

The Hunger Safety Nets Programme, Kenya A Social Protection Case Study



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Beneficiaries queue to receive their cash transfers in Wajir, north eastern Kenya. Photo: Nupur Kukrety/Oxfam

The Hunger Safety Nets Programme (HSNP) began in 2008 in the four poorest districts of northern Kenya (Turkana, Marsabit, Mandera and Wajir). The programme was designed to give long term support through regular cash transfers, to those households most vulnerable to food insecurity.

The safety net programme is currently a pilot programme, funded and supported by the Department for International Development (DFID). The programme's long-term sustainability is dependent on the Government of Kenya's (GoK) financial and logistical support.

The Background

Current levels of poverty in Kenya are staggering. Approximately 46 percent of Kenyans live below the poverty line, with 19 percent living in extreme poverty.¹ More than 1.5 million Kenyans are chronically food insecure, reliant on emergency relief in order to meet their basic needs.² The majority of households most vulnerable to food insecurity live in the arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL) that cover approximately 80 percent of Kenya's land area.

Oxfam GB's involvement came about through:

- **Extensive experience of implementing projects in the context of chronic food insecurity, poverty and vulnerability in marginalised areas of Kenya. Analysis pointed to a clear need to address chronic food insecurity through mechanisms better able to provide reliable and predictable support.**
- **A commitment to social protection programmes aimed at improving food security and livelihoods through active engagement with DFID and groups such as the Hunger Alliance and the Grow Up Free from Poverty Group.**
- **Being an active member of a central policy making body (Kenya Food Security Meeting – KFSM) that coordinates food security issues.**
- **Social protection priorities in Oxfam's regional and country strategies.**

All four pilot districts are situated in arid areas of northern Kenya. With periods of low rainfall and minimal government investment in services, infrastructure and development, these districts are the country's poorest and most undeveloped. The economy here is based on pastoralism – where people raise and sell livestock for food and to earn an income - and is based on extensive animal production, mobility and diverse livestock holdings. The last ten years have seen a steady rise in poverty levels among pastoralists. The size and diversity of herds have decreased as people are unable to afford to support a large number of livestock. As a result, people have been finding it increasingly difficult to withstand the regular droughts that affect the area and more and more households have fallen into poverty.

Turkana in particular has a history of being politically marginalised with poor resources, infrastructure and communications. The district has a history of food insecurity requiring extensive external assistance, and more recently Turkana has experienced both a series of unpredictable, poor or failed rainy seasons and a deadly livestock disease. These factors have severely affected people's ability to cope. Around 94% of the district's population now live below the poverty line and are unable to meet their basic food needs.

Oxfam GB has been working in Turkana since 1963. A Programme Realignment in 2007, led to the integration of humanitarian and development approaches. Part of this initiative has centred on innovative cash and alternative livelihood programmes, of which the Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP) is part.⁴

Rationale for implementing a social protection programme

The recognition that regular ad-hoc and short term responses to hunger and vulnerability are neither cost efficient nor particularly effective in terms of building long term resilience to shocks, led to the development of the hunger safety net programme (HSNP). Predictable problems need predictable solutions. The HSNP is based on the acknowledged need to provide regular and predictable

Abdi Osman Weheliye, one of HSNP beneficiaries in Korondille, Wajir, NE Kenya.

'The programme is good, as we've gained a lot of benefits. Before this there were no pensions at all. People's livelihoods, enterprises or goods have finished or ended and so there was no other money for us at the worst time. Then this money arrived and now everyone over 55 years is receiving it and paying cash for items in shops. A good percentage of this population is poor and now they can buy...water, sugar...whatever they need. It's very good assistance for the vulnerable, poor and aged.'



assistance in the form of cash-transfers to the poorest people and those most vulnerable to disaster. Designed as a safety net, this approach moves away from reliance on implementing unreliable, unpredictable and emergency focused food-based interventions. This is especially crucial in a context where poverty and vulnerability are extremely high and where communities are habitually prone to drought-related disasters.

Social protection is important in helping to reduce dependency on humanitarian aid, particularly in ecologically-fragile and crisis-prone areas

To rebuild livelihoods in these areas, poor men and women need a buffer that meets their day-to-day survival needs and allows them to engage in activities to enhance their livelihoods. Social protection serves this purpose by providing predictable and longer-term support to meet basic needs while creating a foundation for developing sustainable livelihoods.³

Oxfam's Programme Policy Guidelines on Social Protection



2150 Kenyan shillings (Ksh) approximately £18 Great British Pounds (GBP) is distributed to beneficiaries every two months. Photo: Jane Beesley/Oxfam

Programme Details

The HSNP is a **pilot programme** structured across two phases. The overarching goal of the programme is to:

Reduce extreme poverty in Kenya through guaranteed cash transfers to chronically food-insecure households

The overall goal of **Phase One** (2008-2012)⁵ is to deliver regular guaranteed cash transfers (based on the cost of meeting basic consumption requirements) to up to 60,000 households or 300,000 chronically food insecure people. This would be done through regular payments every two months lasting for three years. The key outcomes and programme impacts monitored included: reducing poverty and hunger; impacts on assets, health, education and livelihoods; and changes in consumption expenditure.⁶ A key objective of Phase One is to learn how cash transfers achieve these outcomes and to collate evidence to support national strategy development.

Long-term cash transfers are new and untested on a national scale in Kenya so the HSNP has been designed to pilot methodologies that:

- **Effectively target the poor**
- **Transfers cash efficiently to a large number of people**
- **Analyses the impact of cash transfers on reducing poverty and hunger**
- **Will inform the safety net scale up to a national programme**

In **Phase One**, the programme has five components, which are:

- **Administration** – implemented by a consortium led by Oxfam GB, with support from CARE International and Save the Children UK (SCUK), and described in detail in later sections
- **Management Information Systems** – providing links for information sharing across all five components through recording, storage and reporting of key household information and through generating critical reports that facilitate effective management of the programme.
- **Payments** – ensuring that the money is delivered effectively and safely to beneficiaries. This includes the development of smart cards, deciding on payment points for each beneficiary (in this case agreement with traders who have a high enough cash turnover to make payments), and development of a simple and transparent system for payment.

Partners

The programme was conceived of and supported by the United Kingdom's (UK) Department for International Development (DFID) in close collaboration with the GoK, key United Nations agencies and civil society organisations – most notably Oxfam - as part of a long term strategy to reduce extreme poverty, hunger and vulnerability in Kenya. The HSNP is one of three key projects receiving around £122 GBP million over ten years. The programme in Kenya is part of the UK Government's commitment to address world poverty by working with others to lift people from emergency relief and into social protection programmes as a way of distributing income and increasing access to essential services. Pilot projects serve the dual purpose of building state capacity and enhancing learning.⁷

The HSNP uses a 'managing consultant' approach and works through a number of partners including: Oxfam, Save the Children –UK (SCUK), Care, Equity Bank, HelpAge International and Oxford Policy Management. These agencies are co-ordinated by a GoK led secretariat in Nairobi.

- **Social Protection Rights** – protecting the rights of beneficiaries and other stakeholders within the community. This includes receiving complaints regarding exclusion and inclusion errors, as well as participating in the validation exercise as neutral party.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation** – developing a robust Monitoring and Evaluation system to capture effectiveness of different methodologies, efficiency of delivery system and impact of cash transfers.

These components are coordinated by a GoK based Secretariat to ensure strong coherence between the different elements of the programme.

In **Phase Two** (2012-2017), HSNP will potentially scale up to cover 1.5 million people across the ASALs with GoK and donor funds.

Oxfam's Involvement

Oxfam GB leads a consortium, which includes CARE International and SCUK, that is in charge of the administration component, and which will produce a final list of intended beneficiaries. The budget for this component of phase one is approximately £3 million GBP. This administration role comprises three parts:

- testing 3 targeting methodologies
- distribution of smart cards to selected beneficiaries
- managing issues related to changes in beneficiary details

Comparative analysis of the three methodologies will address targeting concerns and seek to determine which methodologies are the most cost efficient in tackling chronic hunger and poverty and most effective in targeting the poorest and most vulnerable to food insecurity including the elderly. These methodologies will be scrutinised for inclusion and exclusion errors. The three targeting methods being tested in this pilot phase and used in different sub-locations are:

Community based – a households based entitlement, where the threshold is set per geographical targeting unit (ie per sub-location) according to poverty and demographic data. Communities (with guidance from Oxfam) determine relevant enrolment criteria and decide in open meetings which people within the sub-location meet these criteria.

Category targeting based on age criteria – an individual entitlement for everyone in the target sub-location who is over 55 years old (the GoK's retirement age at the time of the design) irrespective of need. There is no pre-determined limit of eligible people per sub-location under this method. However, the lack of birth records does make this problematic.

Dependency ratio in households – this refers to the relative to the number of dependents in a household to the number of people in the same household who are or could be active in income earning potential. Dependents are children (under 16), elderly (over 55) or people living with chronic illness or disabilities. This is a household entitlement and there is no pre-determined limit of eligible households per sub-location under this method.

Habiba Abdille lives with her extended family of twenty two. She is one of the HSNP beneficiaries in Korondille, Wajir, NE Kenya.

'I qualified for this programme because I'm over 55 years old. My husband is over 70 and is also registered; he also has another wife. Our animals are very weak and cannot be taken to market. Now we can buy food, pay school fees and other things we need. Before this programme we could not close the debts we had at the shops and now we can clear them.

Before, women could go to the hills and collect trees to sell to those building. Or we could collect firewood to sell but now no one is buying. We used to collect sisal and sell that but now all the sisal has dried up. All our small income-generating activities have disappeared...and that's why I'm grateful for this programme.'



Beneficiaries

This is large scale pilot targeting in total 60,000 beneficiary households or 300,000 people in the 4 pilot districts: Turkana (24,000 HH), Wajir (16,000), Mandera (12,000) and Marsabit (8,000). This first level inclusion (geographically based targeting) was determined on the basis of levels of chronic hunger and malnutrition, and highest concentrations of extreme poverty. Given that identification of geographic areas, targeting mechanisms have been specifically developed which aim to reach the poorest and most vulnerable people. The project will prioritise the participation of women, with a clear emphasis on the registration of women and female-headed households within the vulnerability categories and methods defined. The project builds on previous projects that have enhanced the role of women as key decision makers in their communities and have built their capacity to take greater control of household resources. Targeting households affected by HIV and AIDS uses a criterion that recognises the chronically sick, through dependency ratio and community based targeting approaches.



Lore Lominyi discusses the benefits of accessing food vouchers through local traders. Photo: Jane Beesley/Oxfam



During the drought in Turkana, pastoralists bring their animals to a waterpoint. Photo: Jane Beesley/Oxfam

Opportunities

- Demonstration to the GoK and development partners that chronic food insecurity, hunger and poverty can be addressed, *but it is better served by appropriately designed social protection instruments rather than those primarily designed to address acute or transitory food insecurity.*
- Case Studies and evaluations produced to show that social protection policies are cost effective and accountable, can be implemented even in the most challenging of environments and will have multiple benefits.
- The HSNP, by establishing a predictable system to address extreme and chronic food insecurity, is likely to enable participation in other development initiatives, and highlight the productive potential of pastoralist livelihoods.
- Regular cash injections into the household, community and district economy will stimulate markets, with potentially wider impacts for non-beneficiaries of the HSNP.
- Regular cash transfers will enable recipients to buy basic commodities and to channel the money originally set aside for food, to be spent on reinforcing their livelihoods, increasing their resilience to future droughts.
- The mechanism of delivery of cash payments will widen the availability and access to a broad range of financial services on which other projects can benefit and can support the confidence and development of the private sector.
- Ownership of the project by the GoK through the newly created Ministry for the Development of Northern Kenya and Other Arid Lands, (MoNKOAL) will create greater sense of citizenship and spearhead wider investment in essential and complementary services as core Government responsibilities.

Challenges in Implementation

- **Resources:** The areas of operation are vast with very poor infrastructure. This, coupled with transport and communication constraints, inevitably led to delays in registration and enrolment.
- **Design challenges:** Inclusion and exclusion errors are inherent in the design of all three tested methodologies. Mixed migration patterns and beneficiary absenteeism have also had a degree of negative impact.
- **New approach:** Unconditional cash transfers represent a new approach and have caused some interagency tension. Agencies working in similar fields have felt compelled to match these benefits, contrary to their own operational or budget constraints.
- **Technological challenges:** The malfunctioning of databases and inadequate resources have affected the speed and efficiency of the implementation of the project.
- **Payments:** The protracted production of smartcards and issues regarding smartcard management have affected the timeliness of payments to the beneficiaries. Some beneficiaries have been forced to travel to pay points further than the stated 20 kilometre limit.

Evaluations/reviews

The HSNP is an ongoing programme. Evaluations and analysis will inform the planning of Phase Two. There have been a number of documents that have evaluated the project, distinguishing between key successes and lessons learnt.⁸

Osman Ali Hussain, one of HSNP beneficiaries in Korondille, Wajir, NE Kenya.

'This programme has been very beneficial to me. I have 6 children in school and I was unable to pay the fees. This money has meant I can send the children to school. At the moment we are unable to save any money from this pension as we are in this period of severe drought but we plan to save immediately this drought is over.'



Key Successes

- Phase one of the programme is currently ongoing and once the roll out is complete, 60,000 households in Mandera, Marsabit, Turkana and Wajir, will be receiving regular payments of Ksh 2,150 per household every two months⁹ (approximately £18 GBP).
- At present, 57,249 households are enrolled in the programme
- Awareness of the targeting process was generally high: 92% of households and all beneficiary households reported that they were aware of the targeting process
- Awareness was relatively uniform across the three targeting methods
- 89% of households generally, and 96% of beneficiaries reported that the programme objectives were explained to them
- Community interviews reveal that on average there was a time gap of 16 days from the start of targeting to enrolment and the distribution of paper cards.
- 15% of communities reported that there were errors of exclusion
- Only 2% of communities reported that there were errors of inclusion¹⁰

- The relationship between MoNKOAL and the partner organisations has been strengthened, increasing the likelihood of creating a sustainable programme
- The relationship between organisations and the government have continued to function well at district level
- The Monitoring and Evaluation system is beginning to provide effective information regarding programme implementation
- Analysis from the methodology pilot is beginning to indicate clear processes for the robust and successful cash transfer programme in Phase Two

The tested targeting methodologies: benefits and drawbacks

Community Based Targeting (CBT)

- **Promotes participation, empowers the vulnerable, locally accurate, easy to understand for illiterate populations and transparent.**
- Poverty is relative. What is perceived as a 'poor' (and therefore eligible) household in one region/ livelihood zone may not equate with what is perceived as 'poor' in another. This method is heavily process oriented and therefore difficult to implement on a large scale, particularly in countries with low capacities.

Category based targeting

- **Clear eligibility criteria, transparent, seen as a simple, cost efficient and effective way of reaching the most in need. Simplicity means it is easy to scale-up.**
- Significant practical challenges in targeting and verification due to a lack of beneficiary age proof. Furthermore, age criteria might not target those most in need.

Dependency Ratio

- **Accurate, as it combines category based targeting and means testing.**
- Severe logistical challenges as criteria may not be shared with beneficiaries by agencies to avoid changes in household characteristics. Moreover, family situations are not static and household characteristics change. Illiterate populations find it difficult to understand the complicated calculations; therefore this methodology is not very transparent.

Lessons Learnt for Social Protection Programming

These preliminary learning points have been captured based on Oxfam's experience of implementing the HSNP. These lessons can be used to help design effective social protection programmes in similar contexts.

Important to have a one-programme approach:

- For Oxfam GB, HSNP is not a standalone project. It is a part of the ASAL programme, that encompasses Disaster Risk Reduction, Climate Change Adaptation and Improving Pastoralist Livelihood strategies (see further reading). Owing to the depth of poverty in these areas it is not only important to invest in livelihood promotion but also to create safety nets so that the chronically food insecure/poorest individuals are supported to meet their basic consumption needs. Such an approach protects the poorest sections of society from destitution and increases their ability to cope with shocks and to take risks.

Achieving balance between transparency and a complex process

- Need to find a simpler method of beneficiary identification and targeting without losing transparency and efficiency.
- Targeting involved the community and local government at all stages. Meetings were intensive and complex. After enrolment of beneficiaries, more time was needed to set up payment methods. Timescale between starting meetings and the first payment to beneficiary was around four months.
- Targeting is challenging where populations do not have a settled lifestyle and people could be missed out at any part of the process. This requires considerable follow up.
- Where there are a large number of people living in poverty there would be a high risk of disappointment for people attending meetings who would not qualify. The information provided to officials and the communities about the processes used and the entitlements available under the pilot needs to be of a high quality, clear and consistent with checks to ensure that these are understood.
- For Phase Two replication and scale up by government, a lack of skills could mean some sub-locations are unable to process the complexities of the programme in a transparent and efficient way.

Prioritising inclusion of poor rather than checking exclusion errors

- HSNP made the conscious decision to concentrate on avoiding exclusion errors rather than focusing on reducing inclusion errors in any given target sub-location.
- Extra time was allowed for inclusion in age based targeting, for visiting households where people were unable to go to registration points and to allow for people who might have been missed during registration.

- As a rights-based programme, resources need to be allocated according to need and not limited by medium term time constraints. This is the case for households such as for the chronically ill or child headed households, where longer term support is vital.

Quality and commitment of staff is the key for a successful programme

- Field staff needed to have multiple skills, including good numeracy skills, relevant computer skills and the ability to share experiences and learning with partners and other agencies.
- Communicating the modalities of a highly technical intervention requires field staff have high levels of sensitivity, commitment and the skills to convey the complex elements of the programme and the rights of enrolled beneficiaries to different communities, many of whom are illiterate.

Important to have a clear and independent management structure

- In accordance with the project's plan, a national level secretariat was created to manage and coordinate the work of HSNP across the different components. The secretariat coordinator was to report to a steering committee comprising the GoK and DFID representatives.
- In reality the steering committee has not been institutionalised and there has been little direct involvement from the GoK. Given the nature of the contractual arrangements (direct funding and contracting of the component agencies by DFID), and DFID's hands on approach, the Secretariat and programme co-ordinator have had little power to make decisions.
- Discussions are already in process to ensure that a fundamental aspect of Phase two will entail the GoK providing strategic policy guidelines and a regulatory role through a steering committee.

Active involvement and ownership of the government is key for long term sustainability

- The GoK has not been very actively involved in the implementation of the HSNP at the national level. The strategy of DFID to deal directly with different agencies leading the various components has further alienated the government. As the state is responsible for delivering on and protecting the human rights of its citizens, it is essential to engage the GoK as a means to implementing an effective and sustainable social protection programme.

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Beneficiaries provide identification details to enable them to receive assistance. Photo: Nupur Kukrety/Oxfam

Further reading:

Oxfam Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation Resources: Case Study Kenya: Reducing disaster risk in Turkana District, Meyers, C., Buxton, J. and Ekuwom, C. <http://intranet.oxfam.org.uk/programme/arr/downloads/Turkana.pdf>

Acronyms

ASAL	Arid and semi-arid Lands
CBT	Community Based Targeting
DFID	Department for International Development
GBP	Great British Pounds
GoK	Government of Kenya
HSNP	Hunger Safety Net Programme
KFSM	Kenya Food Security Meeting
Ksh	Kenyan Shilling
MoNKOAL	Ministry for the Development of Northern Kenya and Other Arid Lands
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
SCUK	Save the Children – United Kingdom
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations

Endnotes

- 1 Oxfam, 'Summary of HSNP Programme Design', January 2009
- 2 'Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP), Ministry of Development of Northern Kenya and Other Arid Lands, <http://www.hsnap.or.ke/index.html>
- 3 Oxfam GB, 'Programme Policy Guidelines on Social Protection', 2010
- 4 Oxfam had implemented a series of successive Cash for Work projects in Turkana between 2005 & 2009 ostensibly as emergency interventions designed to address spikes in the levels of acute food insecurity driven largely by drought. It was recognised however that exposure to the impacts of drought related hazards was greatly increased by levels of chronic vulnerability, predisposed on the paucity of service availability, investment in livelihoods, market linkages, infrastructure and non-livestock alternatives.
- 5 Targeting started in November 2008 and the first payment will be delivered in March 2009. The final payment in Phase 1 will be June 2010
- 6 Oxfam, 'Summary of HSNP Programme Design', January 2009
- 7 Oxfam GB, 'Programme Policy Guidelines on Social Protection', 2010
- 8 These include: HSNP Secretariat, 'HSNP Lesson Learning and Forward Planning Workshop', November 2-4th 2010, DFID, 'Kenya Social Protection Programme: Annual Review, December 2010, Institute of Development Studies and Oxford Policy Management, 'Kenya Hunger Safety Net Programme, Operational Report 5: August – November 2010, HSNP Monitoring and Evaluation Component
- 9 Institute of Development Studies and Oxford Policy Management, 'Kenya Hunger Safety Net Programme, Operational Report 5: August – November 2010, HSNP Monitoring and Evaluation Component
- 10 Institute of Development Studies and Oxford Policy Management, 'Kenya Hunger Safety Net Programme, Operational Report 5: August – November 2010, HSNP Monitoring and Evaluation Component

