

MODULE 1

AFRICARE'S APPROACH TO FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMS

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Introduction

Household food insecurity is a crucial problem in most developing countries, including those in Africa. It is also one of the principal causes of malnutrition among women and children in these countries. At the 1996 World Food Summit, the participating countries agreed that there is food security when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life¹.

In many countries, more than half the population is at risk of food insecurity at one time or another. Food insecurity is often associated with poverty, but it may also have other causes. In fact, food insecurity most often has multiple causes and these may vary from household to household, from village to village, or from one geographic zone to another, as illustrated by the examples below.

Example 1: In the village of Tibila many children suffer from malnutrition during the rainy season. The main cause of this malnutrition is household food insecurity. In this village, there is a shortage of cereal stocks on the local market during the rainy season because local production is insufficient to cover the full year's food requirements of the village and the entire area becomes inaccessible during the rainy season. While there is adequate land in the village, agriculture inputs are expensive and beyond the reach of many producers, resulting in low yields. No one in the community stocks sufficient quantities of cereals to last through this hungry season. Hence the principal problem of food security in this community is the seasonal non-availability of foodstuffs.

¹Rome Declaration on World Food Security and World Food Summit Plan of Action. This document was approved by the Committee on World Food Security at the conclusion of its 22nd Session on 31 October 1996, and pursuant to FAO Conference Resolution 2/95, was submitted to the World Food Summit for adoption.

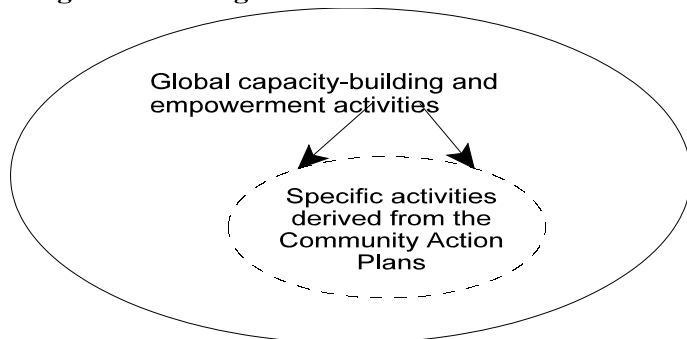
Example 2: In the village of Rouko, the villagers have identified that their food insecurity problems are due principally to the fact that cereal prices increase significantly before the harvest and many households are unable to afford the cereals at these prices. As a result, the poorest households send their children off to stay with their more prosperous relatives and many men leave the community to find work elsewhere. The villagers are aware that their region has fruit trees that could be exploited to increase their revenues. But in order to do this, they would need credit to buy necessary processing equipment and training in how to manage this type of business operation. In this village, then, the problem of food security is principally related to the villagers' constraints which limit their financial access to available foodstuffs.

The problems of food and nutritional security are complex and so, therefore, are their solutions. If programs are to improve the situation, they must have considerable knowledge of the particular situation where they intend to intervene and activities must be planned and implemented in light of this site specific information.

This knowledge comes both from development professionals and from the local community itself. Villagers have particular knowledge of the constraints they face and the opportunities present. They will be able to identify at least some potential solutions and assess their feasibility under local conditions. In the long term, they are the ones who are most greatly concerned by their future and who are best placed to take responsibility for their development. Having said this, however, it should also be noted that many communities have only limited experience in the formal process of analyzing a situation and coming up with a Community Action Plan (CAP)

to address clearly defined problems in a particular time frame. One of Africare's concerns is to increase local populations' skills to carry out these planning tasks and to address problems that arise in a timely manner.

Figure 1.1 Program's two levels of activities



Program Activities at Two Levels

In order to meet its food security and capacity building objectives, Africare's DAPs intervene at two levels. The first concerns the activities of the program that are oriented particularly toward capacity building while the second involves supporting more focused food

security interventions as defined in each community's Action Plan.

Level One DAP interventions focus primarily on participation and capacity building leading to empowerment. Specifically, they might involve training in literacy, in participatory methodologies, management, community development, and in the use of tools for analysis and program implementation. Training in PRA and facilitation of the village's early efforts would be considered a Level One intervention, for example.

Level Two DAP interventions, represented in the diagram as a subset of the Level One program activities, consist of those activities put in place by the villagers themselves, under the auspices of their CAP. This plan will develop from the PRA activities carried out by the villagers to analyze their situation and come up with appropriate strategies for intervention. At this stage, Africare's intervention might involve supporting the community with information or resources

needed to implement the activities that are identified as priorities in the CAP. This might include, for example, helping to develop small commercial activities, improving food storage facilities, assisting with water and soil conservation efforts, providing information about improved food processing technologies, providing information and training on growth monitoring or nutrition education, etc. These Level Two activities have the objective of directly improving food and nutritional security, whereas Level One activities attempt to address food and nutritional security indirectly by empowering local populations with greater analytic and planning skills so that they will be able to more effectively address their own needs.

It should be noted that in many development programs these activities are identified and implemented by DAP staff and consultants. In these cases, it is the program that is “in charge.” This contrasts with Africare’s approach where it is the villagers who are in charge of implementing their Action Plan. The role of the DAP staff is principally to support the activities of the villagers as a counselor, collaborator, and -- where necessary and appropriate -- contributor of financial resources needed to implement local activities.

Follow-Up and Evaluation of DAP Activities

In order to measure DAP success, it is necessary to evaluate both progress toward the empowerment objective and progress in implementing specific activities set forth in the Community Action Plans. Taken together these activities should improve the situation of food and nutrition security and enhance the population’s capacity to manage their situation in the long term.

At the level of DAP management, you will develop a system for monitoring and evaluation that meets your daily needs. However, you also have responsibilities to USAID, as the principal financier of the program, and must take into consideration their reporting requirements as described in the guide they provide all beneficiaries. As outlined in the guide, you are required to report on a certain number of key indicators that are used by USAID to assess the impact of the DAPs it supports. These indicators are described on the Indicator Performance Tracking Table (IPTT) that includes annual targets or mid-term and final targets for each indicator. The IPTT is developed in the DAP design process and revised in the initial year of the DAP (and sometimes at mid-term). It is the primary contract between FFP and Africare concerning the results that are to be achieved from an activity.

At the same time, the populations with whom you work have certain responsibilities as well, and are accountable to the larger community (as well as to the program if they receive assistance). So they also have a need to monitor and evaluate their activities. The role of the program at this level is to work on providing skills to enable the population to effectively carry out these tasks during the life of the DAP and beyond.

Monitoring and Evaluating Capacity Building and Empowerment Activities

To evaluate the DAP’s capacity building and empowerment impact, you need to find out whether the program activities have resulted in the beneficiaries being able to effectively manage the food security situation in their community and decreased their dependence on outsiders in carrying out these tasks. Your system for monitoring and evaluation will need to establish whether the local population is better able to analyze their situation (using PRA tools, for example), whether they are taking the initiative in the development of Community Action Plans and are following through on their implementation, whether they are more confident in carrying out commercial or social activities that contribute to food or nutritional security, etc.

Africare has developed an index of the variables involved in measuring these conditions, called the Food Security Community Capacity Index (FSCCI) that is presented in Module 8.

Monitoring and Evaluating of Activities Defined by the CAP

It is also necessary to verify whether the CAPs are having any impact on the household food security and nutrition situation in the community that undertakes the plan. If the implementation of the plan seems to have had no impact, or a negative one, the next step is to analyze (with the villagers) why this is the case and then to modify the plans as needed. If, on the other hand, the activities appear to have had a positive impact, then the question becomes why they were so effective and what factors contributed to their success. This will enable the program and the community to build on these successes and to maximize the benefits of any other activities that may be undertaken. Here also, Africare has

Follow Up by the Villagers of Their Own Activities

The villagers themselves should be asking similar questions to evaluate the impact of their activities in order to adjust their efforts and also to improve their monitoring skills which will be needed whenever they implement activities under a Community Action Plan. They should also be measuring their capacity and determining where improvements need to be made. The FSCCI can be used as a tool for this purpose also.

As can be seen in the discussion above, in the participatory approach, every intervention (including Level Two interventions that are oriented primarily to implementing the village CAPs) in these programs should have capacity building outcomes and an impact on empowerment. It is essential that the DAP not fall into the trap of solving the village's problems for the villagers. Even though this is often the easier path (and may be more effective in addressing food/nutrition security concerns in the short term), this short-cut is likely to be counter-productive in the long-run. There is a grave danger of actually undermining the village's own sense of initiative and problem solving and actually disempowering the population as a result. This, in turn, risks imperiling the sustainability of program results in the longer term.

The Importance of Reporting Capacity Building and Empowerment

Discussion of capacity building and empowerment activities are to be featured prominently in Africare's Results Reports even though it may be difficult to show any results in the early stages of the activity. By reporting on the activities and their progress, you are showing that your DAP takes this aspect of its intervention seriously. Empowerment and effective participation are often limited to rhetoric in development programs and are given neither the attention nor the investment of time and energy needed to make them effective. It is Africare's seriousness of commitment to these participatory processes that make its programs innovative and, we believe, more effective. As it is expected that your DAP will take these issues seriously and is committed to the approach, systematic reporting of progress (both processes and results) toward both of the primary Africare objectives of food security and capacity building and empowerment should be integrated into all reports submitted on the activity.