



No. 5.1 Agricultural Support Programmes

What are agricultural support programmes (ASPs)?

Agricultural support refers to programmes aimed at increasing agricultural production. Agricultural support programmes (ASPs) typically have several objectives. These include:

- Protecting livelihoods and primary production;
- Re-establishing crop production and protecting production-based entitlements; and,
- Increasing food availability and diversifying food sources.

Agricultural support interventions can take a variety of forms, depending mainly on the stage and type of emergency, and the livelihoods affected.

ASPs usually involve the distribution of seeds in conjunction with inputs (such as tools or draught animals) to assist planting and harvesting of crops.

ASPs may be implemented in conjunction with food distribution programmes to ensure that seeds are not eaten or sold for food (such programmes are sometimes called ‘seed protection rations’).

They may also be implemented in conjunction with credit or cash programmes that allow beneficiaries to purchase other essential items.

Finally, ASPs may also aim to restore the productivity of land, e.g. by strengthening or repairing irrigation or by conducting de-silting following flooding.



Fig. 1: ASPs often involve the distribution of seeds and tools (Credit: Jim Holmes/OXFAM)

What information do we need to design an agricultural support programme?

To design an agricultural support programme, an *assessment or situational analysis needs to be conducted to help decide on the most appropriate responses*. Key questions to be asked include:

- What have people lost as a result of the emergency? What coping mechanisms are they using?
- How important was agriculture as a means of livelihood for the affected population?
- To what extent does climate and the present environment support agriculture?
- How will the population regain the assets they may have lost as a result of the emergency? How can the programme help them regain these assets?
- How will a lack of any of the above things affect the farmers’ ability to farm?

Table 1 provides an outline of the types of information that may be collected during the assessment.

What do we need to consider in designing an agricultural support programme?

The following is a summary of **Sphere’s Food Security and Livelihoods Standards** (for further information, including guidance notes on these standards, see Sphere 2004).

- In acute crises, prioritise life-saving food security responses. ASPs are not appropriate as the only response in crises where there is an urgent need for food.
- Interventions to support primary production are based on a demonstrated understanding of the viability of production systems, including access to and availability of necessary inputs, services and market demand.
- New technologies are introduced only where their implications for local production systems, cultural practices and environment are understood and accepted by food producers and local consumers.
- Inputs or cash to purchase a range of inputs are provided in order to give producers more flexibility in strategising and managing their production and reducing risks.
- Inputs are delivered on time, are locally acceptable and conform to appropriate quality standards.

Table 1: Types of information collected during an assessment for agricultural support programmes

Pre-emergency situation

- Existing land use and farming systems, including land preparation practices, use of inputs, crop purpose (own consumption, sale or barter)
- Division of labour between men and women, and ownership of land and other assets.
- Production (bags or Kgs), as well as land harvested (ha), yield (bags or kgs/ha), sale (bags/kgs) in normal years
- Seasonal calendar of agricultural activities for different crops (see *EFSL Rough Guide 1.5 Participatory Rural Appraisal*)

Hazards and threats

- Civil disturbance, population displacement or other socio-political factors limiting access to land/water/inputs
- Rainfall amount and pattern (duration and timing), climatic variation
- Patterns of hazards (e.g. drought or floods)
- Degradation of land and water sources

Capacity and assets

- Availability and access to arable land
- Type of crop grown, and its susceptibility to hazards such as drought, floods, pest attacks and diseases
- Farmers' risk minimising strategies and coping strategies, such as crop and livelihoods diversification, level of indebtedness
- Availability and access of inputs/seed with farmers, in local markets or from the previous season
- Access to credit or input support programmes
- Capacity to prepare land (including availability and access to tools, labour, draught power)
- Irrigation infrastructure

- While introducing inputs and services, particular care is needed not to exacerbate vulnerability or increase risk, e.g., by increasing competition for scarce natural resources or by damaging existing social networks.
- Inputs and services are purchased locally whenever possible, unless this would adversely affect local producers, markets or consumers.
- Monitoring is carried out to assess that project inputs are used appropriately by beneficiaries.

What options are there for supporting agricultural recovery?

There are numerous programming options for supporting agricultural recovery. These include:

- Seed programs (e.g., via direct distribution, seed fairs or purchase by using vouchers);
- Tool programs (e.g., via cash grants, direct distribution or vouchers);
- Cash grants for agricultural support to cover a range of identified needs;
- Provision of draught animals (e.g., via cash grants and animal fairs);
- Cash for work to rehabilitate agricultural infrastructure (e.g. irrigation canals and agricultural land);
- Food diversification programs (e.g., introducing vegetable or fruit growing, or a secondary crop);
- Provision of agricultural extension services and/or linking with existing government programmes; and,
- Training and education in relevant skills.

Figure 2 provides a decision tree that can help guide decision-making about what type of agricultural support option is the most appropriate for various contexts.

How do agricultural support programmes relate to other Oxfam programme policies?

Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation. Oxfam's Programme Policy on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) commits us to integrate DRR strategies into programmes in contexts where disasters are significant drivers of poverty and suffering. To integrate DRR into ASPs, we would:

- Work with stakeholders to identify key hazards that agriculture faces (e.g., drought, flood, or conflict), and assess risk, vulnerability and capacity in relation to these hazards.
- Work with stakeholders to incorporate the likely impact of climate change into the identification of the hazards and assessment of vulnerability.
- Work with stakeholders to identify strategies to reduce vulnerability and build resilience to the hazards (e.g., flood protection walls or drought cycle management).
- Empower women and men in communities to enable them to understand risks to their agriculture, and to identify solutions and negotiate the means to implement them.

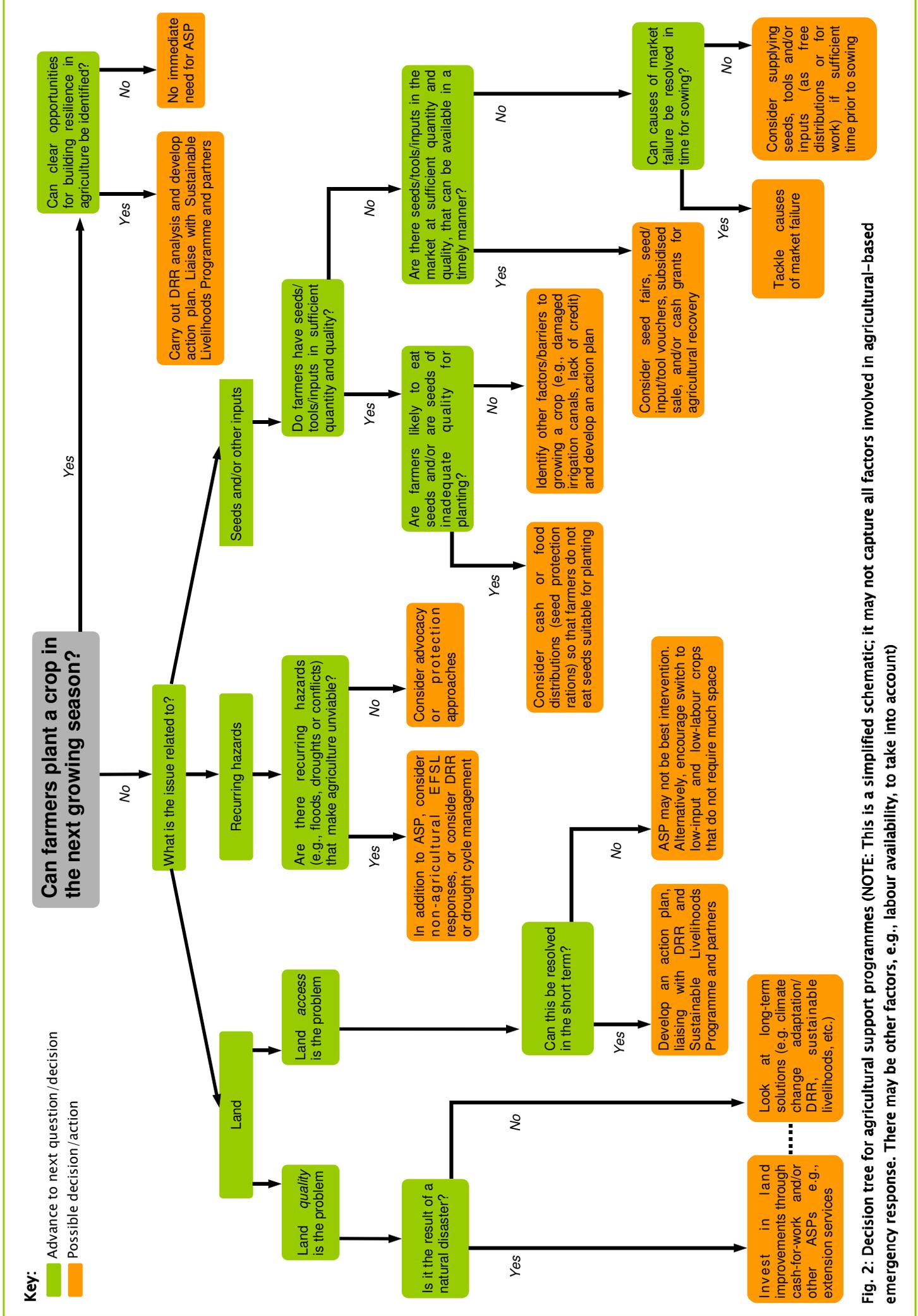


Fig. 2: Decision tree for agricultural support programmes (NOTE: This is a simplified schematic; it may not capture all factors involved in agricultural-based emergency response. There may be other factors, e.g., labour availability, to take into account)

In dryland areas where drought is a significant and ongoing hazard, the drought cycle management (DCM) model provides a way of conceptualising drought as a cycle of four warning phases: normal, alert, emergency and recovery. These four phases are managed through the corresponding phases of mitigation, preparedness, relief assistance, and reconstruction.

Gender and agriculture. Many traditional rural societies have strict gender roles in agriculture. For example, men prepare land, irrigate crops, and harvest and transport produce to market. Women play an important but unpaid role in agriculture by providing labour for planting, weeding, harvesting and threshing crops, and processing produce for sale.

Similarly, commercial agricultural production is seen mainly as a male responsibility. Usually men own most means of production in agriculture, but, in some societies, women have control over some land (usually homestead land) and its produce (usually food for household consumption).

ASPs thus need to account for the different gender roles that exist in the intervention area (see Box 1).

Box 1: Guidance for gender and agricultural livelihoods in emergencies

The IASC (2006) Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action provides guidance for gender and livelihoods in emergencies that is applicable for agriculture. This includes:

- Analysing gender differences, particularly in different skills sets, needs, vulnerabilities and responsibilities; inequalities in access to and control of resources; and obstacles;
- Designing programmes that do not discriminate against women or men and ensure that women, girls, boys and men benefit equally;
- Ensuring women and girls have the same access to programmes as men and boys, and that obstacles to equal access are addressed promptly;
- Ensuring the women and men are participating in consultative meetings equally, and child care or family care provisions are in place to allow women and girls to participate;
- Training and capacity building target specific needs of women, men, girls and boys;
- Monitoring for possible negative effects of changes in power relations, and address instances of gender-based violence;
- Targeting based on gender analysis, and monitoring and evaluation based on sex and age-disaggregated data; and,
- Coordinating with other actors on gender issues.

Are there any Oxfam examples of agricultural support programmes?

Oxfam has implemented many ASPs in its emergency food security and livelihoods work. Some are:

- In Zimbabwe in 2002/3, Oxfam—along with other NGOs—initiated a program with free seed and fertiliser distribution for vulnerable households to increase food production and food security.
- In Eritrea in 2005, Oxfam held seed fairs to support farmers. Each project beneficiary received a seed voucher valued at Nakfa 400.00 (£15.38) that was used to purchase seed from registered sellers who then received cash for the value of the vouchers from the project.

Where can I find further reading and more detailed information?

<p>Oxfam EFSL Rough Guides – 4.2 Seed and Tool Distributions – 4.3 Seed Fairs</p>	<p>The Sphere Project 2004. <i>Humanitarian Charter and Minimum standards in Disaster Response</i> (Chapter 3) www.sphereproject.org</p>
<p>Disaster risk reduction and agricultural programmes: – <i>Oxfam Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation Resources, Disaster Risk Reduction in Drought Cycle Management: A Learning Companion</i> – <i>Oxfam Disaster Risk Reduction Programme Policy</i> (April 2009)</p>	<p>Gender and agricultural programmes: – IASC 2006. Women, girls, boys and men: different needs—equal opportunities. <i>The Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action</i> – <i>Mainstreaming Gender into Livelihoods Work</i>—Oxfam GB intranet https://intranet.oxfam.org.uk</p>

Who can I contact for more information and guidance?

Nupur Kukrety, Emergency Food Security and Livelihoods Advisor, EFSL Team, Humanitarian Department, Oxford nkukrety@oxfam.org.uk.