



No. 1.1 Emergency Food Security and Livelihoods Assessments

What are emergency food security and livelihoods assessments?

Food security and livelihoods assessments are used for understanding the scale and severity of a disaster,ⁱ its impact on the affected population and their capacity to withstand the shock without using damaging coping mechanisms.ⁱⁱ

Assessment data should inform decisions regarding whether or not to respond, and if a response is required, what form it should take. **Such analyses are necessary to ensure timely and appropriate assistance to an affected population.**

Assessments use various tools to answer key questions at individual, household, community and governmental levels. For instance, information collected can include individual mortality and morbidity data, malnutrition status, household food security and livelihood status, and their capacity to cope in response to a shock.

Assessments can inform short, medium and longer-term programming decisions and contribute to monitoring changes. It is common practice for NGOs to do numerous assessments following the shock, especially in contexts of rapid change.



Fig. 1: Man cycling to sell his goods in Kukuma refugee camp (Credit: Crispin Hughes/OXFAM)

Box 1: Situating food security and assessments: informing decisions, targeting need, speeding recovery

“... Assessment [is used] to inform decision-making in relation to four main questions: whether to intervene; the nature and scale of the intervention; prioritisation and allocation of resources; and programme design and planning.”

SOURCE: Darcy & Hoffman 2003.

“If aid is to do the most good for the most people it must be targeted. To do this, a rapid needs assessment should be carried out as soon as possible and in direct consultation with local authorities. **Whatever is done at the start must shorten and not prolong the recovery period and, most importantly, not increase dependency.** Without attention to the local economy, food aid can destroy the local market and wipe out self-sufficiency. If donated equipment is unfamiliar or cannot be maintained locally, its impact and useful life are limited and its introduction is more likely to devalue and undermine local practice than to support it.”

SOURCE: Redmond 2005.ⁱⁱⁱ

Which frameworks are used for food security and livelihoods assessments?

The **Household Economy Approach (HEA)**^{iv} is used as an analytical framework for food security and livelihood assessments and baselines. The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework^v is a complementary reference tool that is used in understanding the relevance of information gathered. Fig. 2 provides a simplified illustration of the HEA analytical framework.

What types of assessments do the emergency food security and livelihoods team use?

Depending on the stage of the emergency, different types of assessment can be used (see Table 1).

Initial assessment is usually carried out immediately after a shock. It tends to rely on secondary data, such as information from local personnel and observers, due to limited field access.

Rapid emergency assessments establish the effects of a shock on people’s food security and livelihood status. They provide information about needs, possible interventions and resource requirements. Rapid assessment normally takes one week or less and is usually carried out by different agencies. They are often followed by more detailed assessments.

In-depth assessments are appropriate when there is a need to identify risks to livelihoods in more detail to identify possible interventions. They include baselines,^{vi} food security and nutritional surveys, monitoring and evaluation. Assessments usually take 3–6 weeks or more and are often multi-sectoral.

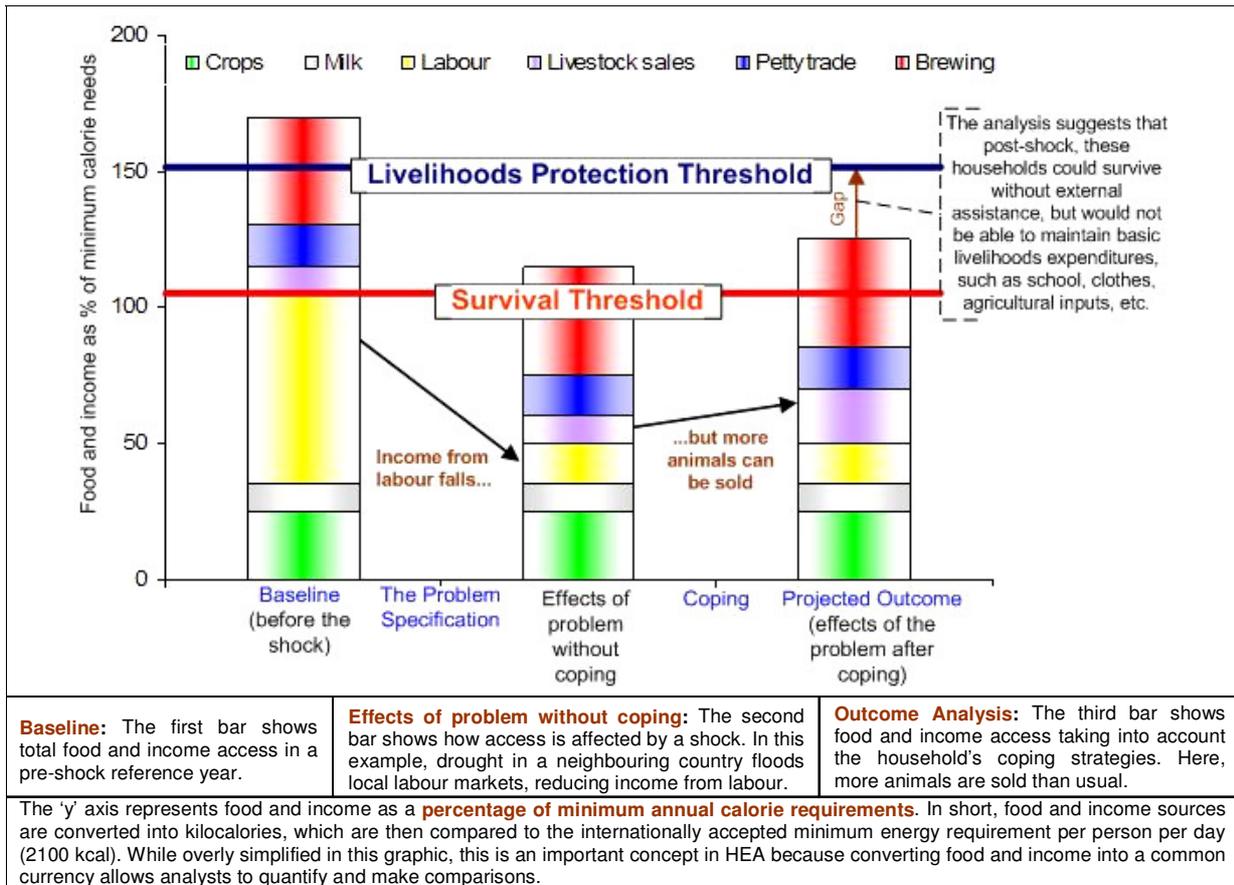


Fig 2: The HEA analytical framework—a simplified illustration (SOURCE: Situation Analysis Knowledge Map)

What key programming questions do assessments need to answer?

Assessments are commonly undertaken to understand the post-disaster context, and in doing so have to answer a wide range of questions, including the following:

- Which geographical areas/livelihood groups need assistance? What type of assistance do they require?
- How many people are in need of each type of assistance, and how much do they require?
- How should beneficiaries be selected, and how long should they receive assistance?
- What is Oxfam's capacity to respond?
- What advocacy issues need to be taken forward?

Table 1: Emergency food security and livelihoods assessment types and characteristics

Assessment	Time frame	Likely Oxfam team composition	Likely decisions/requirements
Initial	2–5 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Country Programme • Regional Humanitarian Teams • Multi-agency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for fuller assessment • Advocacy • Fundraising
Rapid/ Multi-sectoral	5–21 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Country Programme • Humanitarian Division/Regional Management Centre EFSL Team • Multi-agency (with their partners) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of risks to lives and livelihoods • Advocacy • Need for a survey
In-depth	3–6 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Country Programme • Humanitarian Division EFSL Team • Partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food and non-food interventions • Advocacy
Nutrition survey	3–6 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humanitarian Division EFSL Team • Local staff/Ministry of Health • Other agency staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food and non-food interventions • Advocacy • Comparative survey (6–12 months)

What needs to be considered when conducting an assessment?

Considerations required for conducting an assessment fall under three categories: **overall objectives**, **planning and organisation**, and **information collection**.

1. Overall objectives
 - Consider the target audience, the final use of the information gathered and the time frame of the assessment (E.g.: “To understand the impact of the flood on household access to food and income for the design of an appropriate emergency response.”)
2. Planning/organisation of the assessment
 - Establish the methodology for collecting and analysing data at the same time, as this will inform the design of information gathering tools and appropriate time frame
 - Notify key informants (e.g., local authorities/partners) about assessment time frame and objective
 - Make all logistical arrangements to support the fieldwork, including translators if required
3. Collecting accurate information
 - Utilise various sources to enable triangulation of data and ensure information quality
 - Ensure that data collected is coherent. Analyse information daily to identify any information gaps. If new data present themselves, additional time to assess their relevance may be necessary
 - Establish a gender-balanced team if possible. Information should be collected from a wide range of ages, marginalised groups, men and women to reduce bias and ensure a holistic understanding
 - Be observant and challenge any irregularities in the data collected or in observations made

What are the components of food security and livelihoods assessment reports?

Depending on assessment objectives, the report should contain most of the items listed below.

1. **Summary** contains the background, main findings, main conclusions and recommendations. *The summary is a key part of the document – it will be all that the majority of people will read.*
2. **Introduction and background** sets the context of the assessment and ensures that the reader has a clear and sufficiently complete picture of the location and the people living in the assessed area. This section should also contain the purpose, objectives and dates of the assessment.
3. **Body of the assessment, which should include data on:**
 - a. **Seasonality** and the **baseline**/reference year;
 - b. **Livelihoods groups** according to productive assets (see HEA Rough Guide);
 - c. **Food availability and access** by different socio-economic groups for the different livelihood groups;
 - d. **Sources of incomes, expenditure patterns and coping capacity** per socio-economic group;
 - e. **Nutritional status** of the community (see Nutrition Surveys Rough Guide);
 - f. **Future trends** in food security (seasonality, market prices, key livelihood activities) related to vulnerable groups;
 - g. **Planned interventions** (by governments, NGOs etc.) and internal capacity of Oxfam/partners to respond;
 - h. **Access to social services** (health and education) and water and sanitation facilities; and
 - i. **Markets, infrastructure and banking facilities** (to assess the capacity of markets to cope with cash interventions, etc.).
4. **Conclusions and recommendations**, which should be drawn directly from the evidence presented in the report and arise directly and logically from conclusions. *Do not make recommendations that go beyond your technical competency.*
5. **Contact details** are a useful addition at the end of the report, to allow readers to comment/give feedback if they disagree with the findings and/or want to provide complementary information.

Box 2 provides information on what constitutes a good assessment.

Box 2: What makes a good food security and livelihoods assessment?

General criteria for good assessment practice:

Timeliness – providing information and analysis in time to inform key decisions about response

Relevance – providing the information and analysis most relevant to those decisions

Coverage – adequate to the scale of the problem

Continuity – providing relevant information throughout the course of a crisis

Validity – using methods that can be expected to lead to sound conclusions

Transparency – being explicit about the assumptions made, methods used and information relied on to reach conclusions, and about the limits of accuracy of the data relied on.

Good assessment practice would also involve effective *coordination* with others, the *sharing* of data and analysis, and the *communication* of significant results.

A good assessment should:

- Provide the required information to the *target group* that requested it
- Indicate *populations and areas covered*
- Provide *consistent information* throughout the report
- Contain both *quantitative and qualitative information* that is coherent and justifiable
- Describe/discuss *assessment limitations* (regarding methodology, timeframe, area and groups covered)
- Highlight the main findings and lead to clear *conclusions and recommendations* that guide policy and decision-making
- Include *strategic reviews and deep analysis* of the facts described by the communities

SOURCE: Darcy and Hoffman 2003

Where can I find further reading and more detailed information?

<p>Oxfam publications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Guidance and examples of assessments: Situation Analysis Knowledge Map http://intranet.oxfam.org.uk – EFSL Rough Guide 1.2 HEA Assessments – EFSL Rough Guide 2.5 Nutrition Surveys 	<p>Household Economy Approach to assessments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Food Economy Group www.foodeconomy.com – Guide to HEA for Practitioners www.savethechildren.org.uk
<p>General criteria and recommendations for good practice: Darcy J. and Hoffmann A-C 2003. Humanitarian needs and risk assessment. <i>Humanitarian Practice Group</i>, Number 13 www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/271.pdf</p>	<p>Livelihoods approach to assessments: Young H. et al. 2001. Food-security assessments in emergencies: a livelihoods approach. <i>Humanitarian Practice Network</i>, 36 www.odihpn.org/report.asp?id=2301</p>

Who can I contact for more information and guidance? (Lucida Sans Unicode 10)

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Notes:

¹Assessments can also be undertaken before a disaster, e.g., to understand the pre-crisis capacity of households by analysing their household economy, food security and livelihood status.

²Coping mechanisms (or strategies as they are otherwise known).

³Redmond 2005. Needs assessments of humanitarian crisis. *British Medical Journal* 330:1320-1322.

⁴Developed by Save the Children UK—see Oxfam Rough Guide 1.1 HEA Assessments for more information.

⁵This is an analytical framework developed by DfID (see www.livelihoods.org).

⁶Baselines assess communities' livelihood patterns, responses to shocks, and ability to withstand or capacity to cope. They highlight areas and issues that need further research. Normally, baselines are carried out in locations where there is little or no secondary information about the area.