

BENEFICIARY SELECTION CRITERIA IN FOOD AID PROGRAMMES IN BINGA, ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

The paper analyses the selection criteria used by food aid/ assistance Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Binga, Zimbabwe. The paper adopted a qualitative methodology. Literature search was conducted following collection of primary data using thenon-scheduled informal discussions and observations, coupled with the experience of one of the author for staying in Binga. The paper argues that despite the spirited efforts to ensure correct targeting, errors of inclusion and exclusion are prone in any food aid/ assistance programming. As a solution, this paper suggests thorough revision of the selection criteria and targeting tools used by implementing NGOs to minimise errors of inclusion and exclusion. Hence, the paper acts as a toolkit to assist food aid NGOs in Binga to understand the situation so as to device and adopt workable means to enhance effectiveness of the selection criteria for the target people.

Key Words: selection criteria, NGOs, food aid, beneficiary, food assistance, target people, donor

1.0. Introduction

The sub-Saharan region usually calls for emergency interference almost annually for the last decade. Regardless of the efforts invested by the government, NGOs, individuals and other non-state actors to improve food security, the climate change impact is leaving people vulnerable to hunger and starvation. In response to the hunger donors and NGOs came up with and implemented food aid/ assistance programmes in Binga to save humankind. This paper seeks to outline the selection criteria used by the NGOs in food aid in Binga, and to explore the effectiveness of the beneficiary selection criteria used in food aid programme by the NGOs. Food aid has been an important source of food along the border regions for the last several years (Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee, ZIMVAC, 2011). Food assistance instruments might include direct food based transfers (such as general rations, food-for-work, supplementary feeding or vulnerable group feeding, school feeding), food subsidies, cash transfers and vouchers (including school or user fee waivers) and agricultural

and livestock support delivered (Harvey et al, 2010). It is the targeting of the recipients of food aid/ assistance that matters and found the basis upon which this article sought to investigate if ever the intended recipients were really reached. The Sphere project (2011) emphasises to identify and target recipients of food on the basis of need and upon consulting appropriate stakeholders. Regardless of the different selection criteria and targeting strategies used, some intended recipients have usually been left out, thus bringing some errors of exclusion and inclusion. Therefore, this paper puts into context the selection criteria used by food aid/ assistance NGOs in Binga. The paper aims to inform the donors, NGOs, the assistance/ aid receiving communities, the government and many other stakeholders on the gaps of food aid/ assistance criteria and what may be done best to ensure correct targeting and effectiveness of food aid/ assistance.

Conceptual framework

There has been a paradox in defining the terms food aid and/ food assistance. Though the terms appear to be similar, they differ depending on the organisation's contextual understanding of it. Clearly, attempts to define and work within a definition of food assistance that is broader than food aid, raises many conceptual and practical issues (Harvey et al, 2010). The Food Aid Convention (FAC) definition of *food aid* is based on three core characteristics of food aid: international source of funding, concessionality and food commodities (Harvey et al 2010). Also, food aid refers to in-kind food transfers, whether used directly or monetized (Schnepf, 2016). Food assistance is understood as all actions that national governments, often in collaboration with NGOs and members of civil society, and with external aid when necessary, undertake to improve the nutritional well-being of their citizens, who otherwise would not have access to adequate food for a healthy and active life (FAO 1996, cited by Harvey 2010). Food assistance refers to both in-kind food transfers (i.e., food aid) and cash-based programs that provide the means to acquire food (Schnepf, 2016). An increasing number of donors and aid agencies are using the term food assistance as an alternative to food aid. For instance, World Food Programme (WFP), in its new strategic plan, refers to the shift from being a food aid to a food assistance agency, Harvey et al (2010). A major reason for the evolution in terminology is to allow agencies to include the provision of cash for food-related purposes within definitions of food assistance (Harvey et al, 2010).

Food security encompasses food assistance but includes agricultural and rural economic development projects, nutritional well-being programs, and other activities that enhance food security at the household, village, and country levels (Schnepf, 2016). Food security therefore involves sustainability of the means to attain continued production of food items, that is in terms of quality and quantity. In other words, targeting is defined as directing a particular type or quantity of food, to a defined population group (Emergency Nutrition Network (ENN, 2004). The fifth standard of the sphere project concerning targeting and distribution of food upholds that the method of targeted food distribution is supposed to be responsive, timely, transparent and safe, supports dignity and is appropriate to local conditions (Sphere, 2011).

Background

The paper adopted a case study of Binga Rural District to explore issues and circumstances in the food aid programming focusing on the period 2015- 2017. Binga covers an area of about 15,000 square kilometres and is situated along Lake Kariba in the North-West of Zimbabwe (Mutana, 2013). Basilwizi reported that the food situation was fair in the entire five districts they operated including Binga during the 2013 to 2014 period because no hunger shocks were reported. The situation came to be opposite for the 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 rain season which were characterised by hunger as a shock. In Zimbabwe drought, economic crisis, and political shocks (FSIN, 2017) have increased the levels of food insecurity demanding the need for food aid/ assistance. Despite the efforts to preach about bringing sustainable programmes and projects, food insecurity triggered by drought through poor harvests rendered Binga to be an attracting force for NGOs and the government to implement the food aid programmes. Food aid was however discouraged as leading to the creation of the dependency syndrome. As an area now reliant on food aid for several years and with declining public services, working on more strategic development activities remains challenging (Christian Aid, 2011). With their study in Binga, Save the Children UK (2006: 91) augmented that food aid promoted dependency syndrome leading to poor participation in programme activities not related to food aid. Again, ZIMVAC (2011) propounded that food aid does not directly support productivity and self-reliance. Hence to endeavour to ameliorate the anomaly, cash based programming was the next alternative in Binga. The target people could work to develop their areas and then receive cash or food on monthly or bimonthly basis. This came in various forms like Food for work (FFW), Food for Assets (FFA) and

Productive Assets Creation (PAC) programmes. The idea behind was that as people get cash they go and purchase food for household consumption. However, experience taught that cash based programming had challenges that there ran parallel between the priorities of the implementing NGO versus the targeted person.

Steps in planning a targeting system include assessing and defining needs; setting objectives; determining eligibility to receive food; choosing a method for distributing food; and developing a monitoring system (ENN, 2004). The 2015/2016 rain season recorded a bad year not only in Zimbabwe but the whole of the southern African region. The then president of the Republic of Zimbabwe declared 2015/2016 season a drought year. Christian Aid (2011) shared that Farmers in Binga felt that this changing rainfall situation was a more significant factor than declining soil fertility in affecting crop yields. Zimbabwe is among the top five recipient countries of food aid including Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia and Afghanistan as noted by Harvey et al (2010) that they received 2.6 million metric tonnes of emergency food aid, representing 54% of the total delivered in 2008. Despite the generally optimistic production prospects, there were two important threats to this 2017's harvest: an armyworm outbreak, which was known to have affected Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe; and localized flooding following heavy rains in January and February 2017 (Food Security Information Network, FSIN, 2017). FSNI (2017) substantiated that although the armyworm infestation was not expected to have a substantial impact on national cereal outputs, local production was likely to be affected and supply shortfalls would prolong the already stressed food insecurity. Similarly, protracted flooding would likely lower yields in affected areas or result in complete crop losses (Food Security Information Network, FSIN, 2017). With such a scenario at hand, Binga attracted NGOs to provide food aid/ food assistance. The effectiveness of the selection criteria used forms the basis of the paper.

Methodology

The research adopted a qualitative approach in collecting and analysing data. Data was collected from the selected ward where some NGOs provided food assistance/ aid. Again, document analysis assisted the authors to compare studies conducted elsewhere in terms on NGO beneficiary selection data. Sources in the form of texts and documents provide a great deal of data about society, both historically and of the present (Walliman, 2011). The authors used their experience of staying in Binga as a starting point to compile this paper. The

authors had access to the procedures used by the selected NGOs in selecting the target population in food aid and distribution. This assisted in interrogating the experiences with responses from research participants. The researchers also adopted the observation method. They observed the selection and registration process and the distribution procedures at the community level. Non-scheduled informal discussions were also used to gain more relaxed responses from research participants in every category. All such procedures were carried out to provide high quality evidence and sound logic in answering the research questions. No names of data providers were recorded during data collection. The names of food aid NGO remained anonymous for ethical reasons.

Literature review

Globally, 108 million people in 2016 were reported to be facing *Crisis* level food insecurity or worse (FSIN, 2017). Forecasting on food insecurity in Binga, Manyena (2006) expressed that with the scenario, which was not expected to change in the foreseeable future, the dream to build sustainable and resilient livelihoods in Binga District faced by multiple disasters like food insecurity is unlikely to come true by 2015. Tracing back to history, the top five recipient food aid countries in 2008 were Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, Zimbabwe and (Harvey et al (2010). In some countries, food security has been undermined by El Niño, which largely manifested in drought conditions that damaged agricultural livelihoods. The countries most affected are in eastern and southern Africa and include Somalia, Ethiopia (9.7 million), Madagascar (0.8 million in the Grand Sud), Malawi (6.7 million), Mozambique (1.9 million) and Zimbabwe (4.1 million) (FSIN, 2017).

“Generally, the agricultural potential for traditional food in Binga district is limited, the climate is hot, the rains are sparse and erratic and perennial water sources are few. The yields of food are grossly insufficient to meet the rural families’ need and most of the households depend on food hand-outs throughout the year” (Mutana, 2013: 149-150).

Food should be targeted to the people assessed to be most in need: the most acutely food insecure households and malnourished individuals (Sphere project, 2011). According to ZIMVAC (2011) because of food aid, expenditure on staple food which is normally the largest expenditure line is reduced allowing households to switch scarce cash income to the purchase of other essential non-food items. Targeting spans throughout the intervention, not just the initial phase. Finding the right balance between exclusion errors (which can be life-

threatening) and inclusion errors (which are potentially disruptive or wasteful) is complex; moreover, reducing errors normally increases costs (Sphere project, 2011). The question to note therefore is need to check if ever the targeting/ selection is done throughout the project or it might have been done at the initial stage of the intervention only.

NGOs, Donors and other Humanitarian agencies and bodies developed the conventions, treaties and standards essential to be followed in disasters and humanitarian assistance. The sphere project (2011) handbook provides an outline of responses in disaster and humanitarian assistance which include the United Nations (UN) and other formally adopted intergovernmental principles and guidelines on disasters and humanitarian assistance. The humanitarian agencies are obliged to follow certain procedures that help the receiving community to live a decent life.

HAP (2007) provides a list of the seven (7) HAP Principles of Accountability that every humanitarian organisation is obliged to follow. The Principles for Humanitarian Action are divided into Primary principles which are: *humanity*: upholding the right of all persons to receive and give assistance; and *impartiality*: providing humanitarian assistance in proportion to need and with respect to urgency, without discrimination based upon gender, age, race, impairment, ethnicity and nationality or by political, religious, cultural or organisational affiliation. The Secondary principles include: *informed Consent*: ensuring that the intended beneficiaries, or their representatives, understand and agree with the proposed humanitarian action and its implications; *Duty of care*: ensuring that humanitarian assistance meets or exceeds recognised minimum standards pertaining to the wellbeing of the intended beneficiaries; and *Witness*: reporting on policies or practices that affect the wellbeing of disaster survivors. The Tertiary principles involve *Transparency*: ensuring that all relevant information is communicated to intended beneficiaries or their representatives, and other specified parties; *Independence*: acting under the authority of the governing body of the agency and in pursuit of the agency's mandate; *Neutrality*: refraining from giving material or political support to parties to an armed conflict; and *Complementarity*: operating as a responsible member of the humanitarian assistance community. These principles are supposed to be coined in the targeting of food aid/ assistance recipients. However, (HAP, 2007: 6) issued that the organisations' "aspirations to uphold the highest standards of humanitarian action cannot always be realised due to constraints beyond their control". Regardless the

difficulties involved, humanitarian organisations are still expected to fulfil the ‘do no harm’ principle in assisting the communities by getting rid of the unintended negative consequences.

Results

Selection criteria used by NGOs in food aid/ assistance programmes in Binga District

Geographical targeting

In their food aid or food assistance programmes, donors and NGOs decided on the geographical area to target. Geographical targeting may take place between countries, between regions in a country or between sub-region, food economy or livelihood zones, districts or villages (ENN, 2004). Donors could target Zimbabwe as a country and select the provinces that need food aid/ assistance. Within each province, Donors and NGOs selected the worst affected district under which Binga has usually been among the affected. Within Binga District, NGOs selected particular wards. In the wards that is where the specific target social groups could be selected. World Food Programme (WFP) is adopting a “less is more” approach, focusing on particular geographic areas of need and linking its activities to innovative financing options (WFP 2015: 9). Binga was selected on geographical basis as one among the districts in Zimbabwe that is usually affected shocks like hunger.

Target groups

Donors and NGOs do target particular groups of the population. Groups are distinguished based on the age, health status, and many such other considerations. In Binga the feeding programmes targeted infants and the school children mainly of primary educational level. The Lean Season Assistance (LSA) programme targeted the households most affected by hunger and starvation in Binga. Thus, many NGOs may be involved, each with its own views on targeting, for instance Save the Children is more likely to target children and HelpAge International, older people, often with little overall co-ordination (ENN, 2004). In other words, Harvey et al (2010) coined that as in previous studies, findings were that food aid is shared among a much larger group of people than planned by humanitarian agencies because everyone within the community is perceived to be entitled to food aid, or affected by the emergency.

Food security level

After identifying the target group, the NGOs in Binga assessed the level of food security/ insecurity of the identified group. Food security could be assessed basing on the period of which the household could be food secure. WFP assessed the food security of households during the lean season and hence implemented the Lean Season Assistance (LSA) programme in Binga as from 2015 to 2018. “Access to food can be measured by analytical tools such as the food consumption score or dietary diversity tools. Approaches that consider a number of variables including food security, access to markets, livelihoods, health and nutrition may be appropriate to determine if the situation is stable or declining and if food interventions are necessary” (Sphere project, 2011: 181).

Livelihood

Livelihood of the community or household was used as a factor to determine food security level and hence the selection criteria. This meant that households that had one or very minimum livelihood strategies were the worst affected and hence those with diversified livelihoods were better in terms of the effect or the impact of hunger. As for Binga, households that had no or less livelihood diversity were considered. This means that the less the livelihood strategies and diversity, the higher the risk of failing to become resilient in case of shocks hitting the household. The paper further argues that the livelihood based selection criteria was not that efficient since individuals could hide the information pertaining to their livelihoods in order to be considered for food aid/ assistance. Lack of adequate assessment of the livelihoods of communities always gave a wrong impression as communities never admitted that they were food secure even if the case was so.

Community rankings

To determine the food security situation in the household, communities in Binga were asked to rank themselves. That is, each household was assigned a rank position depending on the level of food insecurity. Those ranked first were selected first in descending order. However, the criterion had a lot of biases that caused some better offs to be ranked as the top food insecure. Some intended targets were missed. Despite the presence of the local leaders to assist the ranking process, there appeared no transparency on the part of the community who had their own politics and governance deficits. Again, the implementing NGO staff could not

voice against the community rankings since they believed that the community knew each other best than for the project staff to dictate against the community.

Double or triple dipping

The donor organisations intended not to select households that already benefited from other food aid/ assistance programmes. For example, in the selected ward, the government of Zimbabwe implemented the food for work programme. However, circumstances were observed where double and triple dipping occurred. This disadvantaged some intended people likely to get food aid/ assistance. In this instance the essence of food aid becomes nullified. Worse more, the government and NGOs never shared the data base to check double and triple dippers although they discussed the issues at their district level platforms.

Assets ownership

Ownership of assets was another criteria used to select the target people for the food aid/ assistance programmes. The challenge with this criterion was that households could rarely declare their asset base since they knew that they could be thrown out of the beneficiary registers hence missing the assistance. Coined with unfairness from the local leaders, and failure of the other community members to voice over who owns what in terms of assets and the deliberate failure by households to declare their assets further strained the selection criteria and its associated failure to provide accurate results. Hence, regardless of the feasibility of the targeting, the selection criteria became a challenge to implement though feasible rhetorically.

Livestock ownership

Livestock ownership was used by NGOs to check that the most affected by hunger have no or less livestock owned. Livestock ownership criterion faced the same fate like the asset ownership one whereby households could rarely declare their livestock. Also, livestock ownership created biases in that although people owned livestock such as cattle and goats, some people could rarely sell them to obtain food due to reasons known to the owners alone. Implementing NGOs also had very minimum time overwhelmed by the number of people that needed aid/ assistance within the district. Hence, they did not have time to move to each and every household. Thus, beneficiaries, as they were called, were called to assemble at a

central point, the Food Distribution Point (FDP) where they could be selected using the set criteria.

Income sources/ levels

To determine the household in need of food assistance the sources and levels of income were assessed by the donors and NGOs. In Binga, the assessment of income sources and levels faced the same fate as the asset ownership criteria. As usual, people could not declare their income sources. However, a few members of the community could deny some responses and ensured that those people with better income sources were eliminated from the assistance of food. However, this created tensions and conflicts among the community members. It was overwhelmingly reported at one of the beneficiary selection and registration session that after the food assistance programme staff left, some people started fighting for merely mentioning that they were not fit to receive assistance from the programme because their husbands or sons and other household members were employed by the government and had better income.

Composition of the household

The composition of the household could provide a picture on food security status or potential food insecurity. What it might mean is that a household with a lot of very old and/ too young children has low or no labour force for agricultural production. Such kind of households were targeted by food aid/ assistance programmes. This paper argues that the larger the household size the higher the demand for food and the greater the chances of food insecurity in times of shocks and emergencies. Thus, food insecurity could be determined by the labour force in the household for food production. Therefore, households with more members were likely to be selected but this criterion could be overtaken by other criteria.

Coping strategy

The coping mechanism can propagate the extent to which a household, individual or community is food secure. Coping mechanisms such as livestock sale lack sustainability in that when the household have no more livestock to sell they begin to starve again. For the food assistance programme in Binga, the coping strategy of the household was crucial to find if the households used the strategies that endangered their lives. For example, during the 2007/2008 elnino-induced drought some people resorted to feeding on wild roots and tubers,

some of which were dangerous and induced illness causing some people to die and others relieved at the clinic and hospitals. Many other people sold their crucial resources in exchange of food. Though not much pronounced during the period under review, without food assistance intervention such coping strategies were likely to pop up causing irreparable damages to people's health. The sphere project (2011:153) proves this by ushering that "some coping strategies are normal, positive and could be supported. Other strategies, sometimes called crisis strategies, may permanently undermine future food security (sale of land, distress migration of whole families or deforestation)". Hence, assessment of the coping strategies remains crucial in food assistance.

The effectiveness of the criteria used in food aid/ assistance programmes

A question remains if ever food aid/ assistance have made any sense in terms of meeting the intended results. Food aid/ assistance have succeeded in leveraging short term food insecurity but face criticism of lack of sustainability. In other terms, "food security responses should aim to meet short-term needs, 'do no harm', reduce the need for the affected population to adopt potentially damaging coping strategies and contribute to restoring longer-term food security", (Sphere Project, 2011: 175). The question therefore here is not about the effectiveness of food aid/ assistance per se but that of the selection criteria. Do donors and NGOs really reach the food insecure households? There is usually an error of meeting the unintended beneficiaries leaving out the intended. Thus, according to the sphere project (2011: 175) "targeting, delivery and distribution methods should reduce the risk of inclusion and exclusion errors". In this instance, the palatability of food aid/ assistance to some food insecure household becomes a bad recipe. Though the criteria as spelt on paper may not be bad, but the applicability and practicality of the criteria raises eyebrows and leaves more questions than answers.

Though donor organisations conducted monitoring on regular basis in other areas, no such monitoring was carried out in the studied area due to their remoteness of the area. On the same note, Harvey et al (2010) proved that evaluations of food distributions note poor monitoring as an issue that inhibits better understanding of impact and improved performance. Lack of monitoring may also be analysed in the sense of the identified reasons for food targeting as noted by ENN (2004) are: to ensure food aid is received on the basis of need; to avoid harm of depressing producer prices; the efficient and effective use of resources; and insufficient

relief food. These reasons therefore lacked the capacity to be evaluated safely in relation to the selection criteria.

School feeding programmes are part of food aid done during the period under research. according to Harvey et al (2010) WFP, by far the largest agency supporting school feeding, claims that the debate is largely won: ‘What is so clear...is that we are beyond the debate about whether school feeding makes sense as a way to reach the most vulnerable.’ On the same note, others, notably DG ECHO, DFID and various NGOs continue to question the effectiveness of school feeding in meeting their nutritional or educational objectives compared to other possible interventions (Harvey et al, 2010). In this study it was discovered that the school feeding programmes may succeed in improving the nutritional value in children, but however, lacks a satisfactory answer in terms of defining how the feeding programmes can meet the sustainable objectives of improving school attendance, dropouts and improving enrolments. This is because researchers noted that regardless of the feeding programmes in schools, children continued to drop out and being absent from school. To be a bit careful, this does not seek to discredit the value of school feeding programmes in meeting the educational objectives but however challenges the scholars interested in the school feeding programmes to conduct an independent study pertaining to school feeding. Donor and implementing NGO reports are attractive enough to show how the school feeding programme managed to meet the educational objectives. Though this might be true, an independent researcher may be able to challenge the results and map the way forward to improve the food aid/ assistance programmes. To substantiate this argument, Harvey et al (2010) issued that WFP donors have expressed concern over a lack of documented evidence about impact and outcomes. Also, perceptions of WFP’s role and comparative advantages, as funding shortfalls have constrained WFP’s shift to long-term resilience-building, contributing to a perception that WFP provides humanitarian relief only, and thus more must be done to show evidence of WFP’s comparative advantages (WFP 2015).

On the other hand it would be unfairly justifiable to consider food aid/ assistance as useless. Food aid/ assistance in more general sense could alleviate short term hunger among households and enabled the selected households improve their capacity to save the food that they had. In the studied area the general observation was that even though someone could not get food aid/ assistance, through people’s social interaction those benefiting could share some

part of what they got, for example, cereals, pulses and vegetable oil. At times those who never appeared on the beneficiary lists could get more since they had a pool of relations who could share the rations. This emphasises the importance of social capital in communities.

In terms of the school feeding, hunger at school was highly reduced. The programmes also improved savings of food at household level, managed to boost concentration in school. Thus WFP (2010: 2) ushered that “a hungry child does not grow, cannot learn as well and faces many health risks in the future”. In addition WFP (2010: 2) notes that “alleviating short-term hunger among children at school helps to improve performance on school tests and promote normal progression from grade to grade in completing a basic education”. However, in the studied area, the extent to which the school feeding improved performance needs a justifiable study.

Issues in the selection criteria and targeting

The selection criteria used by the food aid NGOs though perfect on paper but brought various controversies in the actual implementation. Food assistance NGOs faced staff skills issues noted during the beneficiary registration. At times, inadequate training, if any, was provided by food assistance organisation to their field staff. As a result, such kind of staff could not follow with utmost faith the donor conditions of selecting beneficiaries. Therefore, in relation to such challenges, WFP has identified a lack of accountability mechanisms within the organisation to reinforce outcome measurement, a lack of staff with the technical skills needed for good analysis and limited basic monitoring capacities within partner organisations as key constraints to improving outcome-monitoring performance (Harvey et al, 2010). WFP noted gaps in financial and human resources at the local entities implementing programmes, inadequate consultation with communities, limited data and weak private-sector engagement (WFP, 2015: 8)

In recent years, donors and NGOs in food aid/ assistance embraced community participation and involvement as a strategy that can minimise selection errors and biases. However, conditions were provided that NGOs should follow in order to select the rightful and intended people. However, communities have their own issues, problems and challenges for them to meaningfully get involved and participate in food aid programmes. In the studied area, there was a situation where the local leaders wanted their relatives to be in the frontline of getting

food. Also, the local leaders could not defend for those who they wished not to benefit. Food aid was linked to participation in local development programme activities. This meant that those who could not take part in local development activities could risk being left out of food assistance. However, confusion was noted whereby some people who could not take role in community development activities were selected first because they had connections with the local leaders. At times, for one to be included in the beneficiary register the community had to prioritise those who did not benefit from the previous selection. The criteria brought biases and errors in that such kind of people could be better off than those left out. Generally, communities lied and contributed significantly to the inclusion and exclusion errors. However, lack of strong monitoring and coordination among food aid/ assistance agencies propagated the growth of the issues that involved double and triple dipping. In this regard, Harvey et al (2010) are of the view that evaluations and studies of food aid consistently note poor monitoring as an issue.

During the period under study, one food aid NGO targeted an area that had no food insecurity. The lag time between the commencement of food security assessments and the time of providing food assistance could be long to such an extent that the communities could find other means of obtaining food like *inchelela* (cultivation on the river flood plains).

Moreover, during the process of ranking households according to food insecurity, the implementing NGO, usually known as the Cooperating Partner (CP) allowed the chances of the communities to vote on a particular household if it really was fit to hold the ranked position. It was however noted that communities have always learnt NGO selection criteria and strategies and hence they come up with their own means of overwhelming the used system/ criteria. In this regard, the members in the villages who are close relations could team up to vote for a particular household. They could vote for those they like and wished to benefit. This was then critical in that the family members who had high representation in the village could dominate at the expense of the food insecure households. Therefore, in the name of community participation or community based targeting the NGOs missed the priorities in their selection procedures. Participants in the study also noted of concern that accuracy in the selection process was compromised by fear of witchcraft which is believed to take charge in the rural communities. Therefore, the authenticity of the selection criteria and targeting, though clean on paper was then soiled by such discrepancies.

During the beneficiary registration exercise, errors of inclusion and exclusion were identified. Some elderly people who were not able bodied were left out as compared to their able bodied counterparts. “Disaster survivors have no formal control and often little influence over emergency relief agencies, making it difficult for the people affected by disasters to hold these aid agencies to account” (HAP, 2007: 5). Again, beneficiary registers were not updated continuously. This was against what the sphere project (2011: 193) advocated for by steering that “formal registration of households to receive food should be carried out as soon as is feasible, and updated as necessary”. Although more studies have been done, little progress has been made on finding more appropriate targeting methods, or on assessing and monitoring impact. Targeting practices have remained largely unchanged, regardless of the growing evidence of the challenges of doing this effectively, in particular of reaching certain households within communities in complex emergencies (Harvey et al, 2010).

Another very sensitive aspect in the targeting was that at times the recipients of food could not obtain their full rations as designed. Despite having clean distribution lists, some super cereal plus for infants were not delivered. However, the Sphere project (2011) claims that “information on beneficiaries is essential to design an effective distribution system (the size and demographic profile of a population influences the organisation of distribution), to draw up beneficiary lists, tally sheets and rations cards (if issued) and to identify people with specific needs”. The situation that existed was that once someone fails to get the correct ration, in the forthcoming distribution there could be no double ration to cover for the last month’s ration. However, as enshrined in the sphere project booklet, changes in the food basket or ration levels caused by insufficient availability of food must be discussed with the recipients, through distribution committees, community leaders and representative organisations. This could assist designing a strategy on the distribution criteria. In this context, NGOs were of the view that recipients could not be fed in retrospect. On the same note, recipients of food aid were asked to sign for the receipt of food before they were given that food. Hence, after realising some short falls in the distributed food no action could be taken besides recipients having signed for the food they did not receive. In such practices, donors and NGOs are backed by the Sphere project (2011) which spells out that If distribution of the planned ration is not possible, the shortfall is not necessarily corrected in the following distribution (i.e. retroactive provision may not be appropriate).

Conclusions

The paper concludes that:

- Despite the appropriateness of the targeting and selection criteria on paper, errors of inclusion and exclusion characterised food aid or assistance interventions in Binga District in Zimbabwe and it could be difficult to completely do away with, though the anomaly may be minimised.
- Lack of skilled field staff compromised the effectiveness of the selection criteria used for food assistance beneficiaries,
- Lack of strong coordination among food aid partners, the government and NGOs created a leeway for existence of issues like double and/ or triple dipping and errors of inclusion and exclusion.
- Lack of strong monitoring in the periphery wards has contributed to failure by the donor organisations to realise some of the fault lines behind the selection criteria.
- Despite the implantation of feedback mechanisms like the toll free hotline numbers, help desk and suggestion boxes, people in the periphery of the rural district rarely used these platforms for the fear that when they raise the alarm they would completely lose the food assistance or aid.

Recommendations

The paper recommends that:

- There is need to fully train the fieldstaff during the food aid/ assistance intervention registration exercises so as to impart them with knowledge and skills in order to observe extreme caution to reduce bias and errors associated.
- Local leadership need to be re-oriented so that they understand the NGO beneficiary selection criteria to ensure that they follow them with utmost faith, and also be ambassadors of fairness and justice in the selection process.
- Enough time need to be allowed to assess the intended beneficiaries so as to reduce the chances of double and triple dipping.
- Food aid/ assistance partners, that is, government, NGOs and others need to improve and enhance continuous and smooth collaboration and engagement, consolidate and share their beneficiary list databases to reduce and avoid double and triple dipping

issues. This has to be done from planning through inception, implementation and exit of food aid/ assistance.

- There is need to strengthen monitoring of food aid/ assistance activities by all partners especially government particularly to the periphery communities where donors have rarely visited for monitoring in the previous interventions due to poor road network and long distances.
- Communities need to be empowered for them to maximise the use of the provided feedback mechanisms like the toll free hotline number, the help desk, and the suggestion boxes. On the same note, donor organisations may need to promote the anonymous means of reporting issues in the food aid/ assistance selection criteria and processes.
- A deepened study need to be conducted to avail issues on the more specific causes of errors of inclusion and exclusion in food aid/ assistance programming by NGOs so as to suggest possible working solutions.

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