pasture and fodder reserves had been destroyed by the floodwaters, and the price of commercial feed was too expensive for most livestock owners, due to the remoteness of the commune. Many people were spending two to three hours a day collecting leaves and the trunks of banana trees to feed their livestock. Pigs are commonly kept in this area to supplement income and some livestock owners were sharing the rice they had received from the government and NGOs with their pigs, in order to keep them alive.

With the beginning of winter approaching, livestock owners were concerned about the lack of shelter for their stock. Many had not had time to repair the thatched livestock shelters damaged by the floods, because of the large amount of time spent replanting crops and collecting livestock feed. They were also unable to get help from the commune veterinarian and village para-veterinarians (for livestock vaccination or treatment) as the flood had washed away all the vaccines, drugs and equipment. The only option was to call the district veterinarian, a journey of at least 45 minutes each way.

As a result of the LEGS-based assessment and planning process, WSPA provided 91 tonnes of concentrated feed for 600 cattle and buffalo and 750 pigs for 3 months to cover the winter period, benefitting approximately 400 of the poorest families in the commune. The feed was distributed in two instalments, to prevent spoilage of feed during storage over a long period. At the time of distribution, representatives from the feed company were available to inform livestock owners about appropriate quantities and feeding methods for this concentrate.

In addition, 5,000 metres of plastic cloth was provided to make cattle and buffalo shelters rain and windproof for the coming winter, benefitting 350 families. Support was also provided to the commune veterinarian and village para-veterinarians to enable them to treat and vaccinate animals in their area. A small fridge and drug cabinet was provided to replace the ones lost in the floods, as well as cool boxes and veterinary kits.

In April 2011, WSPA conducted a LEGS training course for MARD staff in Hanoi, with the long-term aim that MARD will fully adopt LEGS for use in their future disaster response work with livestock. By using the LEGS approach, WSPA was able to gain a better understanding of the relationship between livestock and their owners, which enabled staff to design more appropriate responses that met the needs of both livestock and owners, and greatly increased the effectiveness of the response. The LEGS approach has also assisted WSPA in its efforts to show others the importance of considering livestock in disaster response and planning, and the benefits of good animal welfare in protecting livestock-based

The above example shows how useful case studies can be for field practitioners being faced by a similar situation. Although context varies, this example shows how the LEGS based assessment

and planning process directly benefited hundreds of families of poor farmers in the affected region.

As a result of the LEGS training program and the dissemination of the LEGS Handbook, LEGS is increasingly used as a guide for humanitarian response, particularly among livestock professionals and donors supporting livestock interventions in emergencies. The tools and frameworks help decision makers and practitioners to select appropriate and timely interventions using participatory techniques. For example, a recent study of the uptake of LEGS in the Horn of Africa drought concluded: "LEGS has brought an important dimension to emergency practices in pastoralist areas: the protection of livestock. A huge capacity development has taken place through a good number of actors. All the key informants interviewed, especially development professionals who had received LEGS training, noted that LEGS had become part of their development and disaster response" (Coupe and Kisiangani 2013).

Conclusions

Livelihoods-based standards are beginning to change the way humanitarian agencies respond to crisis. The shift taking place in humanitarian assistance is evident. The increased recognition and adoption of minimum standards by humanitarian agencies can be seen in the creation of livelihoods and early recovery departments in some of the world's largest NGOs and humanitarian agencies. Although inadequate and poor programming that negatively impacts the livelihoods of affected populations is beyond our control, knowledge and uptake of standards is beginning to pressure organizations to become more accountable as they cannot simply claim they did not know (as standards are readily available).

In the case of MERS, adoption of standards by a growing number of SEEP members and implementing agencies demonstrates the validity of minimum standards for economic recovery. Testimonials from MERS trainers working with practitioners in the Horn of Africa and in Lebanon have expressed that the MERS handbook has helped them when negotiating with donors, and in the design and implementation of new programs. One MERS trainer who carried out a MERS training session in Daddab said that "the MERS handbook is the most referenced material in coordination meetings lately". MERS is in the process of carrying out an independent evaluation of adoption of the standards; however, by viewing the profile of training participants and institutional representation it is clear that the standards are reaching a representative segment of the humanitarian industry.

In 2013 LEGS carried out an evaluation of its impact in the Horn of Africa. The study noted that while LEGS uptake and application is very high among livestock professionals, there is still the case to be made for livestock (and livelihood) based support in crises to donors and decision makers, when compared to food aid and life-saving interventions (Coupe and Kisiangani, op. cit.). Although Gift in Kind donations will continue to be a part of many emergency respondents, (particularly given the way NGOs measure the impact of their work in number of tons of aid shipped, or millions of dollars of in kind donations distributed), increasingly donors and NGOs are recognizing the negative impact that large donor funded food aid and distribution programs can have on local private sector actors, as opposed to programs that support and protect livelihoods.

Timely and appropriate livelihoods-based emergency responses can not only save livelihoods, but can also reduce the need for other emergency support (such as food aid). For example there is growing evidence that livestock feeding support to key milk producing stock can reduce the number of young children in feeding centers during drought (Sadler et al 2012). Similarly research in Ethiopia showed that timely commercial destocking was significantly more cost-effective than food aid followed by restocking among the pastoralist communities studied (Catley and Cullis 2012).

In the growing debate on the importance of resilience for vulnerable communities, livelihoods-based standards offer a valuable contribution to increasing the preparedness of disaster-affected communities and reducing their vulnerability to current and future disasters through strengthening their livelihood assets and livelihood strategies. This process also reduces dependency on emergency support in the short term.

With increasing evidence, research and consensus on best practices, humanitarian actors are under pressure to become more accountable for their actions and programming. The adoption of livelihoods standards by humanitarian agencies is only starting to take traction, however, and more needs to be done to continue to promote the dissemination and adoption of livelihood standards such as LEGS and MERS. With readily available minimum standards that are easy to use, providing clear examples and simple frameworks for assessment and analysis, humanitarian respondents are increasingly more empowered and aware of how livelihoods matter.

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